

Reflections on the Protection and Inheritance of Local Culture by Teaching Endangered Languages

—Taking Patuá as a Case Study

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Abstract: Based on the current cases and measures that scholars and governments worldwide put forward, some endangered languages are gaining more and more attention and protection. However, others are remaining in challenge. Hence, finding proper solutions to regain its vitality and discover underlying cultural logic is becoming more and more primary. Under these circumstances, exploring endangered language—Patuá, and how to protect it has been put forward in this paper. Analyzing the case of two specific education methods to protect Patuá, which are drama and literature, drama can be considered as an oral education that can help local Macanese to acquire and communicate in Patuá; literature is the written measure which Macanese can gain qualities of self-belonging and tolerance of differences. Education has an effective influence on endangered language protection. The statements have shown that language acquisition is closely intertwined with identification and culture ascription. It doesn't mean that language is an individual element in society. Instead, it always interacts and cooperates with the whole society. Saving endangered languages not only can keep certain languages but also can bring a positive reaction, which will be beneficial to maintain the vitality and diversity of local culture.

Keywords: endangered languages, culture preservation, language education, Patuá language

1. Introduction

Nowadays, many works in culture and sociolinguistics are about protecting endangered languages or using education measures to preserve culture and history. However, these papers are more likely to focus on using endangered languages as a medium to display the importance of preserving culture and history or implementing traditional teaching programs to enhance cultural preservation. Instead, there has been less evidence that connecting educational methods with endangered languages. Hence, in the following paper, endangered language becomes the main character of acquisition and preservation. In the case of Macanese, to prove that language protection has a positive effect on preserving local culture, two unconventional educational measures are used to present the

contributions to language preservation. This paper aims to conclude that language learning does play an important role in preservation. Moreover, this paper might offer people a new perspective to explore endangered languages and cultural diversity.

1.1. Background information on Patuá

Due to the Age of Discovery, the Portuguese who came from across the ocean were temporarily settled in Macao between 1553 and 1554. In 1557, the Chinese government authorized the Portuguese to settle permanently in Macao, granting them a considerable privilege of self-government. At that time, these Portuguese from Western Europe started to settle down and rooted in Macao. After four centuries of development, they experienced a process in which they lived and grew up in the local area, and intermarried with local and Southeast Asian people, then progressively evolved into a special ethnic community – Macanese. Just as Li points out in certain degrees, the history and culture of the native Portuguese people is a living history of the opening of Macao, which is the most intuitive phenomenon of the exchange and integration of various civilizations in this eastern seaport over centuries [1]. Professor Ana argues that Macanese have their own unique human biological and cultural characteristics [2]. Moreover, she thinks it is a new group, the product of a mixture of bloodlines. Hence, she also described this group of people in Portuguese as “Filhos da Terra,” in English, and under this context, this concept can be interpreted as “the descendent of land Macao.” From Ana’s perspective, these Macanese are born of the convergence of the Eastern and Western continents [2]. Macanese have a wider cultural background and are both educated and grew up in a mixed society. In the linguistic definition, there is a mixed language called “Creole,” that is, where people who speak different languages live together, people will develop a form of expression called “pidgin” to communicate. Under this circumstance, people who grow up in this language environment convert these expressions into a system step by step, with a fixed grammar, idiomatic words, and idioms, to form a true sense of the language called Macanese Patois (Portuguese: Patuá) also known as “the language of Christ” and “the sweet language of Macao”. It is based on Portuguese with a mix of Malay, Cantonese, English and a few Spanish, Dutch and Italian. For example, it has words of Portuguese origin: Macau (Macao), casa (house), mãe (mother) and filho (son); of Malay origin: sapeca (coin) and cup-cup (butterfly); and of Cantonese origin: amui (girl) and laissi (the so-called “red packets”). Unfortunately, due to the popularity of English and official Portuguese, the decline in the number of Macanese, and other reasons, which this article will explore in the next part, Macanese Patois is losing its vitality. It is spoken only by a few families and the Macanese diaspora in Macao. According to the statistics in 2017, less than 50 people have the ability to speak Macanese Patois fluently, which is listed as an endangered language by UNESCO. UNESCO's Red Book of Endangered Languages lists Macanese Patois as “critically endangered.”

1.2. Current Situation of Patuá and the Reason for Being Endangered Language

After the withdrawal of Portugal in 1999, the status of Macanese became awkward, and the Patuá culture was in crisis. Besides, from the late 19th century, the Patuá began to decline due to the popularity of official Portuguese education and the promotion of the Cantonese dialect of Chinese and English. According to documents, in the 1980s, Portuguese and Cantonese were already commonly used by Macanese. In the 21st century, the Macanese do have not much recognition of Patuá, making it difficult to reverse the endangered status of Patuá in Macau. It was all because the language community base that supported the production and spread of these languages no longer exists. Besides, the social, economic, and political conditions closely associated with language communities have changed. The communication and identity functions of Patuá have been greatly weakened. It only retains the symbolic role of the 400-year history of Sino-Western exchange in

Macao [3].

2. Current protection measures for Patuá

At present, the implication of Patuá language exists only to a small extent as a performance language in Macanese drama and literary works. Indeed, art forms such as literature and dramas are important educational tools for preserving and inheriting endangered languages. Using drama and literature as educational tools means to create a real and vivid learning world for language learners, which is not as rigid and boring as preaching. At the same time, through the language and characters of the works, people can understand some philosophy of life, and change the audience's ideas and behavior patterns. Especially at present, under the background of rapid economic development, people are beginning to pursue a high quality of life, and spiritual construction has become an important part of people's lives, so the influence of drama and literature on people is getting more and more significant.

2.1. The Patuá Drama

When it comes to the protection of the Macanese Patois, one of the most well-known measures of protection is the Patuá theatre. The Macao Cultural Affairs Bureau published that the most important element of theatre is language, and Patuá theatre is a full expression of the unique characteristics of its language [4].” Patuá theatre uses its unique form on stage as a demonstration of mixed culture, which is from the combination of linguistic forms and structures from different language sources, together with cultural memories and varied dramatic expressions. “It is a theatrical culture specializing in comedies that ridicule, satirise and lampoon current affairs and prevailing social issues. It is at once ‘unorthodox’ and intrinsically local [4].” It represents the association between the Macanese and their beloved homeland--Macao, especially in sentimental terms. In any case, it is equipped the necessity that people protect Patuá through the shows of Dóci Papiçám di Macau Drama Group. Thanks to the efforts of the Macanese community, Macao Government, and the Dóci Papiçám di Macau Drama Group, theatre in Patuá was inscribed on the List of Macao S.A.R. Nowadays, Patuá drama has become a reserved program of the Macao Art Festival each year. There is no doubt that Patuá drama is still a fond creation for many Macanese and Macao Chinese. The important figure behind the Dóci Papiçám di Macau Drama Group--Miguel de Senna Fernandes also needs to be mentioned[5]. He is not only a professional lawyer but also is a playwright, director, and linguist who dedicated to preserving the Macanese culture. As a founding member of Dóci Papiçám di Macau Drama Group, Miguel Senna Fernandes has written many plays in Patuá since the group's stage debut in 1993. He holds that protecting Patuá and Macanese culture is a proper way to cultivate Macanese's inner sense of identification and belonging.

One of the reasons the Dóci Papiçám di Macau Drama Group chose Patuá as its performance language was to preserve this symbol of Macanese culture. Patuá used to be the common language of Macanese in Macao. Four hundred years ago, they worked as administrators and translators in the former Portuguese colony. Today, they are trying to maintain their unique cultural identity in Macao. Miguel Senna Fernandes has been interested in Patuá since childhood [6], watching his grandmother chat with her friends. He recalled that his grandmother and her friends were just a bunch of old ladies talking and laughing, and he was curious about why they were laughed at and their language. Unfortunately, his grandmother thought that the Portuguese rulers despised Patuá. Hence, she refused to translate for Miguel and forced him to learn official Portuguese. Because of this old-fashioned notion, he argues that Macanese almost completely lost this interesting language over a long period of time, which contained prejudice and indifference. However, with Miguel's efforts, he eventually learned Patuá and revived the tradition of performing plays in this language. Nair Cardoso, an actress in the Dóci Papiçám di Macau Drama Group, expresses that Patuá is a part of Macanese. It connects

them to ancestors, to their roots." She joined the drama group when she was 33 years old, and she can speak fluent Portuguese and Cantonese. But it was only during rehearsals for the plays that she gradually learned to use Patuá from Miguel Senna Fernandes and other Macanese in the drama group. Miguel Senna Fernandes hoped more young people would join Dóci Papiçám di Macau Drama Group. Because it is a good place to seek their native identity and originality. Many of the Macanese in the drama group gradually learned how to use Patuá and communicate in this language after they joined the drama group, which shows that drama education plays an important role in saving the Patuá. As an artistic method of education, Patuá theatre has the power not only to immerse the actors on stage in the Macanese cultural atmosphere of performance but also to make the audience feel the charm of Patuá subtly. Patuá theatre gives the Macanese a sense of belonging to the land of Macao. What's more, it gives people hope to protect Patuá.

2.2. The Patuá Literature

The Patuá literature is an expression form of Macanese culture, which is actually a kind of Portuguese literature independent of Chinese literature, but at the same time, reflects the living conditions of Macao, China, and is also a unique and important part of the literature of Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan [7]. Based on Li's literature, it is known that indigenous literature can be divided into two parts, the first part is the works of writers before the 20th century, and the works of this part are written in the ancient "Macao native language" known as Patuá now. The second part is a collection of literary works that have appeared since the 1940s, mainly in the local Portuguese press [8]. Some scholars regarded Macao culture as *Cocktail Culture*, in which multiple cultures blend together and coexist harmoniously, and Macao literature fully shows this characteristic.

Henrique de Senna Fernandes is the father of Miguel de Senna Fernandes, who is also one of the representative writers of Patuá literature. He experienced the historical changes in Macao and had a deeply personal experience of the social system and the living pattern of the Macanese [9]. In his works, he expressed his thoughts on the lifestyles of the Macanese with a realistic description. The plots are highly reliable, which can make people effectively investigate the life mode of the Macanese at that time. At the same time, the novel also has the significance of social literature. In the famous novel *THE BEWITCHING BRAID*, Henrique de Senna Fernandes constructs an idealized Chinese female image, which shows ethnic consciousness. The couple finds a harmonious way of life in the face of different cultural conflicts to show that Macanese and Chinese gradually recognize each other's living habits and culture values.

Another example is the female writer Deolinda de Conceição. Deolinda de Conceição is the most famous female writer who had a great achievement in short story writing. As a Macanese, her writing is closely related to Chinese culture. Under the special historical environment. She wrote short stories such as *CHEONG-SAM (A Cabaia)* from the perspective of Chinese females in Macao, depicting their survival form when facing their fate in the 1940s and demonstrating the social characteristics of local multi-cultural integration and symbiont. In her works, it is obvious that her writing method is deeply influenced by Chinese literature, and she treats the phenomenon of female life as an intervener rather than an observer. Under the background of patriarchal culture being mainstream, she chose to present the tragic experience of females whose lives were rarely shown in front of the world instead of writing love stories and heroic stories of males. It doesn't mean that she propagated feminism, but rather that she presented the long, prevalent life pattern of females under the domination of men, which reflected the traditional patriarchal culture. She awoke people's thinking about the status of women. Her works are of great reference significance for studying women's life patterns and social habits at that time, and she retains the record with words. By comparing the situation in Macao with mainland China, the cultural difference between the two places can be found, which has an essential educational significance for the later generations.

The group of Patuá users has the characteristic of marginal cultural identity, so the orientation of their own identity affects the writers' writing style. Starting from the cultural identity, the writers have made various artistic projections of the nature and humanity of Macao in their works. Their elaboration of Macao is no longer from the standpoint and perspective of "foreign people." Still, it can present the spiritual appeal of the root of Chinese culture and the exploration of the "self." Despite the inextricable Portuguese colonial cultural mentality and cultural self-defense instinct, it can be found from Macanese literature that the originally estranged ethnic relations have become open and harmonious [10]. Although Macanese literature is the same as Macao literature, since the authors lived in Macao for generations with Chinese culture as the mainstream, participated in Chinese society, and married Chinese, these literary works are more infused with Chinese culture. These literary works not only played a very important role in preserving the Patuá, which is disappearing, but also served as a reference to help people understand Macao culture and history, promote cultural exchanges and language integration between Macanese and Chinese, help build a sense of national identity, and play a very important role in promoting educational diversification.

Whether it is drama or literature measures, the purpose of education is to protect the Patuá and the history and culture behind it, in this way to further safeguard the diversity of language and culture. Cultural diversity and biological diversity are closely linked, and at the first International Ethnographic Congress held in Belem, Brazil, in 1988, scholars first proposed that linguistic diversity and biological diversity are interdependent. Daniel Nettle and Suzanne Romaine, in their book--*Vanishing Voices: The Extinction of the World's Languages*, argue that places where biodiversity and ecosystems are well preserved are also places where linguistic and cultural diversity gain its protection [11]. Diversity implies adaptability; Identity is detrimental to the long-term survival of the species. Diversity is crucial for the long-term stability of species. And it shows people once again that biodiversity is related to linguistic diversity.

Nowadays, drama performances and literary works are the main measures of education for people to understand Patuá, and people can classify these two methods of education as a form of oral protection and consider another one as written protection. Through these two educational methods, Macanese will be cultivated to identify with their history and culture so that they will have the willingness to learn and use Patuá, to regain the vitality of Patuá, further protect Patuá, and the Macanese culture, and maintain the integrated development of the Chinese and Portuguese cultures in Macao and the image of a city that embraces cultural diversity.

3. Reflections about teaching Patuá based on current measures and cases

Based on the existing methods and cases of teaching endangered languages, this article will put forward some suggestions and thoughts on protecting Patuá.

First, Zhang holds language vitality from the perspective of the speech community [3]. That is to say. People can try to protect languages by abandoning the language perspective and adopting a community perspective to stimulate the vitality of the speech community. Secondly, from Liang's new thinking inspired by Australian Indigenous Language Teaching Programs, people can learn that carrying out appropriate teaching programs and creating a good language environment so that the whole community can be immersed in the cultural atmosphere of multilingual teaching has a positive influence on learning and protecting endangered languages [12]. For the way that can help endangered language preserve, Crystal believes that endangered languages can survive only if their speakers have sufficient social status and wealth, participate in the construction of legal and education systems, and become proficient in writing and using technology [13].

Educators are encouraged to search for appropriate curriculum materials. Using bilingual teaching methods can be an efficient method. The use of bilingual teaching can strengthen the connection between languages and help students to master the language with the help of their mother tongue(L1),

thus promoting the learning of those endangered language. What's more, more application scenarios should be incorporated into the teaching design to enable students to understand and master language skills through practice to increase learners' enthusiasm and awareness of language protection, which contribute to the better inheritance and application of endangered languages.

Finally, people cannot ignore that protecting the Patuá requires not only the efforts of the Macanese community in Macau but also the help of people from all walks of life in the society. Only in this way can people protect this language and preserve its history and culture.

4. Conclusion

The thesis has presented the current status of the Patuá, known as an endangered language, and given examples of the measures people take to protect it. The two measures are drama and literature, which greatly contributed to preserving the Patuá. Through this case, the thesis put forward some suggestions and thoughts on protecting Patuá. Protecting endangered languages is not only saving the language itself but also has a significant meaning for the protection of cultural diversity. By focusing on the protection and teaching of endangered languages, people can promote cultural exchanges while gaining a better understanding of linguistic diversity.

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