Learning, Started from Our Native Language

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I. Instruction

It goes without saying that native language plays a significant role in our lives. These days, however, we can easily discover that students in Taiwan are getting worse at mastering the language they should have at their fingertips. Who is to blame for? Is it because of the education system? Or the students themselves? Or even the parents?

Nowadays, thanks to globalization, people in Taiwan are open to communicate with others in diverse languages. We learn English because it is the leading language in the world. Some of us learn Japanese because we want to do trade with them. A fraction of us learn Korean simply because we are attracted by their soap operas. Then why it is still necessary to learn Chinese if we are using other languages more?

Despite the fact that Taiwan has a combination of different languages, we are going to put our emphasis on the Mandarin Chinese concerning the language speaking while traditional Chinese characters in writing. Perhaps this essay may be a little bit subjective, but I do hope that people’s attention, respects, and confidence toward our native language could be aroused once more.

II. Thesis

1. Who would not like their kids to start winning on the threshold? However, are you sure you are making your children win? Or lose?

Most parents think that they should let their children adopt a second language as soon as possible. Some parents even think that because we all know how to speak Chinese, there is no need to strengthen the skills of it. However, this kind of opinions should be overturned. If a child cannot grasp their first language well enough, their ability in learning other languages would consequently be influenced lifelong.

A. Why should we begin our learning with our native language?

a. Learning the first language has a “crucial period”. During this “crucial period”, which is before the age of six, children must be exposed to a certain language environment. Through large amount of digestion and analyses, children can also build up their ability of thinking. However, once you miss the period, you would never be able to master it. On the other hand, second languages do not have this kind of problem, which means you are always capable of acquiring a second language no matter how old you are

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(R1).

b. Native language is a source of a sense of identification and belonging for a child. If children were placed in an environment denying their first language, they may be confused and thus causing some conflicts in identification. Sometimes, it may also influence their confidence in the future (R2).

B. Why shouldn’t our children learn multi-languages simultaneously during the age they are developing the fastest?

a. Untimely multi-language learning may cause children to suffer from autism or even thinking developing disorder.

In order to make their child to become internationalized earlier, a couple in Shanghai taught their kid three different languages, including Chinese, English, and Japanese, at the same time ever since the kid was born. Unfortunately, when the kid was around the age of three, the couple were shocked to notice that their child was at a loss with distress when they urged him to hurry up. In fact, the child was dealing with the exchange between English, Japanese, and Chinese when getting the command (R3). Multi-language learning could confuse children and thus make them to have problems dissolving information.

b. In Taiwan, while the rate of hiring a tutor teaching non-English second language, such as Japanese and Spanish, for children under 12 is getting higher, the rate of hiring a Chinese tutor for students above 12 is also getting higher (R4). Those who have made their kids to learn a foreign language earlier is starting to realize that their children have a poor ability in organizing the Chinese.

c. Native language is the basic learning tool for children. It can reinforce their logical thinking, personal viewpoints, and cultural values. If children are placed in an environment forcing them to learn two or more languages at a time, there will be a high possibility that they may know everything, but never be good at anything.

2. China’s prosperity has made the whole world realize the importance of Chinese. In order to promote their competitiveness, students all over the world, including the daughter of an American investigation magnate and kids from French slum, are learning Chinese (R5). In this century, only those who are well versed both in English and Chinese will be favored. With the existing advantages, are we, Taiwanese, ready to stand
A. What are the advantages we have?

a. Chinese is considered to be the hardest language to grip. According to the statistics carried out by the Foreign Service Institute of the State, an English native speaker needs approximately 720 hours to build up their standard of German, French, or Italian to advanced level. However, if they want their Chinese level to be the same, it would cost them at least one and a half times more as the former (R6). Nevertheless, since we are Chinese speakers, the problems above don’t seem to be appearing for us.

b. We are the few who preserve the tradition of Chinese because we are still using traditional Chinese characters rather than the simplified ones.

The type of the characters we are using now, which is called Kai Shu (楷書), can be traced back to an ancient style of calligraphy current called Li Shu (隸書) in the Han Dynasty. Even though they were given different names, Kai Shu and Li Shu look almost the same because they only have some slightest differences. In other words, we can still read the documents two thousand years ago without any obstacles.

In fact, restoring traditional Chinese characters has generated a numerous discussion in China due to the fact that simplified characters have made lots of foreign apprentice in a puzzle. Besides, traditional characters play a considerable role in China’s archaeology.

c. We have our own phonetic symbols (注音符號) while most of the people in China use Romanization to pronounce Chinese characters. It is true that foreigners may be able to learn Chinese faster through their way; however, it is also the reason why the foreigners may never be able to pronounce Chinese clearly despite their original accent. Why shouldn’t we use Romanization to pronounce Chinese? It is because that Chinese has four special tones, which are Pin (平), Shang (上), Cyu (去), Ru (入) (R7), that Romanization can never present the differences. “施氏食獅史”, an article wrote by Jhao Yuan Ren (趙元任), is the best example. In this article, all the characters are spilled as “Shi” but their tones vary considerably. It even shows us a major trait of Chinese which is having characters with the same pronunciation like “試釋是事” (R8). English spilling system cannot show the precise pronunciation of Chinese characters and as a result may cause the learners to have another perplexity when it comes to recognizing the Chinese characters.
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Phonetic symbol has a total of 37 symbols, which amounts to only eleven more than English alphabets to remember. Because of this, the combination of 37 symbols and four tones broaden our range of phonation. Phonetic symbol has assisted us to establish a sturdy sounding basis.

III. Conclusion

Nowadays, people in Taiwan, especially students, seem to forget the importance of Chinese. However, what those who are eager to learn other languages have ignored is that all cultivation requires the foundation of our native language. Why should we consider ourselves as disadvantaged? What is the use of speaking other languages if you don’t even know your own culture?

Native language is something that can define a person, your country, and your history. We should be proud, not because we know how to speak English or Japanese, but because we know how to speak and write Chinese. It is something that connects us with our ancestors and makes us unique. If age is not something that would influence our ability in learning other languages, why can’t we just wait a little bit and put more emphasis on Chinese?

A loss of a native language can be considered as the destruction of an ethnic group. Native language even enables Jews to gather once again after thousands of years of separation. The sorrow of forgetting your own language is beyond words. That is why I wrote this essay. I hope that everyone can treasure and preserve what they have been given.

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