

Article

Order and Crash: Multilingual Ecology and Language Planning in Sino-Foreign Cooperative Education Institutions

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Abstract: As preconditions and consequences of the globalization of higher education, multilingualism has reconfigured language ecology, language policy and planning, and multilingual management in the contemporary world. However, studies of multilingualism focusing on real-language scenarios in Sino-foreign cooperative education institutions (SCEIs) are rare. This study explores the multilingual ecology, language policy and planning, and language management of three leading SCEIs in China. It also investigates the attitudes of SCEIs' stakeholders toward language use and language policy in multilingual contexts. A case study was conducted by analyzing a significant number of language policy documents, semi-structured interviews with stakeholders, and partial participant observations. The research results reveal the main features of multilingual coexistence and intense competition in the three leading SCEIs by identifying the micro, meso, and macro issues of language management. The effects of language policy and planning mechanisms are also identified in SCEIs of higher education. Potential conflicts in multilingual environments are interpreted from the perspective of global cooperation. Last, recommendations are offered for the advancement of the language evolution of SCEIs in China.

Keywords: Sino-foreign cooperative education institutions; multilingual ecology; language policy; language planning; language management



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1. Introduction

Sino-foreign cooperative education institutions (SCEIs) are integral components of Chinese higher education. They are an important platform for the international co-development of higher education that has a remarkable impact on globalization. Political, economic, and social forces of globalization have thrust SCEIs into a more competitive global knowledge economy as a valuable industry in higher education [1,2]. In light of this, SCEIs typically carry a rich linguistic diversity to promote their international profiles and encourage international cooperation. Consequently, SCEIs are more susceptible to multilingual environments of language hybridity and pragmatic complexity in administrative, communicative, and educational contexts. Increased emphasis on multilingual policies and practices exemplifies the inevitability of the multilingual ecology in SCEIs, which are characterized by the interaction of multiple languages within the linguistic environment of higher education [3–5]. The ecological concept of multilingualism enables language policy and planning to integrate elements that appear distinct [6] (e.g., language competition, multilingual integration, language users' attitudes, and the status of English and languages other than English). Research on these topics has gained significant attention in recent years. However, it is challenging to identify the issue of current language ecology as the solution to a specific multilingual problem. Meanwhile, it remains unclear how these multilingual elements interact in multilingual ecology SCEIs of higher education, what the rationale and approach are for language planning and language management in SCEIs, and how multilingualism may influence the overall usage of attitudes toward languages in administrative and pedagogical contexts.

The present study tries to fill these gaps. Based on a two-year case study in three leading SCEIs in Beijing, Shanghai, and Ningbo, this research examines the competitive multilingual ecology that is developing dynamically in cooperative institutions of higher education. This research also focuses on the micro, meso, and macro implications and the problems of language conflicts and management issues. The study employs an ecological approach to discuss the language management and language planning actuality of cooperative institutions in China. In addition, this study clarifies the magnitude of multilingual development and the scope of multilingual attitudes. It reveals mechanisms of language policy and planning and therefore offers recommendations for multilingual development in SCEIs of higher education.

2. Literature Review

Multilingual ecology, language planning, and language management have been interpreted differently, despite a wide agreement on the importance of multilingualism of immersion language in the globalization of higher education. For instance, Ref. [7] claims that English was a predominantly written and spoken lingua franca. Ref. [8] also states that most SCEIs in China have increasingly given a predilection for English as the medium of instruction (EMI) from the perspective of globalization in higher education. However, within the context of SCEIs' linguistic diversity, complexities of language ecology have been discussed around perspectives on multiregional and multilingual ideologies [9]. Ecological thinking of multilingualism offers a new approach to analyzing the interactions between language and environment [10]. The language ecology of SCEIs in Chinese higher education is reconceptualized, resulting in changes in language policy and planning, language management, and multilingual attitudes of language users. This section will provide a literature review on the aforementioned topics.

2.1. Multilingual Ecology of Higher Education in SCEIs

The distinctive multilingual ecology of SCEIs in higher education is distinguished by its linguistic hybridity, a broad range of discourse content, complex inter-disciplinarity, frequent language interaction, variable language communication, and challenging linguistic issues [11,12]. The definition of ecology was explained as "living organisms" from a sociological standpoint [13]. The ecosystem metaphor was originally used in linguistics by Voegelin et al. in 1967, drawing a dividing line between the concepts of intralanguage ecology and interlanguage ecology [14]. The concept of language ecology was further elaborated in a multilingual setting as a complex dynamic system underpinning complexity theory and post-modern sociolinguistics [15,16]. A diverse linguistic landscape that takes into consideration language policy, planning, decision making, and other contextual factors is presented by multilingual interaction from an ecological perspective. It also provides a layer of sociolinguistic foregrounding on these factors as opposed to merely a language discourse or message. It can be assumed that the multilingual ecological perspective provides a fresh way to examine participant behavior and attitudes, multilingual integration, language implementation processes, and multilingual usages.

Recent studies of multilingual ecology in higher education, however, have progressively shifted their emphasis to new research criteria [17,18]. Research on multilingual ecology in higher education contexts prioritized a maximum diversity of languages by describing language application scenarios through a systems framework of multilingualism in detail. It can be found that research interests have been moved to the fields of educational globalization, teachers' bilingual and multilingual proficiency, assessment of scale reliability, meta-linguistic practice, multilingual competition, and language hegemony resistance in the last decade. In recent years, research objectives in the context of transnational higher education communities have favored the topic of "multilingual competitiveness" [19]. The results indicate an intricate expansion of English as the medium of instruction in the majority of transnational higher education institutions [20,21]. Scenario-based multilingual competition becomes more complicated in many different languages. Research methods

also switch progressively from theoretical research to empirical research, including qualitative, quantitative, and mixed research approaches. In conclusion, the previous studies in this domain provide a foundational basis for further exploration of multilingual ecology.

Regarding the language competition issues, there have recently been a number of specific multilingual discussions based on language ecological perspective reporting on transnational higher education institutions in China. Language competition, which can be defined as the scramble for resources of language use, application, and control dominance in multilingual settings, naturally occurs in cooperative educational institutions [22]. It is particularly shaped by language ideologies, which multilingual users may articulate as a justification or explanation for their preferred language [23]. Multilingual competition in SCEIs shows a new trend of change: from traditional multilingual groups (mainly English and Chinese) to multilingualism: various varieties of English (e.g., British and American English), Chinese (e.g., Mandarin and other dialects), as well as Japanese, French, Spanish and other languages [24].

From an ecological perspective, language competition can be subdivided into various conditions: the same language (within-language competition) and the other language (between-language competition), or both languages at the same time (simultaneous competition). For instance, Ref. [25] claims that competition across languages contributes to the growth and decline of language. It provides additional support for the “ecology-society computational model” for describing various aspects of language competition (e.g., language extinction, coexistence, and co-development). Ref. [26] introduces the theory and proposes practical strategies for addressing the challenges posed by heterogeneous surroundings in multilingual classrooms. The research results demonstrate how language competition occurred at the micro level in the classroom, and they strengthen the effectiveness of language competition for teachers and students’ linguistic abilities in a multilingual environment. Recent research has centered on different disciplines of multilingualism in higher education contexts, making explicit claims about the super-diversity of language implementation and language competition in higher education contexts. It can be assumed that contemporary multilingualism in SCEIs may present additional challenges and opportunities for language policy and planning in higher education contexts.

2.2. Language Policy and Planning in a Multilingual Context

The study of language policy and planning (LPP) in a multilingual context of higher education has attracted scholars’ interest following the development of language ecology and language management theories. Language policy can be defined as the implementation and patterns of language use in a specific educational agency with varying communicative and pedagogical settings [27,28]. Ref. [29] initially concentrates on language planning as it relates to the regulation of language behaviors, the standardization of instructional language usage, and the resolution of language conflicts. Specifically, the substantial increase in multilingualism in universities was a result of changes in the language environment and the implementation of LPP [30–33]. According to Liddicoat (2016), the administration of LPP in universities remains the least developed aspect of language work [34]. He noticed that English is still used alongside the national language(s) as a way of enhancing international visibility. These findings have made significant contributions of both theoretical and practical nature to an understanding of LPP within the language-in-education discipline. Their contributions have shed light on the complexities of multilingual management in numerous linguistic and cultural contexts. In the last two decades, the study settings have generally shifted from explicit language planning for the integration of disciplines has generally given way to implicit language policy for a single field.

LPP has been described as a multilayered process that borrows economic and sociological terms from the policy field. Numerous conceptualizations of LPP in higher education have been proposed, but the metaphor of an onion cited by Ref. [35] has garnered the most consensus. They depict the multiple layers of language policy as an onion, emphasizing the power of teachers, managers, administrators, and students at the center of the onion.

Some studies further characterize the multiple layers of language policy at the micro, meso, and macro levels of higher education, including the processes of creation, interpretation, and appropriation [36,37]. In addition, Ref. [38] focuses on relationships between language, power, and inequality in the concept of critical language policy among language, individuals, agency, and society. Some studies sought to explore how language policies act as mechanisms of power that impact the educational communicative discourse and opportunities of linguistic minorities [39–41]. It can be presumed that language policy and planning research has provided essential theoretical support for the field, emphasizing the power of language policy and the effects of policy effects on teaching and administration in SCEIs.

2.3. Language Management of Multilingual Ecology

Language management becomes an important concept in studies of language ecology (e.g., language use, manageable costs, and conflict of multilingualism in international settings) [42,43]. The process of language management shows the integration at the social, institutional, and individual levels through a “bottom-up” approach, as opposed to a “top-down” management strategy implemented at the national level. Cooperation between the government and society has superseded the previous approach of “top-down” management of government language policy [44,45]. Language management in multilingual situations refers to a structured approach aimed at facilitating education, instruction, and institutions. The objective of language management in higher education is to actively intervene in the standardization of language practices within instructional and administrative contexts.

Recently, some academicians have focused on the issues of multilingual challenges on an international scale. Researchers pay more attention to the management of equality, extensive consultation, and joint contribution in analyzing multilingual management of higher education [46]. This offers a broader view for examining the challenges associated with language management across several levels of context, with a particular focus on complex language management concerns and conflicts arising from multilingualism within the international education system. In addition, it emphasizes the collaborative participation of diverse languages in the management process of cooperative institutions in higher education. Meanwhile, the global view offers “institutional” solutions for various globalization-related problems [47]. Ref [48] introduces a methodology framework for the management of language, formulation of language policies and plans, and provision of language services, with a specific emphasis on addressing explicit language concerns and implementing methods. The integration of social institutions, groups, and individuals from other cultures has progressively become a major aspect of the global paradigm. There is a potential for improving the ability of stakeholders to deal with cross-language difficulties in the context of cultural and linguistic exchanges [49,50]. Consequently, there appears to be a growing inclination towards including the concept of “global view” within the realm of language policy and planning research in the educational management of SCEIs. It is considered a new perspective for the higher education industry in enhancing multilingual competence, facilitating international communication, adapting decision-making processes, and fostering instrumental advancement.

3. Research Questions

As reviewed above, despite the fact that multilingual ecology, language competition, language management, and language planning in higher education have received a growing amount of attention in recent decades, additional research is required to further understand various cultural realities and specific language scenarios. In addition, as stated by Ref. [51], the utility of multilingualism in internationalized higher education has generated a greater demand for a concentration on conflicts and possible solutions than ever before, despite an unclear paradigm of multilingual issues and an overwhelming emphasis on English. Meanwhile, power discourses continue to provoke a new conflict with the competition of other languages, which attribute opportunities to attain economic development and

prosperity to the superiority of English-dominant education [52]. Although some studies have explored the current reality of multilingualism of higher education in China, mixed findings have been reported because of a vague framework of real language life in higher education institutions [53–55]. Consequently, the present study sought to address these unresolved issues based on the research gaps. The following research questions were of particular interest:

- (1) What are the characteristics of SCEIs' linguistic ecology?
- (2) What are the LPP mechanisms in SCEIs for both administrative and pedagogical contexts?
- (3) What are the main language management themes and factors that may impact multilingual users in SCEIs?

4. Materials and Methods

To answer these research questions, case studies were conducted in three leading SCEIs in China (referred to as Institutions N, S, and D). Initially, a document analysis was performed. Then, partial observation was carried out for an average of three months. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with instructors, students, and administrators from the three institutions.

4.1. Setting

The Sino-foreign cooperative institutions of higher education district where this study took place are located in affluent regions of three of China's largest metropolitan areas. Established in 2004, N holds the distinction of being the first Sino-foreign institution to officially start operations. The institution, established through a collaboration between China and the United Kingdom, provides a diverse array of bachelor's and master's degree programs. Instruction and research activities are conducted exclusively in English. The primary objective is to facilitate the integration of staff and students from various cultural backgrounds, thereby establishing a global learning community that encourages international cooperation and facilitates cross-cultural interaction. Institution S, established in 2006, is situated in Shanghai. This collaborative educational institution offers globally focused, high-quality engineering education and research by using the expertise and resources of two esteemed universities in China and the United States. Institution D is a joint educational endeavor that provides a diverse selection of internationally focused programs of exceptional quality. It implements a bilingual training program in English and Chinese, fostering the acquisition of linguistic abilities among students and equipping them with the necessary capabilities to pursue worldwide academic studies.

The three cooperative institutions were selected from among all SCEIs in China. Initially, a compilation was made of the top ten SCEIs based on their overall rating in terms of academic reputation, student-to-faculty ratio, citations, and research influence, as well as global research connections. Then, a random selection procedure was employed to choose three institutions. Institutions N, S, and D are all co-operated by Chinese and foreign colleges, and the major administrative language is English, with Chinese used on some special occasions. The faculty members and administrators work in a multilingual environment since they may have originated from various regions of the world. They usually attend academic and managerial meetings at the same time, with those meetings conducted primarily in English but occasionally in Chinese (only if all attendees are Chinese). Meanwhile, the students, who all speak Chinese as their native tongue, are required to acquire English through a one-way immersion program. They are instructed in an immersion language classroom but study in a bilingual environment. English is the only language used in the classrooms. In other communicative contexts, however, language use varies based on particular purposes and linguistic situations.

4.2. Participants

Altogether, 11 people participated in the study. Three of them were administrators (one from each institution), three were faculty members (one from each institution), and five were first-year undergraduates (almost evenly from the three institutions). I gave the participants pseudonyms (A1, A2, A3, T1, T2, T3, S1, S2, S3, S4, and S5) to protect their privacy. In line with the principles of research ethics, this study adheres to a rigorous framework that respects the rights of all participants involved. The informed consent of stakeholders was obtained, ensuring their voluntary participation and understanding of the research objectives. The information about the participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. General information of semi-structured interview participants.

No.	Gender	Age	Institution	Identity	First Language	Second Language	Third Language	Place	Time
1	Female	52	Institution D	Dean	Chinese	English	Japanese	Person meeting	One hour
2	Male	59	Institution N		English	Chinese	/	Video phone	30 min
3	Male	45	Institution S		English	/	/	Video phone	30 min
4	Female	38	Institution D	Teacher	Chinese	English	French	Person meeting	One hour
5	Female	47	Institution N		French	English	/	Voice phone	30 min
6	Male	32	Institution S		English	Chinese	/	Voice phone	30 min
7	Male	19	Institution D	Student	Chinese	English	/	Person meeting	40 min
8	Male	19	Institution D		Chinese	English	Spanish	Person meeting	40 min
9	Male	20	Institution N		Chinese	English	French	Person meeting	40 min
10	Female	19	Institution S		Chinese	English	/	Person meeting	20 min
11	Female	20	Institution S		Chinese	English	/	Person meeting	40 min

4.3. Data Collection Procedures

The data collection was divided into three phases. I first collected language policy documents of the three institutions. The data consisted of both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) materials, including college language policy documents, institutional advertisements and agendas, meeting minutes, background papers, event programs, official letters and memoranda, program proposals, and organizational reports. In the second wave of data collection, I played the role of a partial participant–observer within the three institutions’ natural working and teaching contexts in order to interact with and understand the actual multilingual ecology, users’ attitudes, language policies and planning, and language management. I observed the language usage and linguistic structures in natural linguistic environments for both workplace and teaching settings. Throughout the process of observation, I wrote research notes, diaries, and retrospective reports regarding the nature of the multilingual environment I encountered. I also interacted with the members concerned while they were instructing or working and recorded their thoughts and impressions. In the third phase of data collection, I scheduled semi-structured interviews with the 11 participants, either in person or through online meetings. See Table 1 for more information about the interviews. Either English or Chinese was used in an interview, depending on the preference of the interviewee. With the participants’ permission, all interviews were recorded and transcribed.

A corpus-driven methodology was employed for content analysis of the interview transcripts. This involved a systematic process of identifying themes, establishing coding categories, and discovering patterns (see Table 2). I observed the contextual occurrences of keywords and important terms in the interview transcripts. Next, employing the identified themes or categories, I proceeded to assign codes to the textual data. The software AntConc 4.2.0 was utilized in this research [56].

Table 2. Semi-structured interview themes and coding categories.

Identities	Themes	Coding	Coding Categories	Sub-Coding
administrators	language ecology	A-A	multilingual competition English usage Chinese usage other language usage	A-A1 A-A2 A-A3 A-A4
	language policy and planning	A-B	policy making policy adjustment multilingual planning	A-B1 A-B2 A-B3
	language management	A-C	administrative context teaching context daily language use	A-C1 A-C2 A-C3
teachers	language ecology	T-A	language mixture instrumental language	T-A1 T-A2
	attitudes on LPP	T-B	multilingual environment mother language use multilingual anxiety	T-B1 T-B2 T-B3
students	classroom language ecology	S-A	language priority in class language use in class L2 anxiety in the classroom	S-A1 S-A2 S-A3
	off-classroom language ecology	S-B	daily language use academic language use	S-B1 S-B2
	attitudes on LPP	S-C	multilingual anxiety multilingual motivation	S-C1 S-C2

4.4. Data Analysis

Documentary data were considered first. Documentary data were selected from policy documents and management documents of institutions N, S, and D. Through the procedure of finding, selecting, appraising, and synthesizing data contained in those relative documents, I organized them into major themes and categories in accordance with multilingual issues. Qualitative content analyses were utilized to explain and describe available documentary data following the steps of defining SCEIs' multilingual objectives, selecting a representative sample of the content of LPP documents, designing a coding scheme to categorize content, coding the data, and analyzing the coded data by frequency counts [57]. Specifically, I classified categories of multilingual characteristics and language policy genres for the three institutions. I also refined the fundamental strategies and language policy models for specific language management scenarios based on the multilingual competition characteristics of the three institutions. In the meantime, procedural coding was performed in accordance with the coding standards for qualitative research [58]. To code the data, line, phrase, sentence, and paragraph segments were reviewed from the available documents. The initial coding of the content of the documents was based on the research themes: (1) language policy and planning, (2) multilingual ecology and language competition, (3) multilingual management, and (4) multilingual attitudes of stakeholders in multilingual contexts. The overall coding scheme is shown in Table 3.

The second part of the data analysis consisted of summative content analysis of observation diaries and interview transcripts [59]. Without using software, I coded all the individual transcripts using the procedures outlined [60]. I used no coding software to eliminate possible overemphasis on the frequency of responses. I marked the descriptive codes, followed by interpretive codes that linked the descriptive codes to themes in the field literature (e.g., language management, LPP, and multilingual attitudes of language use), or perhaps to themes that emerged independently but were identifiable due to the redundancy or intensity with which the participants mentioned them.

Finally, I conducted both within-case and cross-case analyses of all the observation and interview data in order to identify both individual narratives and group themes. To address my research questions, I deviate from the conventional presentation of multiple case study findings by presenting cross-case analyses prior to selecting within-case analyses.

Table 3. Coding of SCEIs' multilingual attitudes and competition.

Themes	Coding	Categories	Sub-Coding
language policy and planning	A	status planning	A1
		hierarchies of individual languages	A2
		modification of language use	A3
multilingual ecology and competition	B	language interaction of multiple languages	B1
		first language priority	B2
		communicative language	B3
		pedagogical language	B4
multilingual management	C	level of awareness	C1
		level of management	C2
		level of cooperation	C3
		language use propriety	C4
multilingual attitude of stakeholders	D	language beliefs	D1
		language ideology	D2
		language practice	D3

5. Findings

5.1. Documentary Results: Shared Characteristics

Document analysis reveals that the three cooperative institutions shared similar language policy and planning characteristics, including exposure to multilingual environments, hierarchies of individual languages, modification of language use, and administration of decision making regarding multilingual ecology in SCEIs. Through skimming, reading, and interpreting those documents (see Table 4), it can be found that the language ecology elicited a multilingual symbiosis order in which English has a higher priority than Chinese and other languages in the three cooperative institutions.

Table 4. A sampling of documents and data analyzed in this research.

Documents Selected	Data Analyzed
Institution D language management proposal for reference (Official Website, 2022)	language planning, services, and policy in decision-making processes
Institution D enrollment publicity video (Official Website, 2023)	features of language use in different situations
Institution S teaching management documents (Office of Academic Affairs, 2022)	language planning and policy in a teaching context
Institution S language policy documents (Office of Academic Affairs, 2022)	language planning and policy in decision-making processes
Institution N language policy documents (Office of Academic Affairs, 2022)	language planning and policy in decision-making processes
Institution D administrative documents (Office of Academic Affairs, 2023)	multilingual attitudes at an administrative level
Institution D teaching promotional video (Official Website, 2023)	multilingual anxiety in a teaching context

Several shared themes were identified in the related documents of the three institutions. First, the three cooperative institutions demonstrate a more intricate multilingual competition and heteroglossia symbiosis than other colleges within the same university. It is evident that the language policies of all three institutions prioritize the recognition and promotion of multilingualism, acknowledging its potential effects in many discourse situations. For example, the documents have incorporated high-frequency phrases such as “multilingualism”, “bilingualism”, “international recruiting”, “cross-cultural based”, “worldwide partners institutions”, and “multicultural learning”. Second, content analysis of documents reveals that English continues to be the preferable language for administrative working documents and written communicative language in administrative settings. For instance, the documents from Institution N state that “All of the teaching and administrative activities on campus are carried out in English by staff either seconded from Institution

N or appointed to the University of N's standards". The "English first" trend may result in a shift of the socio-educational attribute "cognitive concept" dominated by the English language [61]. It, therefore, influences social psychology and the communication mode of language users among stakeholders from the perspective of inter-ethnic communication and semantic evolution. Third, it was found that English was the only language utilized in classrooms, which was confirmed by certain policies, thereby enhancing its linguistic functions in comparison to other colleges within the same university (e.g., "This policy outlines the guidelines and principles governing the use of English as the medium of instruction at institution D... this policy aims to ensure clarity, consistency, and quality in the implementation of EMI across all academic programs."). Document analysis results show a similar homogeneity of the three institutions, particularly in terms of administrators' multilingual attitudes and multilingual policy in classroom settings. When considered from the perspective of multilingual management, the language policy and planning show a positive statement about teaching in English and provide official encouragement for the classroom use of English. Fourth, only Institution D offers multilingual services in their language policy document, including office hours of bilingual practice for students, multilingual multimedia resources for Chinese teachers, official document translation services, and a foreign teacher multilingual assistance center.

5.2. Themes and Factors of Multilingual Ecology and Competition

I was able to identify several common themes of multilingual ecology and language user attitudes among teachers, students, and administrators based on data gathered through participant observation and semi-structured interviews. First, the document analysis revealed that English has a higher priority than Chinese and other languages in administrative management, pedagogical instruction, and daily communicative conversation. Second, the majority of students, teachers, and administrators expressed positive thoughts about their attitudes toward using English in the classroom. Third, students and teachers articulate the integrative and instrumental justifications for using English in their daily communication. In addition, some administrators in cooperative institutions indicate a contradictory attitude toward the balance between the use of English and Chinese at the organizational management level. Some of these data closely resemble the outcomes from document analysis, while others diverge significantly.

5.2.1. Hierarchy of Languages in Daily Administration Management

The content analysis of observation images, diaries, and reports indicates that English is the dominant and preferable language in the management process of S and N cooperative institutions (see Figure 1). The communicative language of teachers and administrators in a WeChat group is exclusively English, even though all of the teachers in this group are Chinese. I also observed the phenomenon of multilingual mixing at Institution D, where English and Chinese were used interchangeably in the workplace. The issue of English precedence and code-switching behavior directly affects the structure and characteristics of language evolution in cooperative institutions. It diminishes the lingual code-switching ability of language users and, to some extent, the linguistic status of Chinese which may sever the connection between Chinese and educational culture and development.

5.2.2. Language Users' Attitudes to Multilingual Environments

Different attitudes on language policy and planning occurred among the administrators I interviewed. The administrators of the three institutions had diverse perspectives on multilingual policy, which combined or at least equated convenience and economic efficiency of language use. Typically, this took the form of a list of reasons why they choose to use only English or a more balanced language combination. A1's statements about her thoughts on language policy and planning provide an illustration:

I would like to choose a more balanced language policy for our institution. . . so I would like to suggest that all documents produced by our college be printed in

at least two languages you know we need Chinese to exist in our daily working linguistic context. I don't want to see the Chinese language just disappear from our daily workplace.

However, another administrator (A2) said:

We need to make sure that all operational documents and agendas are written in English since all of the college's faculty know how to say English, and that's why we are different from other colleges in our university... It is also quite convenient for users to communicate with foreign administrators since those foreign administrators may not understand what we are talking about in Chinese.

Similarly, a teacher from Institution N stated:

I really prefer to work in English... and if you were to speak with anyone in our college, you could communicate with them in English without any hesitation. I think it's easier for me in a working context. But yeah, when we talk to a Chinese teacher, we will switch our language to Chinese for certain. It really depends. Sometimes I struggled with language switching and therefore made some mistakes in such a mixed-language condition.

In the above quotes, the administrators and teachers all figured that the current multi-lingual competition occurred in the workplace. The choice of language was characterized by a more economical and rapid rhythm in daily communication with others.

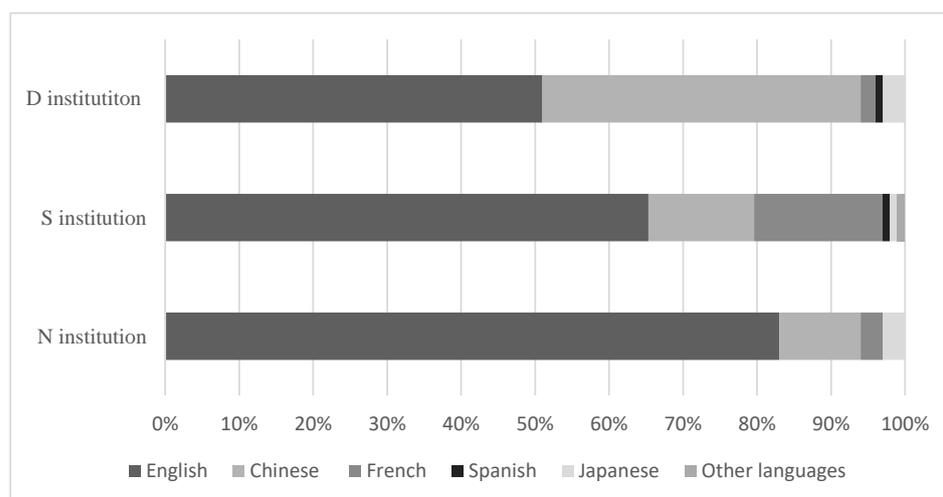


Figure 1. Language usage proportion in workplaces of Institutions D, S, and N.

Students and teachers all underscored the significance of using English rather than Chinese in the classroom, despite experiencing varying degrees of anxiety when speaking and listening to English in class. S4 is a very talkative and friendly student who liked to share his experiences learning in Institution D. He described himself as an outgoing person who made friends easily. Unlike many of the other students, S4 expressed his desire to take all his courses in English, but he also showed struggles in communicating and learning only in English in class. Whereas the other student participants depicted being able to learn and speak in English as their most enjoyable and exhilarating skill, S4 repeatedly mentioned his frustration with his inability to communicate and listen in English. When I asked him directly if he was willing to learn only in English in class or even outside class, he noted:

I think it's really important that we have an immersion class talking and learning in English. It's nice that we have this opportunity to practice our second language. But yeah, for sure, I do feel challenged in our courses. When the teacher spoke in English in class at a very fast speed, I became a little more anxious. I feel a

little bit embarrassed if I overlook something. . . especially when I talk to my classmates in English, well, you know they are all Chinese. . . that makes me feel a little bit weird since we usually talk and chat in Chinese in our dormitory.

Indeed, acquiring a second language needs significant effort and sacrifice. The transitions are frequently described as challenging, sometimes frustrating, and in most cases, anxious. That is why I focused on the motivation participants showed in learning English, as well as their willingness to invest time and effort in the learning process. This also explained why so many students in the immersion program desired to learn English in class but hardly ever used the language outside of the classroom. Typically, multilingual attitudes are defined as the propensity to react positively or negatively toward a given object (in this study, the object is contact multilingualism) [62,63]. Nonetheless, this viewpoint is excessively simplistic because attitudes are complex and multilayered, as evidenced by my observations and interviews. Even though the inclusion of minority languages in the SCEIs' higher education system has served to emphasize the status of English, it has not always resulted in a rise in their use in the broader social context (outside of the classroom and institution).

6. Discussion

The present study examined the topic of multilingual ecology, specifically focusing on language planning and management from the perspective of global governance within pedagogical and administrative contexts in SCEIs. This study also conducted an in-depth analysis of the attitudes of language users toward a multilingual environment in higher education. The findings indicated that the multilingual environment is characterized by multilingual complexity, which may be attributed to its distinctive administrative structure and educational objectives.

6.1. Characteristics for Multilingual Ecology in SCEIs

In response to the first research question, this study found that multilingualism creates tensions and challenges for SCEIs in terms of instructional practices, language administration, and administrative communication and engagement [64–66]. The language priority continues to demonstrate the significant dominance of English as the primary medium of instruction in the classroom. At least two institutions persist in reinforcing the English-first language policy, whilst the remaining institution adopts a more balanced language policy.

The issues arising from the presence of multiple languages in SCEIs can be described as follows: The primary objective is to provide a standardized approach to language use, with the aim of mitigating the adverse consequences arising from language competency and communication barriers. This standardization is intended to promote uniformity in language instruction standards [67]. Furthermore, there has been an increase in linguistic conflicts and issues in institutional operations and educational instructions. Consequently, this necessitates the implementation of novel criteria for SCEIs' language management approach and paradigms. Nevertheless, it can be observed that Institution D made efforts to diminish the prominence of English as a dominating language. They implemented pertinent language policies to officially ensure that Chinese and other languages are accorded the same level of importance. This statement indicates that SCEIs are increasingly acknowledging the linguistic reality of multilingual symbiosis within the framework of globalization. Administrators, educators, and students are actively endeavoring to foster greater equity in language utilization and adaption within a multilingual setting. This suggests that stakeholders of SCEIs can actively engage with historical and contemporary cultural contexts by developing their own social and cultural identities and linguistic values independently.

From a global standpoint, it is imperative for SCEIs to prioritize the evaluation of the attitude factor among both students and teachers. This emphasis is essential to address multilingual tensions that arise as a result of social and cultural debates. It is necessary

to implement sustained multilingual programs for both students and teachers in SCEIs within a more balanced multilingual environment. It is imperative to address multilingual students' and teachers' identity concerns and to gain insight into learners' self-beliefs in other domains related to their multilingual lives.

6.2. The Effects of Language Policy and Planning Mechanism of SCEIs

In order to address the second research question, the present study conducted an analysis of data derived from language policy documents, as well as interviews with the administrators from the three institutions. As shown in the findings section, it is important to note that the impacts of language policy and planning may differ depending on the linguistic situation. There may be tensions between macro-level policies (e.g., from the government, university, or institution) and micro-level situations (e.g., language choice in the classroom and personal language preference in daily communication) [68,69]. The stakeholders in SCEIs can either comply with the current language policy or resist by adapting their actions to specific micro-situations. This study demonstrated instructors' and students' divergent attitudes toward the multilingual policy in and out of the classroom. Students in SCEIs are selected to take the national college entrance examination (Gaokao), and their second language proficiency is substantially district-level (their native language is Chinese). The heterogeneous receptivity of a multilingual environment results in a variety of responses to multilingual community integration [70]. In the meantime, it can be argued that this is occurring as a result of the high-stakes exams and academic requirements that SCEIs' students must pass in order to graduate, as well as the language assessments that have a special linguistic emphasis (primarily in English). In addition, we may insist that administrators contemplate the reality of internationalization to advance development. In short, in each case of a multilingual environment in SCEIs, the institutions begin from the top down, but it is evident that at the micro level, teachers and students are either implementing a bottom-up policy or adopting a top-down policy to modify the priority of language in various scenarios.

According to the categorized subheadings and themes (see Table 2), the effects of LPP in SCEIs occur in the contexts of administration, classroom instruction, daily communication, and other situations. In addition, as recipients of the outcomes of language planning, students contribute meaningfully to foreign language and curriculum planning processes as an integral element of the micro-level planning process. In the meantime, this research reveals that the three institutions thoroughly considered the potential language policy effects on agency operations. To achieve a variety of objectives, policy positions and decisions were formulated, and planning processes were suggested. It can be argued that the language policy and planning mechanism in SCEIs shows dynamic characteristics that primarily facilitate a more balanced development of language in the language planning dimensions. Language users effectively change and create a multilingual environment. It may become a personal lingual belief or even transcend language itself, which condenses into a genuine and independent awakening of consciousness power in language use.

6.3. Language Management in Micro, Meso, and Macro Levels

In order to address research question three, this study employed a longitudinal design incorporating observations and interviews to analyze the effects on potential factors of language management across micro, meso, and macro levels.

The research findings revealed that language management confronts new challenges at the micro level due to several factors. First, the input of a second language (L2) or even a third language (L3) in a multilingual environment may lead to language processing disorders and language structure confusion, resulting in a reduction, attrition, or displacement of language use. Second, the majority of participants are of disparate nationalities with diverse multilingual abilities. They are commonly affected by two or even three inter-linguistic influences. As a result, to negotiate such conflicts, micro-level language management requires the participation of diverse stakeholders in the process of language planning in SCEIs. It

has been argued that “the democratic structures of the university provided spaces for the participation of potential policy agents at different levels of the micro-context and that it is important for senior management of universities to provide such spaces but also that academics and students also need to lay claim to them”. Therefore, it can be assumed that effective language management in universities necessitates a continual and collaborative effort, involving both higher-level decision making and micro-level involvement.

At the meso level, three cooperative institutions all confront multilingual problems such as unbalanced linguistic development, a misunderstanding of language management, and the separation of language policy and language practice. In general, cooperative institutions employ the policy of “English as the primary language, Chinese and other languages as the supplementary languages”. For instance, only Institution D officially implemented the bilingual management policy, requiring all management documents to be issued and notified in Chinese and English versions. In the meantime, observational and interview data led me to conclude that all institutions provide English as the monolingual instruction for classroom registration. All three institutions require students to pass the IELTS or TOEFL exam before enrolling in their junior year. Students without qualified and acceptable exam records will be rejected by overseas enrollment and will probably lose their second bachelor’s degree. Even though there is a distinct tendency toward multilingual development in management, there is still an invisible English-first language ecological environment in management and instruction.

At the macro level, the China Ministry of Education and the National Language Commission published the Report on Language Life in China and the Report on Language Policy in China [71]. Specifically, the report discusses multilingual development in terms of standardization of instrumental language, informative construction of multilingual usage, multilingual services, and multilingual administration in higher education contexts. The national language policy encourages more administrators and instructors to focus on language ecological equilibrium in the view of long-term development [72]. This study demonstrates, however, that top-down language policy may only account for some linguistic reality factors in higher educational speech registers. It may fail to satisfy the communicative requirements of individuals’ language use in actual linguistic scenarios. The individual preferences of multilingualism are also inextricably linked to social and cultural norms. It can be assumed that SCEIs of higher education should address policy issues at the macro level by integrating top-down language policy and planning with bottom-up decision making in language readjustment.

7. Conclusions

This study illuminated several multilingual issues that have largely been disregarded in language ecology, language policy and planning, and language management in higher education. Additionally, it provides an ecological framework for addressing multilingual challenges in SCEIs. The cross-case analysis has shown a dramatic change in multilingual ecology and language policy in China’s higher education. Multilingual ecology brings more challenges and opportunities for further language policy and planning, promising a more innovative management system of long-term multilingual development [73–75]. This study also presents a new theoretical framework for examining language management from a global viewpoint, a position that is not commonly employed in the field of applied linguistics. This approach enables us to comprehend the intricate dynamics of interactions in multilingual settings as complex systems within the global economy.

The implications of this research are numerous. First, the study provides SCEI educators and researchers with new information regarding language policy and planning in a multilingual context. This study offers evidence of multilingual management at the micro, meso, and macro levels, including multilingual attitudes toward individuals, institutions, and nations in different factors. It is vital to cultivate a successful cooperative program by creating a balanced multilingual environment that fosters these attitudes. Second, the study assists higher education researchers in understanding how interpretive work can enhance

and provide an intriguing contrast to traditionally positivistic research on multilingual policy and language management. The inclusion of qualitative research shed light on the complexities of multilingualism in very revealing and significant ways, inspired by participants who respond similarly to the interview but face difficulties and problems in unique ways.

This study is merely the beginning of a much broader investigation into the nature of the multilingual context in SCEIs in higher education. This study is limited by the homogeneity of the student participants in terms of their similar ethnic and linguistic backgrounds and their attendance in three affluent, well-established cooperative institutions. In addition, how the participants were chosen by their instructors and administrators suggests that they may be more optimistic about their educational experiences than a group of students selected differently. All these issues need to be addressed in a future study.

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