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A Sociolinguistic Framework for English Language Education Planning: China as a Test Case

Çin'de İngilizce Eğitim Planlaması için Toplumdilbilimsel Bir Çerçeve

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ABSTRACT

The challenges confronting English language education in China are well-recognized and documented. These challenges range from professional teaching standards to issues concerning the implementation of English curriculum standards. China has made great strides in addressing these challenges since 1978 when it launched socioeconomic reforms that included English language education. The solutions developed to address these challenges include curriculum revision, policymaking, and the adoption of Western educational ideas. Nevertheless, studies have shown that the implementation of these solutions is still far from its perceived reality. This article attempts to supplement previous studies. It proposes a theoretical framework for English language education planning in China. It argues that English language education in China must first be studied from a sociolinguistic perspective at both macro- and micro-levels. At the macro-level, English language education planning and development should map out the functional distribution of L1 (Mandarin) and L2 (English) in the Chinese speech community. At the micro level, studies must be conducted regarding the levels of individual bilingualism in the speech community. The results from these analyses will provide the information for determining the suitable type of English language education that will best serve English language teachers and learners in China.

Keywords: English language education in China, language planning, sociolinguistic framework

ÖZ

Çin'de İngilizce eğitiminin karşı karşıya olduğu zorluklar iyi bilinmekte ve belgelenmektedir. Bu zorluklar profesyonel öğretim standartlarından İngilizce müfredat standartlarının uygulanmasına ilişkin konulara kadar uzanmaktadır. Çin, İngilizce eğitimini de içeren sosyoekonomik reformları başlattığı 1978 yılından bu yana bu zorlukların üstesinden gelmede büyük adımlar atmıştır. Bu zorlukların üstesinden gelmek için geliştirilen çözümler arasında müfredat revizyonu, politika oluşturma ve batılı eğitim fikirlerinin benimsenmesi yer almaktadır. Bununla birlikte, araştırmalar, bu çözümlerin uygulanmasının hala algılanan gerçeklikten uzak olduğunu göstermiştir. Bu makale önceki çalışmaları tamamlamaya çalışmaktadır. Çin'de İngilizce eğitimi planlaması için teorik bir çerçeve önermektedir. Ayrıca, Çin'de İngilizce eğitiminin öncelikle hem makro hem de mikro düzeyde toplumdilbilimsel bir bakış açısıyla incelenmesi gerektiğini savunmaktadır. Makro düzeyde, İngilizce dil eğitimi planlaması ve geliştirmesi, Çince dilsel topluluğundaki anadilin (Mandarin) ve ikinci dilin (İngilizce) işlevsel dağılımının haritasını çıkarmalıdır. Mikro düzeyde, konuşma topluluğundaki bireysel iki dillilik düzeylerine ilişkin çalışmalar yapılmalıdır. Bu analizlerden elde edilen sonuçlar, Çin'deki İngilizce öğretmenleri ve öğrencilerine en iyi şekilde hizmet edecek uygun İngilizce eğitimi türünü belirlemek için bilgi sağlayacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çin'de İngilizce eğitimi, toplumdilbilimsel çerçeve, dil planlaması

Introduction

The challenges that confront English language education in China are many and complex, and previous studies that address them have mostly focused on identifying English language learning theories, approaches, and methods that could be applied to the Chinese educational system. Even though

many of these studies purport to be concerned with "language planning," what these studies largely dealt with was "policy planning" for the purpose of implementing an effective English language curriculum in China (for a survey of the literature, see Wang & Gao, 2008, esp. pp. 386–87). This article is an attempt to supplement previous studies by clarifying the issue of language planning from the perspective of sociolinguistics and by showing language planning as the primary and most important stage in the development of an English language educational curriculum in China.

China has always been a unique country. With a population of over 1.4 billion and a civilization that stretches back more than 5000 years, the country has since its "opening up and reform" been committed to developing the most suitable systems that benefit the Chinese society and its people. Similar to visionary guidelines like "socialism with Chinese characteristics" or "the Chinese dream of a moderately-prosperous nation" (Xi, 2017), tailored systems that account for China's unique demographical and cultural profile (see Zhang, 2012b, 2016) are necessary to advance the nation's economic development in the twenty-first century. China's education sector is no different. The Ministry of Education (MOE) has been on a continual search for an English language curriculum that addresses both the challenges confronting English language learning in the country and the educational needs of the people. As outlined in my synopsis of the literature (see later), since 1978, China has continued to implement reforms in its English language educational curriculum. The literature shows that previous studies simply employ standard language teaching approaches and methods, especially foreign frameworks with western ideological and cultural orientations, to develop the English language educational curriculum in China. More importantly, it indicates that the country's educational reforms over the past 40 or so years still have plenty of room for further reforms and advancement.

Thus, in this study, I wish to demonstrate that English language educational planning in China should begin with a sociolinguistic study. A sociolinguistic approach to language education planning identifies the essential social and linguistic components that must be considered in developing a language education curriculum. It therefore serves as the basis and foundation for building the type of language education curriculum that is *suitable* for a particular community or country. In this regard, this study proffers a theoretical framework that could be used for English language education planning in China. This framework is a sociolinguistic model that is designed to provide an overall blueprint for English language education planning in China.

Unlike in the social sciences and other similar disciplines, methodologies in linguistics often proceed with linguistic modeling—that is, designing a linguistic framework that can be used as a methodological lens to read and analyze the research data or literature (i.e., primary and secondary sources). Hence, in this study, an appropriate methodology that can be used to analyze the data and information from the secondary literature I collected is a sociolinguistic model that is capable of identifying the specific areas, as well as the social and linguistic variables, that must be considered in implementing the research work of the MOE and the concerned educators with regard to English language curriculum development in the country. Without an overall framework for language education planning, it would be difficult to determine the specific areas that must be studied and the social and linguistic variables that must be accounted for in the research work, not least how the results from the research work can be integrated and interpreted in a meaningful way. In other words, this study is an attempt to provide a blueprint, a basis, and an outline for the possible research directions of English language education planning in China.

As argued earlier, tailored systems not only in the sociopolitical but also in the educational sector of the Chinese society are necessary for the continual advancement of China's English language education curriculum. If the country continues to simply borrow and employ ready-made language teaching approaches and methods, we could perhaps expect a slim chance of growth, as they may not be able to address and cater to the specific needs of the Chinese society with respect to English language learning. In what follows, I first offer a synopsis of the literature on the history of English language education in China, followed by the presentation of this sociolinguistic framework. In my presentation of this framework, rather than presenting the methodology theories and concepts and then analysis and results, I have incorporated all three elements as they come to bear in their respective sections so that it would be easier for the reader to see what those theories and concepts attempt to address within each of their specific areas at each level of analysis in the framework.

History of English Language Education in China—A Synopsis

The history of English language education in China is well documented. This history shows a proliferation of language education theories, approaches, and methods that were adopted in the country's foreign language educational curriculum, especially since 1978. It is significant to note the year 1978 because this was a turning point in China's history when several foreign language educational reforms occurred. I note three significant reforms in 1978.

First, it was during this year that the MOE released the first draft of the unified English syllabus for both the primary and secondary schools in China. Second, this year marks the beginning of the revival of John Dewey's (who arrived in China on May 1919) educational methods and the adoption of western ideas to English language learning in China, which became even more noticeable in the 1980s (Sun, 1999, p. 85; also Lau, 2012). Dewey (1897, 1916, 1925, 1938) introduced the ideas of language as a social instrument, language learning by experience, and teachers as facilitators in foreign language teaching. Third and last, it was in 1978 that the focus of the country's foreign language teaching shifted from literacy (reading and writing) to oracy (listening and speaking) skills. Consequently, Communicative Language Teaching slowly became popular in English language teaching in China (Yang, 2000). Many of these educational and curriculum reforms since 1978 were a response to the modern era when China began to emphasize the strategic role of English in its socioeconomic modernization programs (Hu, 2005, p. 7; Peng, 2018, p. 126).

Before 1978, however, foreign language teaching is primarily teacher-centered, textbook-directed, and memorization-based (Peng, 2018, p. 122; Zheng & Adamson, 2003). This pedagogical system was a result of the enduring influence of Confucianism on the Chinese

educational system, which was promoted as the official orthodoxy of education since the Han Dynasty (Yen, 1987, p. 50) and which focused on rote learning of such subjects as morality, ethics, history, language, and other subjects through textbooks (Lu, 1995) and character learning using pattern drills through the Confucian canon, such as the Six Classics. After the Opium Wars (1839–1860), however, many Chinese intellectuals attributed the backward and delayed advancement in science and technology in the country to the traditional Confucian learning system. Thus, in 1912, new learning objectives and literature were launched in attempting to "save China" (Sun, 1999, p. 72). Several years later, when Dewey arrived in China, he introduced a new learning system that is based on the American educational system and ideas. A decade later, a new curriculum based on Dewey's ideas was developed and implemented at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels (see Peng, 2018, p. 125).

But the Deweyan approach did not last long, and it was soon abandoned especially during the period leading to the Second World War. Thus, in the 1950s, foreign language teaching in China continued to focus on intensive reading, rote memorization, grammatical analysis, and language translations (Yang, 2000). In the 1960s, there was also a short period when a number of Chinese schools adopted the Audio-lingual or the "Army" Method (Dzau, 2000). However, the adverse political climate of the time between China and the United States led to the abandonment of both the Deweyan and the audio-lingual approaches to language learning. As a result, foreign language teaching during this time until 1978 largely retained the traditional Confucian as well as the Grammar-Translation methods.

The advent of the modernization of China in 1978 under Deng Xiaoping, however, changed this scenario. The Chinese leaders under his leadership knew that with socioeconomic reforms must come educational reforms. China's open-door policy and its modernization since then made English (replacing Russian) the main foreign language taught in schools from the primary to the tertiary levels. English was perceived to be the answer for the development of science and technology as well as for the strengthening of international communication and cooperation (Zhang, 2012a). In 2019, there were already 400 million Chinese students, roughly about 35% of the country's total population, learning English (Wong, 2019). This figure is impressive, and through over 40 years of being exposed to the English language, one would imagine that, today, the series of educational and curriculum reforms with reference to English language learning in China would have seen significant progress.

Yet, studies show that this situation is still far from its perceived reality. Persistent problems such as professional teaching standards, language learning environment and resources, large class sizes, assessment standards, learning strategies and motivations, and cultural difference awareness continue to linger in the English language learning system in China (see Shi, 2017, esp. pp. 936–37). Nevertheless, in recent years, some of these problems are gradually being resolved.

Social reforms, including reforms in the education sector, do not happen overnight. Even with the gradual reforms in China's English language learning curriculum during the past 40 years in place, its current state reflects a system that is still at its infancy stage—one that is still searching for the right framework that would fit the needs of the nation's unique demographic and cultural profile. Hence, the question that should perhaps be asked is, what kind of English language learning system or curriculum will comprehensively serve the *needs* of the greater Chinese society? This question does not offer any easy answers.

China has made great strides in addressing the abovementioned problems since 1978 and has continued to search for the right tool to accomplish the job. But previous scholarly answers to these problems have generally focused their attention on the levels of language teaching and assessment and of adopting theories, principles, methods, and approaches to language learning without (perhaps) seriously examining the *actual needs* of the Chinese society in relation to English language learning. To be sure, the context of English language education in China is very diverse (see Clark & Gieve, 2006; Hu, 2005; Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Shi, 2017; Stephens, 1997; Wang & Gao, 2008), and this unique context "has created serious problems in the wake of the public zest for learning English for different stakeholders" (Wang & Gao, 2008, p. 386). For this reason, a unique English language educational curriculum that fits the Chinese society is all the more needed.

Proposed Sociolinguistic Framework for English Language Planning in China

This article proposes a sociolinguistic framework for English language educational planning in China demonstrating that language education planning essentially involves an understanding of the interrelationships between the people, languages, and social composition and characteristics of a speech community (i.e., the Chinese society). This means that this framework will involve analyses of the three essential elements—people, languages, and social composition and characteristics—that compose the Chinese society, which would generate and supply the essential information that is necessary for language education planning. There are therefore three topics addressed in this framework: (1) language planning from a sociolinguistic perspective; (2) macro-level analysis of the functional distribution of the L1 (primary) and L2 (secondary) languages or the language/social domains in which L1 Mandarin and L2 English are used at the national, regional, provincial, and community levels of a speech community; and (3) micro-level analysis of the proficiency levels and types of individual bilingualism at the community-level of a speech community (see Figure 1 below).

This framework is a blueprint that shows the specific areas as well as the linguistic and social variables that must be accounted for in conducting the research work or study of China's English language education planning. It provides a holistic picture of how English language education planning could be implemented in China and is the initial step in the implementation of a multifaceted research and study for developing an English language education curriculum that could address and cater to the specific needs of the Chinese society. The first two columns in the diagram represent the theoretical framework, and the third column shows the basic sociolinguistic concepts (of course, each of these concepts will be nuanced by and will be a multifaceted framework of its own in the actual development and implementation of the research work) that will be used to carry out the two levels of analyses represented in the second column, and the fourth column indicates the targeted objectives and results from the analyses.
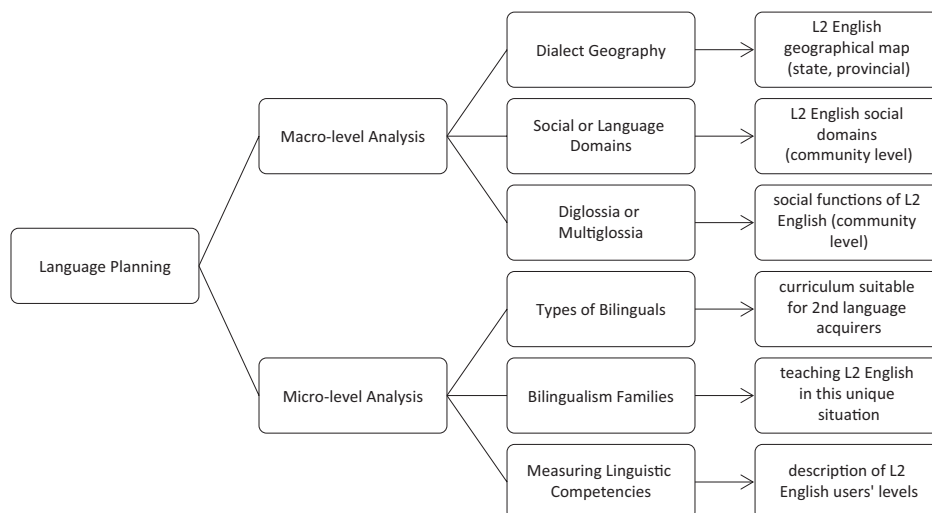
Figure 1.
Schematic Diagram of Proposed Sociolinguistic Framework.

In the subsequent sections, I first explain why a sociolinguistic model is the right tool for conceptualizing and formulating an English language education curriculum in China, given the inadequacy of previous studies, which simply proposed borrowed and ready-made approaches and methods, to address the challenges of English language learning in the country (see earlier). Thereafter, I define the sociolinguistic concepts used in this framework and discuss the purpose and the targeted objectives and results in each of the two levels of analyses (i.e., macro- and micro-levels).

Language Education Planning for China—A Sociolinguistic Approach

Sociolinguistics—with its emphasis on understanding the relationships between language, language users, and the speech community within which language users use their language—has had its significant influence on language education since the past 40 years, with language teaching and language assessment as prime examples (see Leung, 2011). In addition, there have been sociolinguistic surveys on children's linguistic competencies, dialect diversity, and standard and non-standard language use among bilinguals and minority communities that were conducted in relation to language education (Pride, 1979), including studies on second language acquisition (Preston, 1989) and second language learning using sociolinguistic approaches (Spolsky, 1989). These kinds of sociolinguistically oriented studies on language education, however, are different from the sociolinguistic concept of "language planning" that I present in this article.

In this article, language planning begins with a clear identification of the social functions a language is designed to serve a specific speech community: "Language planning is a government authorized, long-term, sustained, and conscious effort to alter a language's function in a society for the purpose of solving communication problems" (Weinstein, 1980, p. 56). To be sure, "Language planning is an attempt to interfere deliberately with a language or one of its varieties" (Wardhaugh, 2006, p. 357). There are two key elements to note in this sociolinguistic concept of language planning.

First, the "planning" for English language education in China must be conducted at the governmental level, since only the government can provide a long-term, sustained, and conscious effort to alter a language's function (English in this case) in the Chinese speech community. This means that whatever the linguistic functions of English is performing in the Chinese speech community today, it would only be the MOE that is able to alter or introduce changes to these linguistic functions. Because language planning is part of "modern nation-building" (Wardhaugh, 2006, p. 356), this principle becomes particularly important to the unique demographical and sociocultural circumstances in China.

Mandarin or *Putonghua* is the strong L1 (primary) language in the Chinese speech community, and it is a symbol of national power and cultural pride—it is spoken by over 71% of the country's population (Wardhaugh, 2006, p. 376; Wu, 2019, p. 31). In fact, there is now an increasing number of people outside of China that are learning Mandarin. A recent report by the *Language Magazine* (dated 6 January 2021) indicates that more than 70 countries and over 4000 colleges across the globe have included Chinese language learning in their national educational systems. The report further indicates that it is estimated that there are 25 million people studying Chinese as a second language and that there are more than 200 million people learning Chinese outside China ("Chinese Progresses as a World Language," 2021). As such, in conjunction with developing its English language curriculum, the maintenance of L1 Mandarin has continued to be a priority in the overall educational language planning in China. The *Gaokao*, known as the "3+X" college entrance exam, includes three major components (Chinese, English, and Math) and one elective component (the sciences or humanities) of assessment tests for all high-school graduates (Gu & Magaziner, 2016). The Chinese component is a rigorous test in language and culture proficiency, poem-memorization writing, and classical texts reading comprehension.

As studies have shown, monolingual communities are typically more economically progressive than multilingual ones: "a country that is linguistically highly heterogeneous is always underdeveloped or semideveloped, and a country that is highly developed always has

considerable language uniformity" (Pool, 1972, p. 222); "Language maintenance [of immigrant languages] in the USA is not part of public policy because it is…being regarded as divisive and incompatible with progress, modernity, and efficiency" (Fishman, 1981, p. 522). Thus, the maintenance of L1 Mandarin within China and its promotion in the international arena has always been a critical element in the development and progress of the modernization programs of the country. Assuredly, maintaining and even strengthening the status and position of L1 Mandarin does not automatically mean that it will adversely affect the status and functions of English as an L2 foreign language in China. In fact, it will even define and delineate more clearly its social functions, from which English language education planning can be carried out. This brings us to the second key element in this language-planning concept.

Hence, second, language planning is about the alteration of a language's function in a society for the purpose of solving communication problems. But to stretch this notion further, the alteration of a language's function is actually not just limited to solving communication problems. Language planning is about making explicit choices and decisions among alternatives (Fasold, 1984), which subsequently entails an evaluation of available alternatives and the selection of the best alternative that would best serve the linguistic needs of a speech community (Haugen, 1966; Jernudd, 1973). It is this notion of explicit choice- and decision-making that makes language planning possible. For these reasons, sociolinguists have developed at least four categories of language planning methods (see Fasold, 1984; Wardhaugh, 2006).

The first is *language determination*. Language determination refers to the selection of a language to be used for specific purposes. If a speech community decides to use a particular language as the medium of communication in a particular social domain, say, tertiary education or colleges and universities, then this is an example of language determination.

By contrast, *language development*, the second category, refers to the selection and promotion of linguistic variants within a language. If a country decides to use British English instead of American English, then this is an instance of language development. Another instance of language development would be the selection of specific lexical domains or categories of vocabulary words to be used for language learning.

The third category is *status planning*. Status planning changes the function of a language and the rights of those who use it, or, as the name implies, it changes the "status" of a language in the speech community. If a particular language is promoted and declared to be used in additional social domains, then that language has gained a new status. Status planning may not always be easy to carry out, as it is often contested by some social groups in a speech community.

The fourth and last is *corpus planning*. Corpus planning refers to the development of a linguistic variety for the purpose of standardizing it so that that variety can serve every possible language function in a speech community. In other words, a particular language may already exist, but a country can still create and develop a new variety of that language for utilizing that new variety for specific purposes and social domains. As such, corpus planning will usually involve the development of a combination of these elements: orthography, new sources of vocabulary, dictionaries, and literature.

When we examine carefully the above four categories of language planning methods, we will notice that the selection of one or a combination of them is a choice that needs to be made at the governmental level, and that choice depends upon the specific needs of the speech community. But how would we know the specific needs of the speech community? This is where the need for analyses of the various macro- and micro-sociolinguistic elements that compose the speech community comes in. The results of these analyses will provide the raw data from which the selection of language planning methods can or should be made. In actual practice, the decision-making process in language planning will involve sociolinguistic ideologies, which are ethical considerations in the language planning process (on this, see Cobarrubias, 1984).

Therefore, the application of this sociolinguistic language-planning concept to the development of the English language education curriculum in China will provide three critical factors that will help policymakers in the MOE decide which type (or types) of English learning approach(es) and method(s) is suitable within specific social domains in the Chinese society. These factors are as follows:

1. the assignment of the specific uses, functions, and purposes of L2 English in specifically identified social domains in the speech community (this will create focus for English language learning in these specific social domains);
2. the selection and promotion or the development of specific linguistic variants within the English language for the use of English in the identified social domains (this will identify the important elements in English language learning or which English subjects should be emphasized in the English language educational curriculum in China); and
3. the specific identification of the "status" of English in the speech community (this will demarcate more clearly the power and social functional relationships between L1 Mandarin and L2 English in the speech community).

One will note that the central issue here at this foundational planning level concerns "the problem of identifying the right kinds of data that must go into planning decisions. Planning should be based on good information, but sometimes the kinds of information that go into planning decisions are not very reliable" (Wardhaugh, 2006, p. 359). Thus, the macro- and micro-level analyses that I will discuss in the next sections will assist the decision-making considerations in the development of a specific language planning method.

Macro-Level Analysis of the Functional Distribution of L1 (Mandarin) and L2 (English)

A macro-level analysis is an attempt to map out the sociolinguistic landscape of a speech community. This can happen at the state level, where the focus of analysis is upon the overall sociolinguistic situation of a region, province, or city, or, at the community level, where the focus is upon specific social groups. There are at least three sociolinguistic concepts that we can use to carry out a macro-level analysis in the speech community of China. The first is dialect geography, the second is social or language domains, and the third

and last is diglossia, all of which represent the three stages in this macro-level analysis. In the actual application of these concepts, each of them will have a dynamic and complex framework of its own.

Dialect geography (or linguistic geography or geolinguistics) refers to the geographical provenance of a particular dialect or language. It is a branch of dialectology that studies the geographical distribution of linguistic items, such as phonetic (accent differences), lexical (vocabulary differences), and grammatical (syntactic differences) variables. When we look at the geographic map of China, we can examine the concentration of linguistic users for each of the regions, provinces, and cities and correlate this information with the geographical distribution of L1 Mandarin and L2 English speakers. Since China is predominantly composed of L1 Mandarin speakers, it becomes easier to determine the geographical provenance and distribution of the population that would be considered as bilinguals, meaning those who could use both Mandarin and English. The linguistic competence of these bilinguals is irrelevant at this point, as we will consider this in our micro-level analysis in the next section. The important information to glean from this macro-analysis is the geographical concentration of these Mandarin-English bilinguals within the country or at the state level. The results of the study are plotted on a map, showing which particular linguistic items (Mandarin-English bilingualism is the key linguistic item in this case) are found in which geographical areas.

Dialect geography research, however, involves some degree of complexity for two main reasons (Hudson, 1996, pp. 41–42). The first is that people move from one place to another, taking their languages with them, sometimes even modifying them to adjust to their new surroundings. Thus, geographical mobility is a factor that must be considered and included in the research framework for conducting dialect geography mapping. The second reason is that social class, gender, and age are sociolinguistic elements that are difficult to include in the research framework. But these are significant components to determine in plotting out the geographical distribution of Mandarin–English bilinguals on the geographical map, as they might be needed in language teaching and language assessment policymaking. While dialect geography research provides us with an overall picture of the geographical distribution of the language (so English) used at the state level, this overall picture can further be enhanced when we are able to determine the functional distributions of L1 Mandarin and L2 English or the social domains in which each of these languages is used at the community level. To do this, we need the concepts of social domains and diglossia (or multiglossia).

Social domains are certain institutionalized contexts that involve "typical interactions between typical participants in typical settings" (Holmes, 2008, p. 21). Examples of general social domains include family, friendship (or neighborhood), government, transaction (or commerce, trade, and employment), religion, and education (Fishman, 1972, p. 22). Such are called general social domains because they are the most typical ones that exist in almost all speech communities. Nevertheless, there is an infinite number of domains that can be defined in specific communities, and there are two basic ways to identify them. The first is to determine domains in terms of a set of similar social situations on the basis of uncontrolled participant observations. Uncontrolled participant observation takes longer to accomplish, as researchers have to observe actual speech communities for long periods of time to identify the typical domains of a speech community. But the results from this type of research work can be more realistic and accurate. The second way to define domains is through controlled experimental conditions. Controlled experimental conditions visualize and simulate domains based on existing data. The work can be completed in a short period of time, especially with the use of computer technology, but the results perhaps cannot be as realistic and accurate as those gleaned from participant-observation methods. Nonetheless, the main objective in any of these methods is to identify the concomitant *default* language used in each of the identified social domains in the dialect geographical map generated from the first stage of the research process.

With reference to the Chinese speech community, it will be apposite to first identify domains in those geographical locations where there is the highest concentration of Mandarin–English bilinguals as gleaned from the state's dialect geographical map surveyed. The identification of these domains will in turn determine the number of counts or instances L2 English is used instead of L1 Mandarin. It is very likely that, in some domains, there will be instances of bilingualism or codeswitching (i.e., the alternate use between L1 Mandarin and L2 English). To be sure, I often have to speak some Mandarin with my students in the classroom, whenever I want to help them grasp the subject matter I am teaching, even though my Mandarin proficiency is only at the basic level. This will be a typical domain in many foreign language classes where English is being used as a medium of communication, and I suspect that there will be a low count of L2 English usage in some other special domains since China is a predominantly L1 Mandarin-speaking community. Nevertheless, the identification of L1 Mandarin and L2 English domains does provide English language education planners the information necessary for the policies, curriculums, and language teaching and language assessment systems they wish to develop and implement. With these L1 Mandarin and L2 English domains in place, the next step is to determine the functional distribution (or social functions) of these languages in the Chinese speech community. So, we turn now to the third and last concept in this macro-level analysis framework.

Diglossia (or multiglossia) refers to the notion that there is a "division of labor" (Holmes, 2008, 27) among the languages spoken in a given speech community. If the focus of the social-domain concept is upon the social contexts where a default language is deployed, the central concern of the concept of diglossia is with the intentional or unintentional use of a language across different social domains. Consequently, the objective of employing the concept of diglossia is to determine the motivations and reasons why a particular language is selected instead of the other available ones in a specific social domain or context. To use the earlier example again, a researcher might ask me the question as to why I have to use some L1 Mandarin in the classroom when the required medium of instruction is L2 English. The reasons that I have to switch to L1 Mandarin may range, for example, from wanting to socially converge with my students (i.e., to make them more socially comfortable in the classroom and familiar with me) to helping them learn and understand the subject matter I am teaching. This range of reasons that I provide the researcher will serve as the intricate social functions of L1 Mandarin that can be contrasted to or compared with L2 English. Certainly, this is another set of factors and inputs that can be incorporated into the English language education planning in China.

Thus far, we have seen that, if a macro-level analysis is successfully conducted, there are three significant raw data that can be used and incorporated into the English language education planning in China:

1. a dialect geographical map at the state, regional, and provincial levels that highlights the geographical distribution and concentration of L2 English users;
2. a list of the various social domains where L2 English is used; and
3. an inventory of the various social functions of L2 English in the Chinese speech community.

These sets of information, however, are still insufficient for an effective English language education planning, since a macro-level analysis only looks at the use of L2 English from a societal viewpoint. But language use, ultimately, is a social activity of language users. Even when we are able to accurately produce the information we need for English language education planning at the societal level, the competency or proficiency levels of these L2 English users remain an "unknown" information. It is one thing to establish from a macro-level analysis that L2 English is being used in multiple social domains in the Chinese speech community, but it is another to demonstrate that its people are actually able to speak, write, read, and understand the language. It is necessary to determine the kinds and types of L2 English users we have in the Chinese speech community. Thus, the third and last topic concerns a micro-level analysis of the proficiency levels and types of individual bilingualism in the speech community.

Micro-Level Analysis of the Levels and Types of Individual Bilingualism

As noted earlier, since China is predominantly an L1 Mandarin-speaking community, most L2 English users in China would naturally be bilinguals, being able to speak L1 Mandarin as their primary language and L2 English as their secondary language. Of course, a large number of the population from different parts of China could also speak other dialects. There are 56 ethnic groups in China, and excluding Han Chinese, the 55 minority groups speak as many as between 80 to 120 languages or dialects (Zhou, 2003, p. 23). For an individual who could speak either of these minority dialects, their minority dialect would constitute as an L2 dialect in their linguistic repertoire, relegating English to an L3 position, since English would be a secondary foreign language that they would have learned and acquired by formal schooling (cf. Lam, 2007a, 2007b). For our purposes, however, we will not consider these other dialects that a Chinese bilingual could speak since our interest is in identifying the bilingual proficiency of Chinese individuals who are able to speak L1 Mandarin and L2 English (so English is moved up to an L2 position for the sake of our discussion).

There are three sociolinguistic concepts that can be used to measure the bilingualism proficiency of an individual (see Ong, 2021, pp. 32, 92–97). The first concept, types of bilinguals, provides us with a description of the different types of bilinguals that could exist while noting the fact that this is not a rigid but a flexible classification, as actual proficiency levels of bilingual individuals vary according to degree, not according to type. The second is known as childhood bilingualism or types of bilingualism families and is closely related to the first concept, types of bilinguals. The third and last concept is the typical categories used for measuring bilingual proficiency. I will discuss each of these in turn below and thereafter conclude with a final remark in the last section of this article. Again, I note that each of these sociolinguistic concepts will constitute a dynamic and complex framework in their actual implementation.

There are three main *types of bilinguals*. The first is known as a balanced bilingual, that is, a person who possesses an equal, native-like control of two or more languages. The second is simultaneous or early bilinguals. These are individuals who have learned their languages simultaneously at a very early age and have used all of them throughout their life. Those in this category who have learned their language consecutively (not concurrently), so, for example, bilinguals who learn their first language at the age of 3 (at home) and the second language at the age of 7 (in school and outside of home), are called consecutive or sequential bilinguals. The third type is second-language acquirers or late bilinguals. These are adult learners of a second language or those who learn a second language when the linguistic system of their first language is already in place. The above three types of bilinguals fall along a linguistic cline, and they are useful terms that we can use to characterize and describe a bilingual individual.

I would assume that most L2 English users in China are second-language acquirers or late bilinguals. As we have already noted, China is predominantly an L1 Mandarin-speaking community, with over 71% of its population speaking the language. Therefore, the majority of its population learned L2 English through formal schooling. And as we have seen in the history of English language education in China, L2 English is now being taught at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. There is a possibility that the next generations of Chinese could become simultaneous or early bilinguals. If the current generation of L2 English users begin to use that language with their children at home, and if L2 English is used in more social domains, then the next generations of Chinese could become simultaneous or early bilinguals, using L1 Mandarin and L2 English concurrently at an early age. This piece of information is significant for English language education planning in China in designing the appropriate teaching methods and curriculum that are suitable for second-language acquirers and late bilinguals.

The second concept is the *types of bilingualism families*. There are six major types of bilingualism families (on this, see Romaine, 2004, pp. 287–303), with an additional seventh type, which comes in two variaties (see Ong, 2016, p. 250): (1) "one-person-one-language"; (2) "non-dominant home language"; (3) "non-dominant home language without community support"; (4) "double non-dominant home language without community support"; (5) "non-native parents"; (6) "mixed languages"; and (7) "non-native parents and mixed languages." Each of these types is identified based on a configuration of a set of sociolinguistic factors—the native language of the parents, the language of the dominant society, and the parent's linguistic strategy in speaking to the child. Of course, there are many other factors that can affect the nature and level of bilingualism of a child in a specific bilingual family, since every "bilingual family is different, with its own patterns of language within the family and between the family and the local community" (Baker and Jones, 1998, p. 28).

Table 1.
Eight Dimensions of Bilingual Proficiency Skills (Reproduced from Baker and Jones, 1998, p. 90).

	First Language		Second Language	
	Oracy	Literacy	Oracy	Literacy
Receptive	Listening	Reading	Listening	Reading
Productive	Speaking	Writing	Speaking	Writing

When we examine carefully these seven types of bilingualism families, we can readily observe that none of them would perhaps resemble the majority of the families in China. Types (1), (3), and (5) may somewhat describe some Chinese families, and perhaps the other types may also describe other families in rare instances. For example, in type (1), the father's native language is Mandarin and the mother's Hakka. Both the father and the mother have some level of competency in speaking both Mandarin and Hakka, and they speak both languages to their children. In type (3), both parents' native language is Hakka, but the dominant language in the community is Mandarin. Both speak their native language to their children. In type (5), both parents share the same native language, which is Mandarin, the dominant language, but one of the parents knew Hakka and speaks the language to their children. It is noticeable in these sociolinguistic situations, however, that L2 English as a secondary language does not enter the picture. The reason is that L1 Mandarin is a strong language that is maintained and promoted in China. Therefore, English language education planning should be based on studying this unique sociolinguistic situation in China: how can L2 English be efficiently taught in this kind of sociolinguistic situation?

The third and last concept is *categories of measuring bilingual proficiency*. It is difficult to classify someone as either a bilingual or a monolingual, because "In between white and black are many shades of gray" (see Baker and Jones, 1998, pp. 90–94). For this reason, second-language educators utilize a linguistic matrix that plots the intersection of eight-dimensional elements that measure the linguistic competencies of a bilingual individual (see Table 1). The vertical dimensions measure the oracy (listening and speaking) and literacy (reading and writing) skills of a bilingual, and the horizontal dimensions assess their receptive or passive (listening and reading) and productive or active (speaking and writing) abilities.

It is important to note that the measurement of these linguistic competencies falls within a range of abilities that can be ranked from poor to excellent. For instance, based on identified evaluation standards and criteria, the reading ability of an individual can be assessed using terms ranging from "basic" or "elementary" to "fluent" or "accomplished" (e.g., see Interagency Language Roundtable categories, https://www.govtilr.org). In addition, for measuring bilingual linguistic competency, it is necessary to first identify which particular language of the bilingual's linguistic ability is being assessed. In measuring an undergraduate student's linguistic competency, for example, we need to first ask, which type of linguistic abilities in the L2 English language are we examining—are we measuring his oracy and literacy, or his overall language, skills?

Measuring the linguistic competency of L2 English users in China will provide helpful information for English language education planning in China. Combined with information gleaned from surveying the types of bilinguals and bilingualism families that exist in the country, these three pieces of information will paint a more accurate picture of the linguistic competencies of L2 English users in China. The biggest challenge perhaps is the method and procedure to be used in implementing the research project. Tests and exams are still the popular assessment tool used in China, and college and university students are proficient at it. But there are perhaps other ways to measure linguistic competencies besides tests and exams. While methods and procedures pose a challenge, these micro-level analyses that determine individual L2 English competencies are necessary information that should be incorporated in the country's English language education planning.

Conclusion

This study has proposed that English language education planning in China should be conducted from a sociolinguistic perspective using a top-down approach that provides the bottom-up information necessary for language education planning. This approach involves decision-making processes and the development of a language education planning framework at the governmental level. This framework also includes both macro- and micro-level analyses of several critical sociolinguistic components at the societal and individual levels of the speech community. Both levels of analyses in turn involve the utilization of various sociolinguistic concepts that need to be further developed into individual dynamic and complex frameworks in the actual implementation of the language education planning project.

One could argue that this proposal may suggest a revision of the English language educational curriculum in China, and this might well be the case, since the key element of this proposal is that China is a unique country and is predominantly an L1 Mandarin-speaking community. Because of its unique demographical and sociopolitical profile, a unique English language educational system could perhaps serve well the Chinese society.

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