1. Introduction

Previous studies on language planning (henceforth, LP) focus on LP policies and methods (Cobarrubias & Fishman, 1983; Kennedy, 1984; Marshall, 1991; Rubin & Shuy, 1973), LP processes (Rubin et al., 1977), and implementations (Kennedy, 1984), whereas little is found in LP literature as how language use develops under status LP. Without an understanding of actual spread patterns, a “good” LP may fail to succeed as planned. This paper is to address the issue by examining language spread in status LP in China in the last forty years with respect to Cooper’s (1983, 1989) product model on a product perspective in a language market.

After China formally started its status planning with Putonghua (henceforth PTH –the common language) as the sole national official language in 1957, the PTH use population has been steadily increasing among ethnic minority nationalities (hence, EMN), while the PTH use population fluctuated greatly among Chinese dialect speaker (henceforth, CDS), as in Graph 1 below. The graph represents the developments based on inferences from surveys and reports, since statistics of the percentage of PTH and its varieties use population in CDS and EMN communities over time are not available in China. The PTH use population is the population that actually use PTH and its varieties as a lingua franca in communication. The development of use or spread is defined as “an increase, over time in the proportion of a communicative network that adopts a given language or language variety for a given communication function” (Cooper, 1982: 6). Chinese dialects include southern dialects, such as Cantonese, Min and Wu, which are not intelligible to the speakers of Mandarin and its dialects. PTH includes Mandarin, its dialects and varieties, which are mutually intelligible.

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These two spread patterns of PTLI in Graph 1 can not be fully accounted for in Cooper’s model. PTH is not supposed to have developed in the way it has, if viewed in terms of Cooper’s four-p criteria, since it fails some of them. Thus, this paper proposes a model based on demand-supply (DS) in communication needs to account for the two developments of PTH use under one status LP in China in the last forty years. This DS model states that in status LP when there is a communication need, whatever product that is most available and best meets the demand will be bought at any price.

This paper is divided into five sections. The first reviews briefly some previous work on language spread and concepts of language market. The second introduces the history of status LP in China. The third section discusses how political turbulences, education and economical developments contribute to a fluctuated PTH use population in CDS communities. The fourth shows how PTH is spread in EMN communities, where the political and economic hierarchy, together with ethnic assimilation and diversification, creates a constant demand for PTH in communication between ethnic Chinese and EMN’s as well as among EMN’s. The last section concludes with some generalizations in relation to the DS model of spread in LP.

2. Previous Work on Spread in LP

Status LP takes time, like any language change, in the course of which the factors considered at the onset may also change (cf. Ferguson, 1977). Given changes over time, the success and failure of LP rely on sound LP policies, which have to be dependent on the understanding of the way language spreads. Therefore, in LP arises the concept of spread hypothesis (Eastman, 1983; Jernudd & Das Gupta, 1971). The hypothesis holds that successful LP forecasts how the planned language will spread with certainty.
Of a number of approaches to language maintenance and spread (McConnell, 1991: 165-66), few are well tuned to status LP about the predictability of future spread. Some previous studies suggest spread of a planned language in terms of market, product, and market value. Haugen (1987: 144) proposes that there is a language market, in which a language has its market value and its value fluctuates. The contribution of Haugen’s study lies in a complete market system: market, products, and values. The question is how the language market works with regard to status LP.

When LP is examined in terms of a market, sellers and buyers are mostly studied from the perspective of LP setting, policy makers and communities (Cobarrubias & Fishman, 1983; Marshall, 1991; Wardhaugh, 1987). However, Cooper (1983, 1989) considered language as a product in a product model, which holds that the success of spread in LP depends on whether LP develops the right product backed by the right promotion and put in the right place at the right price.

In Cooper’s model, language use, awareness and forms are viewed as products, which can be planned, implemented, and evaluated. LP policy makers are like product managers of a new commodity. They design and target a language product at potential consumers. Then, they do promotion, by means of awards, publicity, monopolization of media, and reshaping of existing attitudes, to encourage potential users to adopt it in terms of awareness, positive evaluation, proficiency or usage. The policy makers also need the right place, like schools and media, to provide it to speakers in a target speech community and to respond to their concerns. They also have to be aware of the cost for adopting a language product, such as tuition, time and energy. However, what are the costs for people to adopt a new language while giving up their own languages? The concept of cost is not clearly defined in Cooper’s model and gives rise to big questions.

This brief review introduces a product model for spread in LP. The question is whether this model fully accounts for the two spread patterns presented in Graph 1.

3. The Background of Status LP in China

China has fifty six ethnic nationalities with eighty languages. Ethnic Chinese consists about 93% of the total population (1990 census), who speak various Chinese dialects. The history of a national language develops from Baihua (colloquial speech) to Guanhua (official speech), to Guoyu (national language), and finally to PTH.

Chinese dialects are in fact more complicated than one can think of. Chinese is considered to have five to nine major dialects (cf. Chao, 1969). The differences among the
dialects are not only phonological, but also syntactic (Zhou, 1997). Major southern Chinese dialects are not intelligible to speakers of northern Chinese dialects nor to speakers of other southern Chinese dialects. The population of CDS communities is over 300 million—about 30% of the ethnic Chinese population.

The origin of PTH’s written form can be traced back to Baihua widely used in literature and official documents since the Song and Yuan dynasties (960-1368). As a result, the vernacular gradually gained the status of a written language (Baihuawen) throughout China. During Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911), Guanhua, based on the pronunciation of Beijing/northern dialects and the grammar of Baihuawen, was used in the governments, and became popular among government officials and the educated. Baihuawen and Guanhua became the basis for a common language, which becomes the prototype of PTH, among various Chinese dialect speakers (cf. Zhang, 1957/1978).

The earliest documented official efforts in status LP started in Qing dynasty (Wang, 1965: 7). In 1728, Yongzheng Emperor, troubled by some of his officials’ dialect accents, began to worry about communication between those officials and his subjects all over the country, and ordered establishments of schools for Guanhua pronunciation in some southern provinces, which were abolished later. Some initiatives in status LP were taken again by provincial governors before Qing was overthrown in 1911.

In 1912, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of China organized a status LP working committee, which together with the third national conference on education urged the Ministry to decide on a phonetic symbol system for Guoyu pronunciation and promote it nationally, and to change the course of Guowen (national written language) to Guoyu (national language) in elementary schools. Thus, the Ministry directed normal universities to train Guoyu teachers for elementary schools. For the training, it authorized a phonetic symbol system (zhuyin fuhao), which was formally published in 1918. A romanization system for Guoyu was added in 1928. The phonetic and romanization pronunciation systems were both based on phonological features in Beijing dialect. However, no progress was made because of wars (cf. Barnes, 1973).

Status LP was resumed in China in 1955. During a national conference on the standardization of the modern Chinese spoken language and after debates among linguists and administrators, PTH was designated as the official national language, which is a continuation of Guoyu. In 1956, the State Council issued a directive on popularization of PTH and established a committee for PTH promotion at all levels of the government. Accordingly, the Ministry of Education notified provinces and municipalities to hold training classes for
language teachers in elementary schools. In 1958, after the National Congress adopted a Chinese Language Phonetic Spelling (Pinyin) Plan, the Ministry issued a directive to promote the teaching of Pinyin in schools. Efforts were seen in one national working conference on popularization of PTH and four national orientation conferences on PTH teaching from 1956 to 1966. Schools, workshops, publications, and radios all became channels for PTH promotion. After interruption during the Cultural Revolution, in 1978, the Ministry of Education notified provinces and municipalities on strengthening PTH and Pinyin teaching in schools, held the fifth national orientation conference on PTH teaching, and offered PTH training classes for teachers. In 1982’s Chinese Constitution, an item of it was devoted to PTH “the state promotes the use of PTH nationally”. In a national legislature on compulsory education passed in 1986, it is required that “schools must promote nationally used PTH and use it”. The Ministry of Education with two other ministries issued a directive to test PTH proficiency among government officials and teachers in 1995. This effort was followed by a national PTH competition among government officials at the provincial government level.

This review shows that PTH may be the right product, with the right price, for ethnic Chinese with the right promotion from all levels of governments and on the right place: schools, televisions, and radios. On the other hand, for Chinese EMN’s, PTH does not seem to be the right product, since it has no historic, cultural and social relationships with EMN communities. There is no question about the right promotion in the right place, since it is implemented as enthusiastically in EMN communities as in CDS communities. For EMN communities, however, the price may be economically right, but not socially and culturally. Given the EMN and CDS differences and given one product for all, would PTH spread at the same rate in CDS and EMN communities?

4. Spread of PTH in CDS Communities

The spread of PTH in CDS communities has been prompted by education, political upheavals, and economic development for the last forty years. This section will examine educational, political and economic influences on the spread of PTH.

Education plays a basic role in PTH spread, with elementary schools being instrumental. Since 1958, Pinyin has been integrated into the first and second grades, as it is covered in the first few lessons in the first grade and on top of Chinese characters. A new character is followed by Pinyin in parentheses in the text up to the sixth grade. All those who have some education are supposed to be able to speech some PTH.
However, in reality, teachers in urban schools were trained to teach PTH, while those in rural schools were not. This effectively reduced the number of elementary school students who could speak PTH. Further, after leaving school, elementary graduates, who stayed in their rural villages for the rest of their lives, had almost no chance to switch from their local dialects to PTH, since code switch entails changes in social relationship. In addition, a considerable number of children did not go to school.

Political upheavals are double edged to the promotion of PTH by prompting one mass learning of PTH and two great movements of people around the country and by interrupting the government’s efforts for about ten years from 1966 to 1977.

In 1958, China launched the Great Leap Forward, when a mass campaign, added with Pinyin, was set to rid of illiteracy and to learn PTH. Professionals and government officials were sent to rural China to hold PTH workshops for people with education, who in turn taught the illiterate to speak PTH and read. Model counties were reportedly successful in both eliminating illiteracy and in teaching PTH on a large scale. “Pinyin is powerful, like one tree bearing two fruits; literacy and PTH”, as a folk lyric goes (Zhan, 1993). However, the mass campaign died as the Great Leap Forward failed in 1959.

During the Cultural Revolution, no efforts were made in the promotion of PTH. Nevertheless, it twice dispersed students from middle schools and colleges all over country, which consequently had a positive effect on the spread of PTH.

The first was the Great Revolutionary Experiencing (chuanlian) from 1966 to 1968. Students from urban China went to visit strongholds for Mao’s revolution and marched along the routes taken by Mao’s army in remote rural China in 1930’s, while students from rural China went to urban China to exchange revolutionary experiences. These two directional rushes of young people (estimated 200 to 300 million) all over China led to the first greatest demand for PTH in communication. However, this short-lived mobility did not sustain a long term demand for PTH.

The second great movement of people took place, immediately after the first, during a campaign (shangshan xiaxiang) to reeducated urban youth. When finding difficult to control the wandering young people, Mao sent them to rural China for a reeducation by the farmers. From 1969 to 1976, more than twelve million youth were relocated from urban China to rural China (Bernstein, 1977). The relocation promoted PTH in two ways. First, communication between the youth and villagers was negotiated in a PTH variety, before they spoke local dialects. Secondly, it provided qualified teachers to local schools so that rural children got a good education and better PTH. During this period, a greater number of professionals and
officials were also sent to rural China periodically, who played a very positive role in the spread of PTH too.

The third great movement of people has been in the making, accompanied by modern communication technology, since China started its economic reform in 1979. The spread of PTH is speeding up in two steps. First, when farmers had extra hands, young ones moved to nearby cities for work in the 1980’s. They spoke PTH varieties for better chances of job opportunities. In the second step, when coastal provinces are booming in the 1990’s, young farmers from inland areas have been moving to coastal cities for jobs, migrating from dialect communities to dialect communities. They speak PTH varieties to look for jobs, to keep their jobs, and fulfill their job duties. The consequences are multiple. Their employers and co-workers have to communicate with them in PTH, and their landlords, grocers and other service people have to speak PTH for their business. Back at home, more young people are encouraged to learn PTH and to move to coastal cities. At the same time, businessmen in the coastal and inland areas are doing business in PTH through a telephone network, which is second only to that in the United States. All of a sudden, remote areas are only a phone call away.

The economic growth has sustained the longest demand for PTH to the greatest degree ever. For example, in Guangzhou in the later 1970’s and early 1980’s, speaking PTH, one could found 70% to 80% responses in Cantonese. By the middle of 1990’s, one could find 95% responses in PTH. In 1995, a survey team of the Language Office of Shenzhen City did their field work along a highway across Cantonese, Hakka and Mm dialect communities, but the team did not find one single instance where their encounters did not speak PTH when they were spoken to in PTH.

In summary, the fluctuations in PTH spread are caused by political upheavals, and the peak is sustained by a great mobility motivated by rapid economic growth. In CDS communities, teaching PTH in schools has nurtured potentials, which are not realized as PTH use until there is a communication demand, which did not exist when everyone shared the same dialect and a written language in a still CDS community.

5. Spread of PTH in EMN Communities

China’s fifty five EMN’s have a population of over 91 million which is about 7% of the total population (1990 census). However, this population speak almost eighty languages, and inhabit more than 50% of the areas in China in three patterns: large concentration in a large area, small concentrations scattered in a large area, and scatters among communities of
different EMN’s. PTH has been promoted in EMN communities since 1958 as vigorously as in CDS communities.

In 1949, twenty one of the fifty five EMN’s had their written languages, while the rest EMN’s did not. The Ministry of Education held the first national conference on education for EMN’s in Beijing in 1951. The conference decided that if an EMN has a written language, courses in elementary and secondary schools should be taught in that language in that EMN community; if an EMN does not have a written language, courses could be taught in Chinese or a traditionally used language, and a written language should be developed; and Chinese language may be taught whenever EMN’s are willing to learn. This position is constitutionally supported, since the 1954 Chinese Constitution states that EMN’s have the right to chose languages for education and government. After the first conference on EMN languages in 1956, field work teams with over 600 linguists were sent to EMN communities. Twenty written languages were developed or reformed for fifteen EMN’s, fifteen of which, together with a plan of guidelines for developing written languages for EMN’s, were approved by the State Council in 1957.

However, at the second conference on EMN languages in 1958, the previous positions were criticized. The new position was that EMN’s would soon assimilate into ethnic Chinese and could learn Chinese without learning EMN languages. It had serious consequences for more than twenty years (cf. Dai, 1990; Shama, 1989; Zhou, 1995).

In education, most EMN schools switched to PTH varieties, particularly in the south and southwest. EMN students had difficulties in understanding what were taught, resulting in three ‘low’s’ in many EMN communities. A very low percentage of EMN children went to schools, a very low percentage of them kept going to school, and a very low percentage of them graduated from schools (He, 1990). In some EMN communities, 90% people were illiterate or half illiterate even in the 1980’s (Zhou, 1995: 164).

In BMN autonomous governments, a large percentage of officials were ethnic Chinese, who lost their interest in learning EMN languages after 1958, and most business was carried out in PTH varieties. (He, 1990). Consequently, EMN’s had to speak PTH varieties. In addition, there was a requirement for certain level of education when a government position was open. This requirement implied some proficiency in PTH varieties for whomever is hired, since most of EMN’s education was in PTH.

In mass media, the situation was even worse. There were some newspapers in EMN languages for EMN communities in the north and northwest, but there were only two in the south and southwestern, where there were many EMN communities (Bai, 1994). The national
radio station started broadcasting in four EMN languages in early 1950’s, but stopped later and did not resume until 1971. In some BMN communities, there were no local EMN language broadcasts. For example, in Guaizhou Province, there were 7.5 million EMN’s, and there had not been any radio broadcasts in EMN language before the 1970’s. Television broadcasts in EMN languages did not start till late 1970’s.

In 1980, at the third national conference on EMN languages, the positions of the first conference were resumed. In the new Constitution, it is reaffirmed that EMN’s have the freedom to use and develop their own languages, though it also states that PTH is promoted nationally. In 1984, new Autonomous Laws state that EMN governments should educate and encourage their officials to learn from each other’s language; ethnic Chinese officials should learn EMN languages, while EMN officials should learn and use PTH together with EMN languages, and that education and government business be conducted in EMN languages together with PTH. After the fourth conference on EMN languages in 1991, the Ministry of EMN Affairs made some proposals to the State Council, which issued a directive calling for promotion of media, education, translation and publication in EMN languages, encouragement of use, reform and development of EMN languages, and implementation of bilingual education in EMN communities.

Since 1980’s, bilingual education has been in three forms in China (Dongribu, 1989). First, some courses are taught in EMN languages from elementary schools to universities in Mongolian and Uygur communities. Second, in some EMN communities with college education in PTH, all courses are taught in EMN languages from preschool classes to secondary schools with PTH as a second language. Third, in many EMN communities, all courses are taught in PTH varieties in schools, while EMN languages are taught in preschool classes or for the first two years of school.

The constant demand for PTH, pushed politically and economically, leads to the steady spread of PTH in EMN communities. Linguistically, there are now four types of EMN communities: monolingual, bilingual-developing, bilingual, and PTH variety (Zhou, 1995: 13-14). In monolingual EMN communities, only government officials and college/middle school graduates speak PTH varieties. They consist of 5% to 20% of the population in the communities. The monolingual population is 25% of the total EMN population. In bilingual-developing MN communities, 30 to 40% of this population, who have been to school, understand PTH varieties, but fewer of them use PTH frequently. The bilingual-developing population is 33% of the total EMN population. In bilingual EMN communities, EMN languages are confined to EMN villages or even to EMN families, while PTH varieties are the
lingua franca. 60% to 80% of this population use PTH varieties. The bilingual population is 15% of the total EMN population. In PTH variety EMN communities, 90% to 100% of the EMN population speak a PTH variety. The PTH variety population consists of 27% of the total EMN population.

In summary, the spread of PTH varieties in EMN communities was politically and administratively initiated, but sustained constantly by the demand for PTH in communication between EMN’s and ethnic Chinese, since economy, education, media and government were controlled by PTH variety speakers. When the governments’ efforts are weakened, the spread of PTH is economically sustained by an ever increasing demand in communication in PTH among EMN’s and ethnic Chinese.

6. Conclusion

After four decades of status LP implementation, PTH use develops in two spread patterns in two types of communities: steady spread in EMN communities and fluctuated spread, with a sustained peak in 1990’s, in CDS communities.

How can the disparities in PTH spread between CDS communities and EMN communities be accounted for? It is difficult for Cooper’s (1983, 1989) spread model based on the product-perspective, since steady spread is found in the communities who pay a much higher price, though the same product, promotion, and place are involved.

PTH has been promoted with almost the same vigor in CDS communities and EMN communities through channels of schools, media and publications, by means of awards, publicity, monopolization of media, and reshaping of existing attitudes. The differences lie in the price for the two types of communities. In CDS communities, CDS’s learnt PTH as part of their education, but they all had to jushf~ code switching from their dialects to PTH socioculturally and psychologically. On the other hand, in EMN communities, EMN’s learnt PTH at the cost of their own languages and cultures, since it is not their language nor their dialects, in addition to deficits for many of them in education. It is obvious that EMN’s paid a much higher price for PTH than CDS’s did.

Why were EMN’s willing to pay more than CDS’s did? The ultimate answer is not in the product of PTH, but found in the communicative value of PTH in the language market. An EMN member had to learn PTH in order to make progress in his/her career politically and economically, since communication in PTH was essential in an ethnic Chinese dominant society. For EMN communities, there is a constant demand in communication with ethnic Chinese and other EMN’s, while PTH is the only viable product available in the market.
However, CDS’s did not have to speak PTH to advance careers politically and economically before 1990’s, since communication cross CDS communities was not common and could rely on the written language. For CDS communities, there was no demand for PTH in communication, except for those few occasions motivated by political upheavals. When the demand for PTH arises in the 1990’s, CDS’s rush to learn and use PTH, creating and sustaining a peak of PTH use.

Given the two PTH spread patterns and for the same product, promotion and place, EMN’s paid a higher price for PTH because it was the only product of high market value available and is badly in demand, as the DS model predicts.

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