

华中科技大学

二〇〇五年招收硕士研究生入学考试试题

考试科目: 英汉互译与英语作文

适用专业: 外国语言学及应用语言学、英语语言文学

(除画图题外, 所有答案都必须写在答题纸上, 写在试题上及草稿纸上无效, 考完后试题随答题纸交回)

Writing (75 points)

Part One (35 points)

Directions: In this part you will read an article about 1800 words. Write a summary of about 300 words based on the following article. Remember to include all the major points discussed in the article. Marks will be reduced from direct copying.

Do we really understand the issue? — Media coverage of endangered languages

I am interested in how the media 'frame' issues related to culture and science and how those media frames link to public understanding and policy making in those realms. By 'frame' I am referring to the media's power to select, highlight, and exclude information. I am referring to how media presentations can define societal problems in ways that privilege some solutions over others.

Research has demonstrated, for example, that the media's tendency to simplify complex issues related to the environment, economy, or political conflict can limit public understanding of those issues – and by extension, constrain policymakers' ability to deal effectively with societal problems.

Today, I wish to present the first results in a much larger project that investigates the global discourse surrounding the issue of cultural and linguistic diversity. This study focused on international news media and how they portray the issue of endangered languages.

The basic statistics are relatively easy to find in the media. Linguists estimate there are around 6,800 languages in the world today, yet 90 percent of the world's population speaks the 100-most used languages. Languages are declining or dying at a pace that will see at least half of the world's languages become extinct within this century.

Often people can recall 'reading something about this' in their newspaper or in a magazine. All too often, however, the media merely capture the last gasp of a language's life. The articles tend to profile 'one of the last speakers' of obscure language X or Y along with some academic or local effort to record what phrases remain of the once vibrant language -- now doomed to extinction. Worse, is when the 'cause' of the language's death is presented simply as the fact that not enough people speak it any longer. Not only does this type of media portrayal mistake the final in a long line of symptoms of language death for its cause, but it implies that the language suffered a 'natural' death as its speakers grew old and dwindled in number.

I wish to point out here that languages -- from the beginning of time -- have appeared and disappeared. However, they did so in a state of what linguists call 'linguistic equilibrium' -- that is, roughly for every language that was lost, another was born. In the last 500 years, however, the equilibrium that characterized much of human history is now gone. And the world's dominant languages -- or what are often called 'metropolitan' languages -- are now rapidly expanding *at the expense of* 'peripheral' indigenous languages. Those peripheral languages are not being replaced.

This study asked the following questions: How do the media frame the issue of language endangerment? Do the media create a barrier to our understanding of this issue? How might media framing of this issue link to public perception -- and ultimately -- to policies regarding the preservation of indigenous languages?

To assess how well the media portray this issue it is important to first identify the kinds of facts that *could* be covered in the media regarding endangered languages. According to scientists, what *should* the media be telling the public and policymakers?

Between 1996 to early 2004, the issue of endangered languages appeared on some international news wire, on average, 1.5 times a month. In other words, the visibility of this issue is very poor in international media. To make the news, the issue of endangered

languages tends to require a precipitating action or event -- such as a new report released by UNESCO, a new university project being funded, or a conference or event that took place. In general, the articles that do appear tend to be neutral to sympathetic to the plight of language loss. No article stated that language extinction was a good thing.

The most striking finding, however, is that the 'problem' of vanishing languages -- while treated sympathetically -- is defined as a problem that affects *only two groups of people*: the indigenous culture home to the endangered language and academics who prosper from their study. In other words, the media 'contain' this problem to two obviously self-interested groups. The media portrayal gives no sense that the loss of indigenous languages is an indicator of trends, environmental or otherwise, that will affect the general public in any way.

One paradox in the findings is that, although the news articles often present the statistics regarding the rate of language loss around the world, they manage to do so with no sense of urgency that this is a problem that needs to be solved. Part of this may relate to how the statistics are presented: a loss of half of the world's languages over the next *century* likely sounds more urgent to linguists and environmentalists than to the general public.

When actions to 'save' or 'slow' the death of a language were mentioned in the news -- and these included activities such as the creation of language databases and dictionaries and language training -- they did not include the need to empower cultural groups and to link the issue more clearly to the cause of environmental sustainability and human rights. The rapid pace of vanishing languages is definitely not portrayed in the international media as the "miner's canary," indicating the diminishing health of our planet.

If we look more closely at how the media framed the *cause* of the problem -- who or what is at fault for the language extinction -- then it becomes more apparent why this is not considered an urgent problem in the media. I found that there are **two** primary causal frames that dominate the media portrayal.

Frame 1: The cause of the problem rests within the community

As mentioned earlier, this frame tends to define the problem and its cause within the confines of the endangered language community itself. This media frame implies that language loss is ultimately a choice. It suggests that speakers choose to take advantage of economic opportunity by adopting more dominant languages. It does not refer to the societal or economic pressures that may force this choice. Unfortunately, the logical remedy to this definition of problem and cause is, from a policy perspective, to do nothing. It is what people choose.

Frame 2: The cause stems from 'inevitable' global forces

The third media frame looks more to the future and places the fate of languages within a broader context of evolving global forces: globalization, demographic changes, modernization, and the diffusion of western products and media programming. It implies that minority languages and traditional ways of life are no match for the powerful forces of global change. Many articles, for example, mention the prevalence of English, Spanish and Chinese as increasingly dominant, and essential, languages associated with the global business economy.

This frames implies that language extinction, while a loss, is inevitable. This frame makes reversing the language loss trend, through government policy making or grassroots efforts, seem futile in the face of these powerful forces.

The overall finding of the media coverage of endangered languages is that international news sources present the issue of endangered languages in a way that does not ask for public attention. The issue is not presented as a problem that society needs to solve. More broadly, the media framing of the issue of endangered languages is similar to that of many complex scientific issues. It doesn't give the public, or politicians, enough information to base sound policies on.

While there are certainly disagreements among language experts about how actively, if at all, governments should be involved in the promotion and protection of endangered languages, most express a common frustration that the public is ill informed about both the plight of the world's languages and the merits of language diversity. Nettle and Romaine suggest that the position they most often confront is that of 'benign neglect.' The 'benign neglect' position sees language extinction as a fact of modern life and most revitalization efforts as 'too late' or unrealistic in the face of globalization. This view sees language shift as a choice made by groups seeking economic progress and a better life. It also tends to argue that monolingual education within a society is preferable to bilingualism due to the belief that linguistic differences support conflict rather than cooperation and hamper economic development, although there is no historical evidence that either is true as a rule. My study supports these observations. International media do, in fact, tend to promote a perspective of 'benign neglect' in regard to endangered languages.

While the findings of this initial study do not offer much encouragement regarding the role of media in public understanding of the issue of endangered languages, I'd like to

end with a statement of hope. I have noticed, at least, in my own country that the media are trying to tackle, more seriously, issues related to the environment and to create media formats more amenable to the presentation of scientific issues. If language diversity advocates can successfully make the link between the need for linguistic diversity and environmental health, then perhaps this issue will ultimately find a media framing that points to the need for action.

Part Two (40 Points)

Directions: Based on the article you have read in part one, write a paper about 500 words to answer the following question :

What is lost when a language is lost?

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III. Translate the following into Chinese. (45points)

1. The transportation system determines the ease of interaction between the supply and demand configurations. The transportation system has two attributes. One is the transportation network, which determines the spatial coverage of its service, and the other is the level of service of quality of the transportation system. Both factors have an effect on the interaction between activities. (15points)

2. In like manner we sometimes fall in with persons who have seen much of the world, and of the men who, in their day, have played a conspicuous part in it, but who generalize nothing and have no observation in the true sense of the world. They abound in information in detail, curious and entertaining, about men and things; and, having lived under the influence of no very clear or settled principles, religious or political, they speak of every one and everything, only as so many phenomena, which are complete in themselves, and lead to nothing, not discussing them, or teaching any truth, or instructing the hearer, but simply talking. No one would say that these persons, well informed as they are, had attained to any great culture of intellect or to philosophy. (30points)

IV. Translate the following into English. (30points)

贾岛初赴举，在京师。一日，于驴上得句云：“鸟宿池边树，僧敲月下门。”又欲“推”字，炼之未定。于驴上吟哦，引手作推敲之势，观者讶之。

时韩退之权京兆尹，车骑方出，岛不觉，行至第三节，尚为手势未已。俄为左右拥至尹前。岛俱对：“所得诗句，‘推’字与‘敲’字未定，神游象外，不知回避。”

退之立马久之，谓岛曰：“‘敲’字佳。”遂并配而归，共论诗道。