A Multi-case Investigation into Trilingualism and Trilingual Education in Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture

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Abstract Among the 55 officially recognised ethnic minority groups in China, the Yi are the seventh largest, with a population of about 7.7 million, unevenly distributed across the mountainous regions of southwest China, primarily in three provinces, Yunnan, Sichuan and Guizhou. This chapter focuses on the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, home to speakers of Nuosu. Nuosu is not an endangered language but it is becoming vulnerable because of the power of Chinese and changes to the demographic makeup of society. The chapter uses an educational linguistic approach to investigate trilingualism and trilingual education in Liangshan. It finds that, in common with many other ethnic minority languages in China, the maintenance of Nuosu is hindered by historical, political and sociolinguistic factors, and suggests a number of measures to improve the situation.

Keywords Trilingualism · Language policy · China · Sichuan · Chinese · English · Yi

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1 Introduction

A person who conversed only in Chinese would find inter-ethnic communication challenging in Old Liangshan, Sichuan, before 1978, for as a Yi-dominated region, a majority of the population there at that time, merely communicated in the Yi language, with little knowledge of Chinese (Chen et al. 1985). Visiting Liangshan almost 30 years later, it is now obvious that the Chinese language has achieved public status, which is equal to or even superior to the Yi language. The reason for the change is the advantageous socio-economic benefits achieved from learning Chinese and the slow-paced policy process related to the Yi language. Given the limited and constant class hours of language education, stakeholders of bilingual education constantly face a dilemma, over whether to maintain the minority language or to spread standard Chinese (Putonghua). Moreover, with the implementation of the 'Open Door' policy since the late 1970s, English is also required to be taught as a subject from the third year in primary schools (Ministry of Education 2001a, b). Thus, the addition of a foreign language in education creates an even more complex state of affairs.

In this chapter, an educational linguistic approach is adopted to investigate language use, language provision and language attitudes in Liangshan, focusing particularly on trilingualism and trilingual education in the Yi language, Chinese and English. It seeks to contribute to multilingual studies by two methods. Firstly, the status quo of trilingualism and trilingual education in Liangshan will be examined for the first time; secondly, based on the data gathered, a comparative analysis will be conducted not only between the cases in Liangshan, but also with other cases nationwide and internationally.

2 Background

2.1 Demographic Context of Liangshan

Among the 55 officially recognised ethnic minority groups in China, the Yi are the seventh largest, with a population of about 7.7 million, according to the Fifth National Census conducted in 2000. Geographically, the Yi are unevenly distributed across the mountainous regions of southwest China, primarily in three provinces, i.e. Yunnan, Sichuan and Guizhou. Nearly 45.5 % of the Yi people live in concentrated communities and the rest of them are extensively scattered and segregated. Yunnan has the largest population of Yi (4.7 million). Besides the 1.5 million Yi people who have settled in and are concentrated in two major Yi autonomous prefectures (i.e. Chuxiong and Honghe), the others are segregated and dispersed across the province. About 800,000 Yi people are distributed over the north-west corner

Fig. 1 Map of contemporary Liangshan and old Liangshan

of Guizhou. Another remarkable feature of their inhabitancy is their long-term co-existence with the Han and other minority groups, which results in their shared vernacular language and customs.

Liangshan Yi autonomous prefecture in southwest Sichuan is the principal concentrated community of the Yi, with a population of about 2.2 million, accounting for 47.22 % of the overall prefecture population. Between its founding in 1952 and expansion in 1978, the total figure for Yi people in Old Liangshan, of which nine Yi-dominated counties were under the administration, reached over 77.10 %. In 1978, the Xichang region, which administered six Han majority counties, and two minority autonomous counties, i.e. Yanyuan Yi autonomous county and Muli Tibetan autonomous county, merged with Old Liangshan. Therefore, the current Liangshan has seventeen counties within its territory, as illustrated by Fig. 1. The capital city of the prefecture was moved from Zhaojue, a Yi-dominated county, to Xichang, the present economic and political centre with Han people making up 79.06 % of the population. Since the field trips to present study did not extend westward as far as Muli Tibetan autonomous county and the Yi-dominated Yanyuan County, the research described in this chapter is limited to the other fifteen counties that formed, historically, the Xichang region and Old Liangshan.

2.2   The Yi Language

The concept of the Yi language covers a wide range of genetically-related languages spoken mainly in Sichuan, Yunnan and Guizhou. It is called the Yi group by Sun (1998) or the Loloish languages by Bradley (1997). Nuosu, spoken in Liangshan, is one of the group, which belongs to the Burmese-Lolo language group of the Tibeto-Burman language family. Matisoff (2003) proposes a three-way subdivision of the Burmese-Lolo languages: Northern, Central, and Southern. This categorization covers all the Loloish or Yi languages. Nuosu is in the Northern subdivision.

Yi people in Liangshan are speakers of Nuosu. Nuosu in Liangshan has three major varieties: Shynra, Suondi, and Yynuo. Shynra has the most speakers; it is used primarily in Xide, Yuexi, Xichang and Mianning. Yynuo speakers are mainly found in Meigu, Ganluo and Zhaojue, while Suondi is used in places such as Butuo and Dechang. In our investigation, we visited only Shynra- and Yynuo-speaking regions. In the following discussion of the Liangshan case, to avoid confusion, we will use "Yi" to refer to the nationality and "Nuosu" or "Nuosu Yi" to the language.

2.3   Language use of Nuosu and Chinese

Overall, Nuosu is not an endangered language. Intergenerational transmission is still uninterrupted. But because of pressure from Chinese, it is becoming vulnerable. Although most children still speak the language as their mother tongue, its usage is restricted to certain domains. Meanwhile, language use in Liangshan is also determined by the demographic makeup of its society.

In the counties of Old Liangshan, Nuosu is widely used in informal domains. Meigu County can be cited as an example. Yi make up 98.74% of its population, with the remainder consisting of Han and other minority nationalities including Tibetan, Mongolian and Hui. Orally, Nuosu is used on a daily basis for intra-ethnic communication among Yi people of various ages and in all walks of life. In some situations, Nuosu in fact, serves as a language for inter-ethnic communication. For example, we interviewed a primary school teacher of Mosuo origin who has been working in Meigu for over 10 years and now speaks Nuosu fluently. But when he first arrived in Meigu, he knew nothing of the language. He recalled that "it is a necessity for life and work here, and I acquired the language very quickly within three months".

However, this does not imply that the Yi people in Old Liangshan are monolingual. On the contrary, they have equal competence in Sichuan Mandarin, a dialect which is similar to standard Chinese, with only minor regional differences in pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. Sichuan Mandarin is used for inter-ethnic communication between the Yi and the Han. Apropos language use in formal domains, such as schooling, meetings, TV and radio programmes, it is Chinese that dominates; Nuosu is simply used for particular reasons such as pre-meeting small talk or in limited spectra like in Yi language classes where Nuosu is taught.

In terms of the written languages, two types of Yi scripts are available: the classical Yi and the modern Yi. The former is a syllabic logographic system, reputedly dating back to the seventh century or even earlier (Wu 1991). With around 10,000 characters, the classical Yi script is mainly used by Bimo, the Yi shaman who is highly knowledgeable in every aspect of Yi culture and performs religious rituals for his people. The modern Yi writing is a standardised syllabary with 819 basic glyphs (Li and Ma 1983). The modern Yi script was reformed in 1974 and popularised in 1980. Since then, it has been utilised by ordinary Yi people for reading and writing. Nowadays, many Bimos also transcribe their scripture in modern Yi script. Based on our observations, shop signs in Old Liangshan are all written bilingually in both modern Yi and Chinese. Most of the mass media like newspapers, radio and TV programmes in Old Liangshan are in Chinese, but some of them continue to be in Nuosu Yi, such as the *Liangshan Daily* (the Nuosu version), Yi radio programmes and the Yi TV Channel.

With reference to the former Xichang regions which administered six Han majority counties from 1952 to 1978, Sichuan Mandarin is used in practically every informal domain. Nuosu is only spoken, but not necessarily, in places where most people belong to the Yi nationality or among Yi family members. In formal domains, Chinese is the dominant language, such as standard Chinese for class instructions and Sichuan Mandarin for meetings. But, Yi TV programmes are available in the former Xichang regions. As for written languages, the prevailing situation is almost similar to that in Old Liangshan.

In Liangshan, English is occasionally employed for certain purposes. But it is more commonly used in the former Xichang region than in the counties of Old Liangshan. For example, Xichang is a famous tourist destination because of its splendid scenery and the Xichang Satellite Launch Centre. Therefore, many signs in Xichang are trilingual. Besides, Xichang is also very actively involved with many international collaborations and exchanges. Although English is not easily encountered in Old Liangshan, there are occasions on which English is used, for example, some international NGO projects and academic conferences, specifically, the Sino-Britain project for AIDS prevention and control in Zhaojue County, and the international conference on Yi studies in Meigu.

Moreover, the topography has a remarkable influence upon language use by the Yi people. According to *Hnewo Tepyy*, the Genesis of Yi, the Han people lived on flat land and around lakes and rivers; the Yi people lived in mountainous regions and on steep slopes of river gorges. Although many Yi people have now moved from the mountains to flat land, their general pattern of habitation remains unchanged. Therefore, those living in mountains have less interaction with the Han people; they can barely speak the Chinese language. Those who live on flat land have frequent interactions with the Han people. Historically, according to He (1980), the economy of the Han people was based on salt, rice and iron products, which they sold to the Yi people; the Yi people, in turn, traded in fur merchandise and herbal medicines with the Han. Agriculturally, Han crops such as rice, corn and wheat were introduced to the Yi regions; politically, those living with or close to the Han people replaced their traditional hierarchical relationships of slavery

with relationships under the feudal system. Currently, the frequency of interactions between the Han and the Yi peoples is even more marked and noticeable than before. But it is evident that the influence from the Han is much stronger. Thus, this group of Yi people are capable of speaking acceptable Chinese, and since many of them have fewer opportunities to converse in Nuosu, their Chinese can even be deemed as praiseworthy.

2.4 Language Policies in Liangshan

Since 1949, three basic principles underlie all major policies decreed on the topic of minority languages in China. They are: (1) all languages are equal; (2) all nationalities have the freedom to use and develop their own languages; (3) all nationalities should be encouraged to learn each other's languages on the basis of their free will.

Besides the general directives from the *Constitution of the People's Republic of China* at the national level and the *Statute of Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture* at the local level, three important policies prescribe language use and language education in Liangshan.

The Yi standardised written plan: From 1949 to the present, Tibetan, Mongolian, Russian, Korean, and Xibo are the only five continuously used and intact minority written languages in China. The remaining minority languages have gone through, to different extents, reforms initiated by appropriate governing bodies. The Yi language reform is often cited as a successful example (Zhou 1993; Mahe 1985). The Yi people had their classical written language; but it was used to a limited degree, by only 1.7–2.75% of the population (Mahe and Yao 1993). Therefore, the Chinese government developed a plan to reform the traditional Yi written language into a Latin-alphabet-based new form, from 1950 to 1957. However, the Yi people had strong emotional feelings and linguistic attachment towards their own writing system. Thus, with the support of the prefecture government, the Yi people developed their own written language based on the traditional Yi script (Blachford 1999). This language was much favoured and spread rapidly across the region. The plan was officially approved by the Sichuan provincial government in 1975 and the State Council in 1980.

The statute of spoken and written languages in Liangshan: The first version was approved by the prefecture and provincial people's congress in 1992. This version primarily focused on the bilingual use of Nuosu Yi and Chinese in administrative, juridical, cultural and educational domains. Nuosu and Chinese are placed on an equal platform. But there was a tendency for people to have better competence in Chinese than in the minority language. To remedy this situation, a revised version was implemented in 2009; it favours strengthened competence in Nuosu. For instance, balanced bilinguals in Nuosu Yi and Chinese have enhanced job opportunities and more promising futures career-wise. Moreover, the new version stipulates management and supervision of language usage, as well as the legal responsibility and implications, associated with contravention of any articles in the statute.

Bilingual education, two models, two allocations, four-levelled planning, and two connections: The two models policy is the essence and guiding principle behind bilingual education in Liangshan. Given the language policies and the nature of Nuosu-Chinese bilingual society, in 1978 and 1984, Liangshan launched two models of bilingual education programmes (Teng 2001). The first model requires that schools, where a maximum number of students are of Yi nationality, must use Nuosu as their medium of instruction (MoI) and teach standard Chinese as a school subject. This model, categorised by Baker (2001) as the strong form of bilingual education, was designed for the cultivation of specialised knowledge in the Yi language, literature, and culture. In the second model, the roles of Nuosu and Chinese are reversed; it was the weak form of bilingual education (Baker 2001), and designed for the inheritance of Yi culture. Accordingly, before students entered a higher school, they were allocated to the two models, in terms of educational resources and their own will. To ensure a satisfactory number of first model students, the urban and township government is responsible for planning sufficient first model classes in its primary schools; the county government plans for classes in junior secondary schools; the prefecture government for classes in senior secondary schools; and the provincial government plans for colleges. Further, in order to ensure that students of the first model were admitted by universities in Han-dominated regions, since 2000, Nuosu was adopted for first model students in the national college entrance examination (CEE); and the students were independently considered for admission standards. While education in first model schools improved, Yi students of the first model would not be independently tested, until 2005, although their entrance examination continued to be in Nuosu. However, these students would have more options for tertiary education.

3   Literature Review

Three bodies of literature are identifiable for bi/trilingualism in Liangshan: language use and attitudes, Yi-Chinese bilingual education and foreign language education.

Wei (2008) surveys language use and language attitudes of the Yi people in Ganluo, a county in the northernmost part of Liangshan. It is established that Nuosu is the most important communication tool in Ganluo; but the Yi people there are eager to learn and master Chinese and parents attempt to create a favourable environment of Chinese learning for their children. Therefore, bilingualism is a common phenomenon in Ganluo. Teng (2001) adopted an ethnographic and educational approach to study stakeholders' attitudes towards bilingual education in Liangshan. He concluded that there was broad consensus on the implementation of bilingual education; but the programme had flaws in terms of both planning and implementation, such as the achievement of language proficiency and of educational goals. Therefore, a realistic and timely plan was urgently needed for bilingual education in Liangshan in the twenty-first century. Teng also conducted a historical survey of bilingual education in Liangshan. Many other authors, too, (e.g., Shi 2009; Pu 1999) have commented generally on current bilingual education models.

Furthermore, a growing number of discussions have focused on foreign language education in Liangshan. In 1999, a middle school in Xichang began an experimental teaching practice, entitled *the Yi-English bilingual programme,* in which Yi students whose competence in Chinese was low were able to learn English through the medium of Nuosu. Positive findings were reported by Xiao (2003), when he affirmed that Yi students were progressing and showed a marked improvement, in both their English learning and general school performance. Regrettably, we discovered that the programme had to be cancelled, due to significant shortages and a scarcity plus unavailability of Nuosu-English bilingual teaching materials. Aga (2007) argued for the feasibility of the implementation of trilingual education for Yi students. By examining language attitudes of Yi students towards Nuosu and English, he concluded that a great number of secondary schools in Yi-dominated regions in Liangshan were not qualified to provide trilingual education.

In addition to these research findings, the literature also demonstrates that bilingual education in Liangshan in both balanced (Model 2—see Chap. 2) and accretive (Model 1) forms has historical, social and educational foundations, but there is no foundation for English. Therefore, trilingual education should be further clarified in a Chinese context. Narrowly defined, trilingual education is the practice where three languages are taught as school subjects and meanwhile, used as the MoI (Ytsma 2001). Accordingly, language education in Liangshan cannot be viewed as a case of trilingual education, since L3, i.e., English, is only taught as a school subject. However, Cenoz and Genesee (1998) maintain that multilingual competence in several languages is not equal to monolingual competence. Schools in Liangshan where Nuosu, Chinese and English are taught only aim for additive trilingualism (Lambert 1974, cited in Bhatia and Ritchie 2005). For instance, schools adopting the first model strive for complete bilingualism in Nuosu and Chinese, whereas the goals for English education are limited to competence in listening, reading, speaking and writing. Moreover, Ytsma (2001, p. 12) elucidates on this subject, by further suggesting that besides education *through* target languages, additive trilingualism can also be achieved by education *in* target languages, which means that the languages can be taught each week as school subjects for one or more lessons. Thus, a broad definition of trilingual education is selected for the current project by including both ways of establishing trilingualism. Trilingual education in China should in fact be studied based on such premises.

4 Multi-Case Comparative Studies

4.1 *Methodology*

Three issues are addressed in the present study: (1) the roles of L1, L2 and L3 in classroom practice; (2) stakeholders' perceptions of and attitudes towards trilingual education; (3) the major influences upon the policy process of trilingual education in Liangshan. Thus, the following questions are examined:

1. What is the linguistic typology of language allocation in classrooms in different schools in different areas of Liangshan?
2. How do different stakeholders perceive the importance of L1, L2 and L3?
3. What are the major influences upon the policy-making and implementation of trilingualism and trilingual education in Liangshan?

To make the data comparable within a region and between the various regions, the counties are sampled in terms of their demographic, geographic and socio-economic typology; and the schools are chosen as representative of demography, resources and geography, which indicate one primary school in a relatively poor and remote area (minority village school); one primary school in an area that is better-off than the above school (a town school with better resources); and one secondary school for children of the minority group. Thus, the following counties and schools were selected and numbered in the format of "initials of the regions + number":

  I. Xichang, the capital, located in central Liangshan with mixed ethnic groups: 17.18 % Yi and 79.06 % Han;
      XC1.—Village Primary School, Second Model, with 1064 students and 99.81 % Yi;
      XC2.—Township Primary School, ordinary, with 2267 students and 16.10 % Yi;
      XC3.—Minority Middle School, First Model and Second Model, with 2588 students and 90 % Yi;

 II. Mianning, located in northern Liangshan, immediately adjacent to Xichang with mixed ethnic groups: 35.74 % Yi and 62.24 % Han;
      MN1.—Village Primary School, Second Model, with 443 students and 100 % Yi;
      MN2.—Township Primary School, ordinary, with 1640 students and 49 % Yi;
      MN3.—Minority Middle School, Second Model, with 1010 students and 89.80 % Yi;

III. Meigu, located in north-eastern Old Liangshan, among the poorest counties of the prefecture, with 98.47 % Yi and 1.49 % Han;
      MG1.—Village Primary School, Second Model, with 238 students and 100 % Yi;
      MG2.—Township Primary School, Second Model, with 1566 students and 90.61 % Yi;
      MG3.—Minority Middle School, Second Model, with 1330 students and 97.60 % Yi.

We conducted a 15-day field trip to the three counties in Liangshan in June 2010 to obtain the data. Four major techniques were employed in data-collection:

Questionnaire Multiple choice and Likert scale were used in the questionnaire to gather data on basic information, language learning/teaching, language use and language attitudes of the stakeholders. Three versions of questionnaires were designed for students of senior secondary, junior secondary and primary schools. Based on whether English classes were offered in primary school, two different forms of questionnaires were designed.

Interviewing For the purpose of this study, different types of informants were required. At the prefecture level, officials, administrators and researchers were the ideal informants for language policy and language attitudes. At the school level, the major source of information for language attitudes and priorities were school principals, teachers, students and parents. In this study, interviews were semi-structured and open-ended. The data were recorded by two methods: note-taking during the interviews and note-making after the interviews, based upon the tape-recording. The recordings were carried out after being granted permission by the informants.

Non-participation observation Observational data included language provision in classroom practices and language use in school and social contexts. Thus, information was collected on how policies are implemented in bi/trilingual education. Observations were recorded in the forms specially designed for the case study.

Documentary review The documents, published and unpublished, reviewed for the study comprised a broad range of materials: socio-economic communiqués, written policies, scholarly reports, textbooks, curriculum guidelines, teaching plans, students' achievement reports, school timetables, students' homework, examination papers, etc. However, certain statistics were not available since there was no official data in some of the sampled schools.

4.2   Findings

The data gathered from the present study will be compared in three dimensions (Feng and Adamson 2011): sociolinguistic and ethnolinguistic contexts, language education in schools and the attitudes of stakeholders. It is found that the three dimensions are closely related with the forms of education, their educational resources, the educational stages, the demographic makeup and the economic status.

4.2.1   Sociolinguistic and Ethnolinguistic Context

Two elements will be examined in this segment: ultimate goal of the policy and L1 vitality. They are related to the forms of education and/or the regional demographic makeup.

A.   Ultimate Goal of the Policy

Primary and secondary schools in Liangshan are categorised into two types: bilingual schools and ordinary schools. Compared with the data from Teng (2001), the absolute number of Yi students who received bilingual education in bilingual schools in Liangshan increased from 70,576 or 35.49 % in 1997, to 261,147 or 63.41 % in 2009. However, schools offering different forms of bilingual education were unevenly balanced to a significant extent. The number of Yi students choosing

the second model jumped over four-fold from 62,233 in 1997 to 254,159 in 2009, while those choosing the first model fluctuated from 6046 in 1990 to 8343 in 1997 to 6988 in 2009. An identical trend was observed in the numbers of schools, students and bilingual teachers at each educational level.

In Liangshan, bilingual schools aim for trilingualism and triliteracy, while ordinary schools aim for bilingualism and biliteracy. Schools of the second model and ordinary schools follow the national curricula for Chinese and English; those of the first model follow the national Chinese curriculum too, but they have a lower standard (Teng 2001). For Nuosu, bilingual schools follow the Yi curriculum developed by the Sichuan provincial education department. We had an opportunity to read the second model Yi curriculum; but not the Yi curriculum for the first model. Table 1 represents what the students are expected to achieve at the end of primary school and junior secondary school in each of the three languages: the characters or words known, reading speed and reading amount.

From the table, for example, we note that in their 9th year, students in bilingual schools (second model) should know how to use the 819 Yi characters, 3500 Chinese characters and 1200–1400 English words; they should be able to read materials written in Nuosu at the speed of 200 or more characters per minute. Their amount or volume of English reading should exceed 150,000 words.

Another important factor related to the ultimate goal of language education in Liangshan is the demographic makeup of the particular areas. A maximum number of bilingual schools are located in Yi-dominated areas; and although some schools are in Han-majority regions, their target students are Yi. At the county level, among the three sample regions, Meigu is Yi-dominated, Xichang is Han-dominated, and Mianning has a population with a mixed community. Therefore, each school in Meigu implements bilingual education and aims for trilingualism and triliteracy. The goals of language education in Xichang and Mianning are further determined by the demography at the village level. Since XC1 and MN1 are located in two Yi-dominated villages, their purpose is the same. Likewise, XC3 and MN3 in the present study are two ethnic minority secondary schools, and they also have similar goals. By contrast, XC2 and MN2 are in Han-majority areas, and their goals are different.

However, the reality is not always as expected. In the following section, we will show how each sample school varies in its methods of following the curricula and achieving its goals.

B.   Vitality of Nuosu

The vitality of Nuosu is primarily related to the regional demographic makeup. To measure the ethnolinguistic vitality, we adopt the approach from Giles et al. (1977), in which ethnolinguistic vitality is defined to refer to the liveliness "which makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in intercultural situations" (p. 308). It can be measured by researching three classes of factors, namely status, demography and institutional support, according to the taxonomy of

Table 1 The ultimate goal of language education in the 6th and 9th year

| | | Ultimate goal | Emphasis | Requirements | | | | | |
| | | | | No. of characters or words to be known | | | Reading | | |
				Nuosu	Chinese	English	Nuosu	Chinese	English
6th year	Ordinary schools	*Bilingualism* in Chinese & English / *Biliteracy* in Chinese & English	Chinese	NA	3000	600–700	NA	300/m	Simple reading
	Bilingual schools — First Model	*Trilingualism* in Nuosu, Chinese & English / *Triliteracy* in Nuosu, Chinese & English	Nuosu	–ᵃ	2500–3000	600–700	–ᵃ	<300/m	Simple reading
	Second Model	*Trilingualism* in Nuosu, Chinese & English / *Triliteracy* in Nuosu, Chinese & English	Chinese	819	3000	600–700	150	300/m	Simple reading
9th year	Ordinary schools	*Bilingualism* in Chinese & English / *Biliteracy* in Chinese & English	Chinese	NA	3500	1200–1400	NA	500/m	150,000
	Bilingual schools — First Model	*Trilingualism* in Nuosu, Chinese & English / *Triliteracy* in Nuosu, Chinese & English	Nuosu	–ᵃ	3000–3500	1200–1400	–ᵃ	300–500/m	150,000
	Second Model	*Trilingualism* in Nuosu, Chinese & English / *Triliteracy* in Nuosu, Chinese & English	Chinese	819	3500	1200–1400	200	500/m	150,000

[a] no official data

the structured variables (Giles et al. 1977, pp. 308–309). Thus, following the continuum of vitality (Giles et al. 1977, p. 317), objective measurement suggests that Nuosu vitality in Meigu is medium-high. Because of the larger Yi population, the status of Nuosu is higher than that in the other two regions. Nuosu vitality in Mianning and Xichang is respectively medium and low-medium. For the current project, we did not conduct any subjective measurement of Nuosu vitality in Liangshan.

4.2.2 Language Education at Schools

In this section, a comparison will be made in five categories: (1) language as school subject; (2) language as MoI; (3) language(s) of examinations; (4) school environment; and (5) human resource for trilingual education. These five topics are related to the forms of education, and they can be additionally affected by other factors such as education resources, educational stages and regional economy.

A. Languages as School Subjects

The offering of language classes is related to the forms of education and the educational resources at hand, teachers in particular.

A typical pupil in China is expected to complete 16 years of education, from primary schooling up to tertiary education. The first 9 years, namely Grade One to Grade Nine, comprise compulsory education, which includes 6 years for primary education and 3 years for junior secondary education. Grade 10 to Grade 12 is for senior secondary education. A unique feature of this stage is that since there are two streams for the college entrance examination (CEE)—arts and science—the students have the option to choose whether to study arts or science after the first semester in senior secondary education. Currently however, this practice has been discontinued in some provinces as part of the educational reforms process. But in Liangshan, the practice remains unchanged.

According to the curricula, bilingual schools in Liangshan should offer Nuosu and Chinese classes from the start of primary school, and English classes from the third year onwards; ordinary schools should offer only Chinese and English classes and similar arrangements should be made in terms of time allocation for each language. But there is a significant difference between the reality (see Table 2) and requirements.

With regard to the nine sample schools, all of them offered Chinese classes, which accounted for 77.74–91.75% of the three language classes. For primary schools, 6–11 h of Chinese classes were guaranteed each week; for secondary schools, the number ranged between 5 and 9 h. Furthermore, all the seven bilingual schools offered Nuosu classes, which accounted for 12.37–23.40% of language education. Nevertheless, the sample schools embraced different practices for Nuosu language education. Some schools continued with the Yi curriculum standard (YCS) like XC1 and MN1, while others did not follow the YCS. For instance,

Table 2 The weekly class hours of the Yi language, Chinese and English in the nine sampled schools

School	Grade 1			Grade 2			Grade 3			Grade 4			Grade 5			Grade 6		
	N	C	E	N	C	E	N	C	E	N	C	E	N	C	E	N	C	E
XC1	2	7	0	2	7	0	2	7	0	2	7	0	3	7	1	2	7	2
MN1	3	8	0	4	8	0	3	7	0	4	7	0	3	7	0	3	7	0
MG1	0	7	0	0	7	0	2	6	0	2	6	0	2	6	0	0	11	0
XC2	0	7	0	0	8	0	0	7	2	0	7	2	0	7	2	0	7	2
MN2	0	9	0	0	8	0	0	8	0	0	8	0	0	8	0	0	8	0
MG2	0	10	0	0	10	0	1	8	1	1	8	1	1	8	1	1	8	1

School	Grade 7			Grade 8			Grade 9			Grade 10			Grade 11			Grade 12		
	N	C	E	N	C	E	N	C	E	N	C	E	N	C	E	N	C	E
XC3 *Second Model*	2	8	8	2	9	7	2	8	8	2(A) 3(S)	9(A) 8(S)	7(A) 8(S)	2	8	8	2	8	8
First Model	4	8	8	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	5	7(A) 8(S)	8(A) 8(S)	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
MN3	3	9	9	3	8	8	3	8	7	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
MG3	1	6	7	1	5	6	0	6	6	0	6(A) 5(S)	6	0	5(A) 6(S)	6	1	9	10(A) 9(S)

N Nuosu, *C* Chinese, *E* English, *A* arts, *S* science

according to the timetable of MG1 and MG2, the Nuosu classes commenced later than recommended in the YCS. Moreover, the Nuosu class at MG1was actually a 1-year practice. Due to a paucity of teachers, Yi students learnt the Yi script in grade 6, before they were tested in this subject. A similar situation prevailed in MG3, where senior secondary students acquired knowledge of Nuosu in grade 12, before appearing for the CEE.

The offering of English classes in the sample schools was even more inconsistent and unreliable. All the three secondary schools offered English classes. However, English was fundamentally overlooked in primary schools. Only two primary schools followed the English curriculum standard (ECS). As for the other schools, they either started teaching the course later than the grade recommended by the ECS or did not offer any English classes at all. What transpired at XC1 is a typical case often perceived in Liangshan. The timetable of the school attested that one to two class hours of English were taught each week. But in reality, the English classes were cancelled after several years of practice. No-one in the school could confirm when the classes would restart.

Teachers are the most important educational resource in a school. The severe shortage of teachers is one of the major reasons for failure to conduct English classes in Liangshan. It was established that a higher number of English teachers worked at urban and township primary schools than at village primary schools. Similarly, more Nuosu language teachers worked at village primary schools than at urban and township primary schools. This equation suggested that English teachers were more likely to choose schools in areas with an advanced economy and Nuosu language teachers were constrained by choice to work in village schools, since numerous urban and township schools were located in Han-dominated regions.

Besides the availability of teachers, their qualification is another factor to be taken into consideration. Among the 610 teachers from the nine sampled schools, most of them (49.55%) had an Associate Degree (3 years); 44.20% of them had a Bachelor's Degree (4 years); and 6.25% of them had merely completed their secondary education (see Table 3). We noticed a significant difference between teachers' qualifications in secondary schools and those in primary schools, and verified that trilingual teachers in secondary schools possessed superior qualifications. This could be the reason why secondary schools followed the YCS and ECS relatively rigidly and many primary schools were unable to adhere to these curricula.

B.   Language(s) as Medium of Instruction

The languages used as the MoI are related to the forms of education and the regional economy. In accordance with the curricula, the second model bilingual and ordinary schools should use Chinese as the MoI from the earliest grade in all classes, except for Nuosu class; and first model bilingual schools should use Nuosu as the MoI from the earliest grade in all the classes, except the Chinese classes. But based upon our observations, several variations existed in the schools.

Table 3 The number and academic background of the teachers of Nuosu, Chinese and English in the nine sampled schools

School	N				C				E			
	Total	B	A	S	Total	B	A	S	Total	B	A	S
XC1	2	–[a]	–	–	22	–	–	–	3	2	1	0
MN1	2	0	2	0	6	0	5	1	NA	NA	NA	NA
MG1	3	–	–	–	7	–	–	–	NA	NA	NA	NA
XC2	NA	NA	NA	NA	35	7	24	4	3	1	2	0
MN2	NA	NA	NA	NA	21	19	2	0	NA	NA	NA	NA
MG2	1	0	1	0	40	2	37	1	4	1	3	0
XC3	11	4	5	2	19	14	3	2	19	12	3	4
MN3	5	2	3	0	9	6	3	0	9	5	4	0
MG3	2	2	0	0	18	12	6	0	17	10	7	0

B with Bachelor's Degree or above, *A* with Associate Degree, *S* with Secondary certificate
[a] no official data

Table 4 Linguistic typology of language allocation in classes of Nuosu, Chinese and English

	N	C	E
XC1	Mixed	Mixed	Chinese-aided
MN1	Mixed	Mixed	NA
MG1	NA	Nuosu-aided	NA
XC2	NA	Chinese as MoI	Chinese-aided
MN2	NA	Chinese as MoI	NA
MG2	Mixed	Chinese as MoI	Chinese-aided
XC3 Junior	NA	Mixed (Second Model)	Chinese-aided
XC3 Senior	Mixed (Second Model)/Nuosu as MoI (First Model)	Chinese as MoI (First Model)	Chinese-aided
MN3	Nuosu as MoI	Mixed	Chinese-aided
MG3 Junior	Chinese as MoI	Chinese as MoI	Chinese-aided
MG3 Senior	NA	Chinese as MoI	Chinese-aided

We observed the language allocation of 26 classes (40 min for each class), including seven classes for Nuosu, eleven for Chinese, and eight for English. All the classes could be categorised into three models in terms of the MoI (see Table 4). The three models for the Nuosu class were Nuosu as MoI, mixed MoI and Chinese as MoI. 28.57 % of the Nuosu language classes used Nuosu as the only MoI. 57.14 % of classes used both Chinese and Nuosu as MoI; but it was Nuosu that dominated and accounted for 76.18–99.60 % of the oral instruction. However, one teacher used Chinese for 87.36 % of his instruction.

The three models for the Chinese class were Chinese as MoI, mixed MoI and Nuosu-aided MoI. The classes (54.55 %) taught by the Han teachers used standard Chinese as the only MoI, though sometimes they did switch to Sichuan Mandarin, which was aimed at achieving a desired result through their instruction. 36.36 % of the classes used up to 99.11 % Chinese for instruction, but it was justifiable to use Nuosu for actions such as greeting friends, relatives and colleagues, questioning, one-to-one conversations, references to traditional Yi culture, and similar acts of

daily life. Both Han and Yi teachers adopted this practice. 9.09 % of Chinese classes were Nuosu-aided. For instance, the teacher at MG1 switched between Chinese and Nuosu 74 times[1]; and 59.37 % of the MoI was Chinese and 28.63 % Nuosu. It was solely the Yi teachers who utilised Nuosu-aided MoI. It was also discovered that students in urban and township schools were more competent in Chinese than those in village schools, and these students did not use Nuosu as an aid or support during classes. But students at rural schools necessarily required help with Nuosu in Chinese or other classes.

On the subject of English classes, all teachers used Chinese-aided MoI. English was used at a maximum of 69.66 % and for at least 13.75 % of the instruction. For the purpose of explaining English vocabulary, grammar and usage, an average 52.96 % of the MoI was Chinese. It was ascertained that English teachers in urban primary schools possessed more suitable meta-linguistic abilities than their counterparts in rural schools. Primary school English teachers used the target language more frequently as the MoI than teachers in secondary schools.

C.   Language(s) of Examinations

The choice of language or languages used in examinations is influenced or determined by the forms of education. Ordinary schools used Chinese exclusively as the language for examinations. The second model bilingual schools used Chinese for every subject except Nuosu, whereas the first model bilingual schools used Nuosu for every subject except Chinese.

The language of examinations for first model bilingual schools was more complex. The Chinese and Nuosu examination papers were monolingual and had to be answered in the target language, and the examination papers for the other subjects were bilingual in Nuosu and Chinese. The students could answer questions in either the Chinese or Nuosu.

D.   School Environment

"School environment" signifies on-campus language use, including talks, wall newspapers, slogans, and so on. This variable was firstly related to the demographic makeup of the school, and subsequently, to the forms of education.

It was noted that if the majority of students on campus were Yi, then Nuosu was more frequently used for all school activities and functions. All the nine sample schools had a varying proportion of Yi students. Thus, their language use was, to a certain extent, bilingual. Chinese was the dominant language for formal domains, such as classroom instruction or meetings. Additionally, Nuosu was also used on campus, but typically for informal domains. The questionnaire confirmed that, in

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[1] One switch is counted when the speaker uses one language to talk minimally for a time length of two seconds.

Table 5 Number of bilingual teachers in 2009

Total	Model 1			Model 2		
	Primary school	Junior secondary school	Senior secondary school	Primary school	Junior secondary school	Senior secondary school
1564	167	73	60	1039	195	30

urban and township primary schools, Yi students use much less Nuosu (23.21%) than students in village schools (85.82%). 76.78% of on-campus talks in the three secondary schools, were conducted in Nuosu.

Moreover, English was also employed on campus, especially for classroom wall newspapers. In most schools, the wall newspaper was written customarily in Chinese; the topics ranged from Chinese proverbs and an introduction to common sense knowledge to guidelines on fire prevention. However, in some schools, the newspapers were trilingually written. We refer to one wall newspaper at XC1 as an example. From left to right, we perceived firstly a demonstration in Chinese of a mathematics problem, and then a passage in Nuosu about Yi education. This was followed by a passage in Chinese about the fire torch festival, which is a very significant Yi festival, and was succeeded by an English passage entitled "Mr. Tin is a short and fat man", and the wall newspaper finally concluded with several Chinese proverbs.

Moreover, we were unable to locate any wall newspapers and slogans in Nuosu at ordinary schools. This could be attributed to the reason that they sought to establish their "ordinary" identity very evidently and obviously.

E.   Human Resources for Trilingual Education

We identified that among the 610 teachers from the nine sample schools, the Nuosu language teachers all had Yi ethnicity. 63.52% of the Chinese teachers were Han and 31.76% of Chinese teachers were Yi. The Han constituted 76.37% of the English teachers and a mere 10.91% of English teachers were Yi. Most of the teachers were monolingual in Chinese. Teachers of Yi nationality tended to be bilingual and two or three English teachers were, in fact, trilingual. The distribution of teachers in schools was related primarily to the forms of education.

Teachers in ordinary schools were mostly monolingual, though a few of them were bilingual. At XC2 and MN2, we identified a few Chinese teachers of Yi nationality. However, we were unable to find an appropriate or favourable occasion to investigate their language competence. Nine Model 1 and 102 Model 2 bilingual secondary schools promoted education in the prefecture. Looking at Table 5, we see that Model 1 secondary schools had more bilingual Nuosu-Chinese teachers than Model 2 secondary schools, given the total number of schools.

It was determined that in bilingual schools, even though some of the teachers were monolingual Chinese speakers, they did acquire minimal essential competence in Nuosu for teaching. A former English teacher at XC1 discontinued teaching

English in 2007. In order to replicate for us one of her English classes, she demonstrated for one class hour, the method by which she taught English to her students. During the course of instruction, she constantly used Yi words such as "ax yi wox" (children) and "ngex w" (right?), to confirm that the students understood what she was explaining to them. Several teachers with trilingual competence taught in secondary schools, and all of them were Yi and teachers of English.

4.2.3   Attitudes of Stakeholders

Four types of informants participated in the interviews or/and filled in the questionnaire; they were policy makers, teachers, parents and students. Different stakeholders assumed different attitudes toward trilingual education (see Table 6). A remarkable and striking feature was that as the hierarchy descended, perceptions became increasingly more diverse. Moreover, the attitudes of stakeholders were related to the forms of education, the educational stages and economic status.

A.   Policy Makers

From the perspective of policy makers at the prefecture and county levels, bilingual schools should aim to establish trilingualism and triliteracy. But different forms of education have different emphases. In our interviews, policy makers reasoned that the three languages were indeed important, but not equally. Chinese was considered the most important for almost every school in the prefecture, except for first model bilingual schools, due to its role as the lingua franca across the country. Policy makers argued that Nuosu and English should be placed on an equal footing of secondary importance. Nuosu should be inherited and preserved and English was the bridge that connected China with the outside world. Therefore, the policy makers responded actively and enthusiastically to bilingual education requirements in Nuosu and Chinese. For instance, in each county, bilingual education supervisors were appointed to guide and supervise bilingual education at schools within their jurisdiction. One policy maker elaborated upon his attitudes toward bilingual education:

> I could not speak any Chinese before Grade One in primary school. When I was in Grade Three, I could barely communicate in Chinese, and I could speak fluent Chinese when I was in Grade Five. But till now, I have to think in Nuosu before using Chinese expressions. If students could receive bilingual education from primary school, the obstacle might be overcome….It was Nuosu that significantly helped improve the literacy of the Yi people. And I was one of them; without the language, I could not go to the Southwest University for Nationalities[2]. Although the development of Nuosu is not as good as Korean, Tibetan and Uyghur, it is not near the edge of extinction; developing the language is still what we need to do now….

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[2] Southwest University for Nationalities: founded in 1951, the university is located in Chengdu, the capital city of Sichuan province. Its student population is largely composed of ethnic minorities, but it has recently opened up to Han Chinese and foreigners as well.

Table 6 Language attitudes of stakeholders

Policy makers

	C>N=E
Primary	100 %
Junior secondary	100 %
Senior secondary	100 %

School principals

	C>N>E	C>E>N	C=N>E	C=N=E	C=E>N
Primary	28.57 %	42.86 %	28.57 %	0.00 %	0.00 %
Junior secondary	20.00 %	40.00 %	0.00 %	20.00 %	20.00 %
Senior secondary	0.00 %	25.00 %	0.00 %	25.00 %	50.00 %

Teachers

	C>N>E	C>E>N	C=E>N	N>C>E	E>C>N
Primary	92.31 %	0.00 %	0.00 %	7.69 %	0.00 %
Junior secondary	20.00 %	60.00 %	10.00 %	10.00 %	0.00 %
Senior secondary	0.00 %	57.14 %	14.29 %	0.00 %	28.57 %

Parents

	C>N>E	C>E>N	C=N>E	C=N=E	C>N=E	N>E>H	E>C>N
Primary	30.77 %	15.38 %	0.00 %	15.38 %	23.08 %	7.69 %	7.69 %
Junior secondary	–[a]	–	–	–	–	–	–
Senior secondary	50.00 %	0.00 %	50.00 %	0.00 %	0.00 %	0.00 %	0.00 %

Students

	C>N>E	C>E>N	C=N>E	C=E>N	N>C>E	C=N=E	N>E>C	E>C>N	E>C=N
Primary	40.00 %	20.00 %	5.00 %	5.00 %	10.00 %	0.00 %	5.00 %	10.00 %	5.00 %
Junior secondary	11.11 %	33.33 %	0.00 %	11.11 %	0.00 %	22.22 %	0.00 %	22.22 %	0.00 %
Senior secondary	0.00 %	20.00 %	0.00 %	0.00 %	0.00 %	20.00 %	0.00 %	60.00 %	0.00 %

> more important than, = equally important, *C* Chinese, *E* English, *N* Nuosu

[a] – no data

It appeared that policy makers were not interested in promoting English education in primary schools. Most of them were progressive and unbiased but adopted a laissez-faire attitude. However, when it came to secondary schools, their attitudes were totally at variance with their attitudes to primary schools. Since English was deemed an important subject for the CEE, they were very proactive in promoting trilingual education in bilingual schools.

B.   Teachers

This section examines the attitudes of the second type of informants, i.e., the teachers, including school principals. They implement policies at the school level and are responsible for enforcing the policies too.

We have to admit that school principals are policy makers to a certain extent, for they select the language which should be given more importance and, in turn, the language which can be safely discounted. Generally, the understanding and comprehension of different school principals differ with respect to the same policy, and in so doing, they may all follow different practices. For example, 49 % of the students at MN2 were Yi; but the school principal was not convinced about the importance of Nuosu, and consequently, no Nuosu classes were organised for the students.

Primarily, the attitude of the school principals and teachers is related to the forms of education and educational stages. Based upon our observations, school principals as well as teachers were extremely proactive in promoting Chinese education. In fact, teaching Chinese appeared to be the sole and most important concern of ordinary schools. In order to learn Chinese more competently, the students at XC2, for example, participated in a Chinese poem recitation performance every 2 weeks as part of the school's "Scholarly Campus" event. The results from our questionnaire also suggested that rural teachers attached greater importance to Chinese, more so than urban and township teachers, probably because of weaker competence demonstrated by students in Chinese.

A few of the bilingual schools were active in responding to bilingual education needs in Nuosu, though not with the same fervent intensity as displayed for Chinese education. To recount an example, the school principal and teachers at XC1 reflected that the Nuosu class was very significant and devoted considerable attention to the class. The teachers of Nuosu language at XC1 were rewarded for teaching Nuosu effectively and the Han teachers were actually encouraged to learn Nuosu. In another case, the teachers at MN1 assumed a permissive and indifferent attitude toward the Nuosu class and toward competence of students in Nuosu. This was the most commonly discernible attitude of teachers to Nuosu education among the six sample primary schools.

English was, to a large extent, overlooked and discounted in primary schools. But in secondary schools, it assumed a role of equal importance and prominence with Chinese because of its function in the CEE. Therefore, teachers were proactive in promoting trilingual education in secondary schools. At this juncture, we must elaborate on specific practices in selected schools connected with the three

languages. We refer to certain cases, such as the Chinese language teachers at XC2, who expected their students to maintain a diary and use the Chinese books in the school reading room to their fullest advantage; to help the students understand western culture, the English teachers at MN3 held an annual Christmas party; Nuosu language teachers at MN3 replaced some complicated and difficult Nuosu essays in textbooks with folk literature which was easily understood and accepted by the students. The teachers at XC1 helped Yi students to perform Nuosu dramas and songs, and watch Nuosu movies; XC3 held Nuosu speech contests and traditional cultural exhibitions, aimed at promoting the language.

C.   Parents and Students

The third and fourth types of informants were parents and students. A majority of them were in agreement about the importance and meaning attached to the three languages, but differed in their opinions as to the extent and degree of that significance. Secondary school students regarded English as the most important language to learn and Nuosu the least important. In primary schools, Chinese was considered more important than English and Nuosu. Moreover, rural students dedicated more time and attention to learning Chinese and Nuosu; English was regarded as markedly important by their urban and township counterparts. A similar stance was noticed in the attitudes displayed by parents to trilingual education. Our interviews revealed that while students were keen to achieve trilingual proficiency, their parents were equally proactive and enthusiastic in their support of trilingual education.

To summarise, the key factors related to the three dimensions discussed above are the form of education, followed by the demographic makeup of the particular region. It was an unpredicted finding that the influence of economic status was not strong. In view of the interdependent relationships among each factor, the roles of less important factors cannot be overlooked. Up to this point, the first two research questions have been answered. In order to address the third question, a unique characteristic of trilingual education in Liangshan should be identified.

5   Dilemmas in Trilingualism and Trilingual Education in Liangshan

According to Feng and Sunuodula (2009), three indigenous minority groups are representative of minority groups in China, in terms of geographical location and degree of integration with the Han. They are the Uyghur in Xinjiang, the Yi in Sichuan and the Zhuang in Guangxi. They are defined by Zhou (2000, 2001) respectively as follows:

Type 1 community: those with writing systems of historically broad usage;
Type 2 community: those with writing systems of historically limited usage; and
Type 3 community: those without functional writing systems.

Therefore, minority groups belonging to Type 1 and Type 3 communities find it easier to reach an agreement on exactly how to implement language policy or choose their language priority. But minority groups of Type 2 community, like the Yi in Sichuan, do not have a well-defined and distinct path to follow. Different people have a different, or even conflicting, understanding of the language policy, thereby reaching diverse language choices. The dilemma commonly confronting most people is a choice, primarily between the Chinese and Nuosu.

A typical example is a Yi parent expressing his views about his child's choice of schooling. The parent gained his Bachelor's degree from the Southwest University for Nationalities. He was the principal of a remote village primary school. His child attended MN2, where no Nuosu classes were offered. When he was questioned about his child's Nuosu proficiency, he responded:

> There is no difficulty for my child to speak Nuosu, but it is still necessary for my child to learn Nuosu at school, because the instruction at home is not systematic … and attending the present school is not an ideal choice. But I have no better choice. The child needs to take the examinations [to go to higher schools] …. My primary school has Nuosu classes; but it is too far away, I didn't send my child there.

The parent wanted his child to attend a school where Nuosu classes were offered. But if these particular schools were not available in regions with more improved educational resources, the child was compelled to attend more suitable schools, at the expense of the ethnic language. Therefore, three dilemmas are very obviously noticeable here: (1) the lack of coherence between the personal aspirations of the Yi people and the actual reality; (2) the tension between the spread of Putonghua and the survival of the minority language; and (3) balancing the three languages in the light of the increased importance ascribed to English.

5.1 Personal Aspirations Versus Reality

Out of the 796 Yi students in the present study, 70.48 % of them assumed a positive attitude towards their Yi identity; 71.86 % of these students reflected that the Yi people must be able to speak their own language; and 61.93 % of them could speak Nuosu fluently. However, proceeding from our observations and interviews, hardly any students, except students of the first model, were capable of reading and writing with the Yi script. The Nuosu language teacher at MG2 declared: "Only one or two in a class of about 50 students can write and read without much difficulty in the Yi script. The rest of them can barely follow the class."

Disproportionate opportunities in the field of education and later, in finding an appropriate job and career were the major reasons to justify the inadequacy and deficiency of Yi students, and their lack of Nuosu literacy; these were also the principal reasons for this dilemma. Among the 562 primary schools in Xichang, Mianning and Meigu, 50.36 % of them were Yi-majority schools. However, 89.29 % of the urban and township primary schools were Han-majority schools, which, in turn, implied that most primary schools with superior and therefore, preferred educational facilities were Han-majority schools and offered no Nuosu language classes.

In the case of higher education schools, only 19.30% of secondary schools in the three counties were Yi-majority schools, and a greater number of secondary schools did not offer Nuosu language classes.

Furthermore, Yi people believed that learning Chinese from the outset could transform the process of learning and education, making it more advantageous and accessible. Attending secondary school was a matter of priority and acquired inordinate importance on the agenda of Chinese people. All the subjects, except English, for the vital entrance examinations in China were in Chinese; and sitting for the examinations in Chinese denoted obtaining an equal chance for abundant opportunities in future education. For instance, Yi students of the first model who took the examinations in the Nuosu language were only permitted to choose limited majors in several colleges; on the other hand, Yi students who sat for the Chinese examinations could choose any major in any college across the country. The implementation of preferential policies, such as lower standards for admission for all minority students in China, made Yi students even more competitive than the Han students. Therefore, 98.3%, or 404,864, of Yi students in Liangshan favoured taking secondary school examinations in Chinese. When Yi students entered college, the MoI was Chinese; those with low Chinese proficiency, such as students of the first model, were bound to be at a noticeable disadvantage. Thus, we concluded that despite the fact that the Yi people had strong ethnic identity and the personal will to learn Nuosu, they were obliged to take reality into consideration.

Upon completing their schooling, the Yi people discovered that nearly all jobs required adequate proficiency in Chinese, and jobs involving the use of Chinese only were more profitable and even easier—and less demanding—than those necessitating the use of Nuosu. We refer here to the Nuosu language teacher at MG3 as an example. He was the only teacher of Nuosu for twenty classes of students at MG3. He taught one class hour of Nuosu language for each class every week, which was acutely insufficient to achieve the aims of language learning. The teacher experienced a sense of utter frustration at the state of affairs in the school, and lost his motivation for teaching.

It must also be emphasised that teachers for first model students were expected to use the Nuosu language and script to teach every subject except Chinese and English. Thus, besides knowing the Nuosu language, teachers were supposed to have specialised knowledge of subjects like Mathematics, Chemistry and Physics. Consequently, teachers who only possessed knowledge of the Nuosu language underwent further training in specified subjects. But the rewards were not commensurate with their increased efforts and work-load. A faculty member from Xichang College commented on the lack of bilingual teachers:

> Our college started to enrol Yi students in the Nuosu-Chinese bilingual programme in 1989…. At least 1400 students have graduated as registered Nuosu-Chinese bilingual teachers…. However, only half of them continue to work as teachers.

This statement is supported by the results from the questionnaire, which clearly indicated that only half of the Yi students in the nine sampled schools thought that learning Nuosu could benefit them to gain employment.

5.2 Propagation of Putonghua and the Survival of Nuosu

In attempting to trace the roots of the personal dilemma from a social context, a separate dilemma emerges for the community in Liangshan from the viewpoint of the minority language policy. Blachford (2004) surveys historically the reform of the Uyghur and Kazakh written languages and the spread of Putonghua in Xinjiang; an identical paradigm can explain the status of Nuosu in Liangshan from 1949 to the present day. Blachford (1999, 2004) elucidates that the first decade after the founding of the PRC in 1949 witnessed total development of the general minority language policy and an active use of minority languages. Later, in view of the limited use of the traditional Yi written form, the government assisted the Yi minorities to reform their written language.

However, two political campaigns, from 1958 to 1977, i.e., the Great Leap Forward[3] and the Cultural Revolution[4], recalibrated the policy away from encouraging diversity to assimilation. The reformed writing system was banned. The formerly optional Chinese was the only official language in every social domain. But the majority of the Yi people in that period could communicate exclusively in Nuosu. Teng (2001) affirmed that all the textbooks at that time were in Chinese; hence, numerous schools had only three grades, because the students dropped out before Grade Four.

The Yi people were reluctant about replacing their language with Chinese or even the Latin-based written Yi. Thus, they developed their own written language, based on the traditional Yi script. Admittedly, this bottom-up reform was a success; but Putonghua was undoubtedly the language which spread and developed during the "turmoil" for almost 20 years, and subsequently, many Yi people learnt Putonghua.

Two years after the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, Deng Xiaoping acquired power. The government agenda changed from political movement to economic development. However, a major debate ensued over minority language policy. Finally, a compromise was reached, which ended the controversy between the pro-Putonghua and pro-minority groups. A bilingual policy prevailed in minority regions. However it also provided the grounds for the spread of Putonghua among the minorities. In reality, since 1958, along with the reform of the Yi writing system, the policy of disseminating Chinese was carried out and accomplished "with more central support, more political rightness, more openness and with greater enthusiasm" (Blachford 2004, p. 112).

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[3] The Great Leap Forward: an economic and social campaign of the Communist Party of China, reflected in planning decisions from 1958 to 1961, which aimed to use China's vast population to rapidly transform the country from an agrarian economy into a modern communist society through the process of agriculturalisation, industrialisation, and collectivisation. However, this campaign turned out to be the prelude to a series of economic disasters.

[4] The Cultural Revolution: a social movement that took place in the People's Republic of China from 1966 through to 1976. It was designed to further cement socialism in the country by eliminating capitalist elements from Chinese society. This process involved major changes to the political, economic and social landscapes of China. Social norms largely evaporated and previously established political institutions disintegrated at all levels of government.

5.3   Dilemma over English Classes

Unlike Nuosu, which students learn as a projection of their ethnic identity, the English language is purely learnt as a subject for examinations. The reason that the MoI in all English classes is Chinese-aided (see Table 4) can be ascribed to the above statement, for using Chinese is the most efficient approach towards enhancing the students' understanding of grammar and other language details, within a limited scope of time.

The controversy with reference to English is whether the course should be offered in primary schools. Although all school principals and teachers of primary schools in the present study concurred unanimously that English should be taught as a school subject, only half of the six sample primary schools actually conducted English classes. Many schools in Liangshan followed a system whereby secondary schools started English teaching afresh, irrespective of whether or not students had graduated from a primary school with English classes. If this was indeed the prevalent system, as corroborated by several primary school principals, there was no essential necessity for students to learn English in primary schools, especially when many village schools lacked a supply of credible English teachers. Therefore, the requirement in the new curriculum for English is not obligatory, and its implementation is totally decided based upon the acumen and understanding of the concerned school principals. What is more, a prejudice appears to have developed against primary school English education, which is regarded as time-consuming and laborious but inefficient.

6   Discussion

In this section, two perspectives will be adopted from policy analysis and functional linguistics to explain the above-mentioned dilemmas and address the third research question.

6.1   The Non-Autonomy of the Autonomous Prefecture

Chinese law is one of the oldest legal traditions in the world, where ruling through the superior power, exercised by an individual or a group, has long been the convention. That particular individual or group decides and implements the ideologies and policies. Blachford (1999, pp. 102–122) identifies the communist power structure and interplay among each of the organisations, at various policy levels. She concludes that the central-local relationship is neither complete central dominance nor comprehensive regional autonomy. Nevertheless, the balance of interdependence appears to be largely in favour of the centre.

In the case of Liangshan, its superior actors are the national and provincial government organs. Despite inter-agency relationships, they exert stronger influences on Liangshan than the reverse impacts. Therefore, the policy relating to Nuosu as educational outcomes initiated by Liangshan Prefecture cannot be implemented because of conflicting policies at the national and provincial levels. According to an official from the Language Commission of Liangshan Autonomous Prefecture[5], in reality, the party and government bodies at each administrative level in Liangshan urgently require Nuosu-Chinese bilingual civil servants. For example, the use of Nuosu on a daily basis to deal with legal cases is compulsory in people's courts. Therefore, an additional examination in Nuosu should be conducted for these employees, as stipulated in the '*Regulations with Regard to Spoken and Written Languages in Liangshan Autonomous Prefecture*'. The Sichuan Provincial Department of Personnel, which is in charge of holding the examination and assigning the qualified examinees to their posts contends that there should be an additional test of Nuosu; however, the leaders reason that such an examination is unjustifiable for qualified Chinese monolingual examinees, as they would be placed at a disadvantage. Therefore, learning Nuosu alone is not a stipulation to guarantee that bilingual examinees have a strong desire to compete and succeed; and departments that have to recruit bilingual staff face difficulties and obstacles in accomplishing this task.

A further setback to Nuosu language education, to the first model in particular, is that Nuosu is replaceable in the CEE. It is as an accepted practice that Model 1 students answer examination questions in Chinese. Therefore, this practice undermines the aims of the first model. Consequently, motivation levels for first model students are low, when it comes to learning Nuosu, and they favour the more convenient language, Chinese.

6.2 Language Functions: Efficiency vs. Equity

Halliday (1994) categorises the three metafunctions of language as ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function. The tension between the first two metafunctions appears to be the key reason for the afore-mentioned dilemmas. In a multilingual context, people on the one hand tend to choose the most accessible language(s) to construe their experiences of the world for the sake of efficiency; and on the other hand, they are inclined to communicate in the language(s) which best indicates their ethnic identity for the sake of equity. Here, *efficiency* refers to the extent to which time or effort is best used for intended communication, and *equity* connotes the equal right for the co-existence of cultural identities involved

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[5] The Language Commission of Liangshan Autonomous Prefecture: a government body which makes the policy of language use at the prefecture level and supervises its implementation, including implementation of Chinese and other minority languages within its jurisdiction. It also sets and implements the standards of language use, both spoken and written. In practice, its main job is to facilitate the spread of standard Chinese.

in intra- and inter-ethnic communication. When these two communicative ends are in contradiction, bilingual or multilingual speakers more often than not experience difficulty in language choice. They have to seek a balance between the ideational function and the interpersonal function, or between efficiency in communication and equity in ethnic identity. One important technique of displaying that equity is to use the ethnic language.

In Liangshan, the Yi people have to choose one language as an efficient tool of communication and meanwhile, decipher and determine their ethnic or cultural identities. It has been observed that efficiency outweighs equity in the communication process. Yi students purely use Nuosu for the purpose of intra-ethnic communication; in inter-ethnic communication, they use Chinese to communicate with Han students at the cost of equity in the Yi identity. In terms of different domains, 67.65 % of Yi students exclusively or primarily used Nuosu at home. In educational domains, Chinese was considered a more efficient language for examinations. For socio-economic activities, the dominant communicational language, both spoken and written, was also Chinese. The minimum use of Nuosu in the educational and socio-economic domains indicates the sacrifice of the equity in ethnic identification. Therefore, the equal status of Nuosu, a significant symbol of ethnic identity, cannot be guaranteed by law; it is determined by efficiency in real language use.

Additionally, people from villages use Nuosu for approximately 83.64 % of all their communication; but the corresponding percentage is 11.49 % for people from towns within the same county. Thus, it is noteworthy that the more developed the regional economy, the smaller the number of Yi people who use Nuosu. As the economy further develops and expands within the prefecture, people will be confronted by a greater dilemma, in the absence of suitable measures.

Based on the discussion, the third research question has already been answered. We have identified two major influences upon policy-making and the implementation of trilingualism and trilingual education in Liangshan. Firstly, unsuccessful coordination between the upper and lower policy bodies of government is the main reason which leads to the status quo. Although the lower policy bodies formulate the process of trilingual education, it is the upper ones that determine the contradictory or impracticable outcomes. Secondly, the legally equal status of Nuosu and Chinese cannot be realised, because Chinese is in greater demand in more domains. The Yi people have relatively fewer possibilities to use Nuosu as a symbol of maintaining the equity in ethnic identity.

7   Conclusions and Implications

The present study has surveyed the status quo of trilingualism and trilingual education in Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan and provided comparative studies in three dimensions. We have also identified the dilemma faced by the Yi people in trilingual education. The most important findings are as follows:

1. There is a significant gap between the curricula and the practice, in Nuosu and English education in Liangshan.
2. Chinese is more favoured in Liangshan than Nuosu and English, for it is a more efficient language of communication in important domains.
3. The Yi people have strong ethnic identity but are compelled to use Chinese, for they face a series of dilemmas arising from their history as well as from reality.

Based on the findings, three sets of implications emerge in three related fields: language planning, language use and language education.

Since the Chinese language meets social needs and helps to obtain many benefits, it is widely recognised and accepted by the minority people in Liangshan. Nuosu and English education have scope for improvement, if people acknowledge and understand the following.

In language planning:

1. In the prevalent Chinese power structure, to maintain the minority language, policy makers must realise the importance of cultural diversity and multilingualism.
2. The policy enforced by superior administrative levels should ensure that the end never contradicts the process; the policy at each level should be consistent.

In language use:

1. Measures should be taken to realise the legal equality of Nuosu in real situations; Nuosu should be recognised as more efficient than Chinese in certain social domains.
2. The use of Nuosu, both spoken and written, should be mandatory in some important domains.

In language education:

1. Bilingual education alone cannot maintain the minority language; other socioeconomic, historical and political factors correspondingly have a role to play in this aspect.
2. Bilingual education can be achieved only if teachers are comprehensively and adequately trained, the teaching material sufficiently compiled and sufficient class hours ensured.
3. Education, including the teaching and learning processes and examinations for the first model must be enlarged, standardised and strictly enforced, in accordance with its original purpose.
4. English education between primary and secondary schooling must be efficiently linked, to ensure that it is no longer a burden for primary schools, which at present have no educational resources or intentions to offer English classes.
5. The existing gap between rural and urban schools should be reduced as far as possible.

Despite the unique features of trilingualism and trilingual education in Liangshan, it has many common aspects with other minority groups in China. The knowledge acquired from this study may shed significant light on trilingualism and trilingual

education across the country, or even in other parts of the world. In the process of follow-up studies, an important concern to be addressed is the establishment of an improved model of trilingual education for minority students in particular regions. Accordingly, detailed research on each factor of the above-discussed three dimensions, in addition to other influences such as linguistic distance and recency in language acquisition should be examined.

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