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The Chinese as an Emerging Linguistic Resource in the Education Sector of Pakistan

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Abstract: Investment in a new language restructures the prevailing ideologies through its potential as an alternative resource in the future linguistic market. This resource modifies the learners' existing identities with the imagined identities of this new resource. This study aims to explore how learning Chinese language evolved as an investment in the education sector of Pakistan to construct an alternative identity in the future linguistic market. Under thematic analysis, in-depth interviews of the stakeholders investing themselves at various levels in promoting, learning, and teaching Chinese were analyzed with power discourse as the theoretical framework. Darvin and Norton's (2015) model of investment was used as analysis model to investigate how investing learners in Chinese is reshaping their current identities in a structured habitus of shifting ideologies. The findings show a corresponding relationship of Chinese with a powerful economy, innovative technologies, and higher education. The major themes focus on the Chinese as an alternative resource with better employment potential in the future job market. This serves as a better alternative linguistic resource to improve the learners' social and economic capital. This is where learners of this language invest themselves at different levels of the education sector in Pakistan to re-envision their future identities.

Introduction

Chinese language has found an honorable reception in the education sector of Pakistan. The schools, vocational institutes, and university departments have focused on the promotion of this language as a new and emerging linguistic resource where its learners have increased growingly in the last few years. With its foundation in higher education institutions, Chinese has been projected as a skill enabling its learners to create a better identity as a linguistic resource in the future market. During the last decade, consent has been built in the Pakistani community to make their future identity (their imagined identity) in Chinese language on the basis of its potential strength in the global market. Therefore, investing in learning this

language, particularly in the context of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), is mostly due to an ideological shift in the supremacy of market forces. Previous research focuses on the language of the market as the language of power as a practical resource serving as a symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991; Cavanaugh, 2018; Muth, 2017; Muth & Del Percio, 2018; Pavlenko, 2015; Tavares, 2017). It becomes a source of power in the state of affairs for working places (Huebner, 2016; Seidhofer, 2021; Yao & Gruba, 2022). Investing in the language of the market under the influences of superior forces (Rabbidge & Zaheeb, 2022) leads to a subtle increase in people's social and economic capital (Norton, 2013, 2015; Rahman, 2011). Based on the

commodification of language, investing in learning a language is grounded in sharing power in communication (Del Percio, 2015; Heller & Duchêne, 2016; Heller et al., 2014). Significantly, the bottom-line role in shifting the international power game is exercised through the language of power (Foucault, 1995, 2007; Van Dijk, 1997, 1998, 2008).

In the last few years, the rapid spread of Chinese language received the focus of researchers. It has been explored as an international language for negotiating ideologies and identities (Sharma, 2018). Also, China's advancement in innovative technology created a worldwide ideological shift to mold the language policies of other countries in favor of learning Chinese (Bianco et al., 2009; Block et al., 2014; Darvin & Norton, 2015; Duchêne & Heller, 2012). This is where Chinese language finds support and reinforcement for its status as a soft-power strategy (Ding & Saunders, 2006; Hua & Li, 2014). However, there has been little interest in exploring the role of Chinese language in the CPEC context. A few studies (including Asif et al., 2019; Butt & Butt, 2015; Niazi, 2019; Syed & Tariq, 2018; Zafar et al., 2017) were conducted with a limited angle on the utility of Chinese as a language of communication, business, and cultural exchange. The present study investigates the promotion of Chinese language as an emerging linguistic resource in Pakistan where learners invest their energies to develop their skills in this language as a new identity in the future linguistic market. This tendency is found in schools, vocational centers, language centers, and departments at universities. By using Darvin and Norton's (2015) model of investment, this study finds out how investing learners in this language is shifting their present identities (attached to English as the existing language of the market) into the (future) imagined identities, reorienting their ideologies in the context of the changing economic canvas of this region.

Language as a Market-based Skill

A language converts into a symbolic capital the moment it drives people with the motive to invest themselves in it. The fast-growing post-globalized world has influenced people to willingly invest in a new language. The dominant discourses of the market-value a language possesses mold and reshape public opinion altogether. Moreover, investing in such a language is mostly subject to the financial support of an economically stronger country. This becomes a motivating factor for people to improve their economic and social capital. In this way, they are transformed into language entrepreneurs (Rabbidge & Zaheeb, 2022). The faster growth of Chinese is seen as an outcome of the latest chapter of economic globalization and China's dominant position in it (Sharma, 2018). In the context of the present study, Chinese language is not only supported and promoted by powerful China but is also projected as the new emerging language of the market. This language has, therefore, made an easy way to become part of the education system in Pakistan taught not only at the grassroots level but also at higher education institutes.

Investing in a Language: An Ideological Shift in Identity

Language serves as a social system where identities and people's understanding of their relationships are negotiated. These relationships are structured across time and space with an understanding of possibilities for the future (Norton, 2013). Though language as linguistic capital remains mostly invisible but investing in this capital is made from the larger perspective of imagined identities and imagined communities (Norton, 2013, 2015). These imagined identities belong to the future world the learners re-envision, i.e. how things are and how they want them to be (Darvin & Norton, 2015). If people invest in a particular language of the market, they do so with the belief that they will be able to acquire *symbolic resources* (such as language and

education) and *material resources* (such as properties and money), increasing the value of their social power (Bourdieu, 1991; Norton, 2013).

Ideologies are grown in discourses of the individuals (Han, 2019). They become the dominant ways of thinking, constructed and reproduced through hegemonic practices and consent. Owing to the ever-changing communicative landscape, Darvin and Norton (2015) place investment at the intersection of identity, capital, and ideology in their model of investment (p. 42). This intersection provides an opening to how structures of power work for language learners to exercise this capital.

Investing in learning Chinese, particularly in the CPEC context, shows mostly a similar ideology as this language has been projected as a soft skill to develop a better identity in the future linguistic market. Moreover, more people look forward to making their future identity (i.e. imagined future/imagined identity) in this language. Students in their academics decide on investing in areas that are potentially capable of increasing their market value in their current as well as imagined communities (Chang, 2011). Speaking in these terms, learners of Chinese language in Pakistan invest themselves in it on the basis of their future identities. In turn, these identities are attached to the higher employability ratio the Chinese currently possess in the economic landscape of the region where the rise of China as a global power influence valuing and reshaping of language ideologies (Bianco et al., 2009; Block et al., 2014; Darvin & Norton, 2015; Duchêne & Heller, 2012). The rapid expansion of Chinese as an international language of the market shows negotiating ideologies and identities as a soft-power exercise of an emerging economic power. Similar to the existing market power of English, Chinese is rising rapidly as a capital people learn for achieving certain objectives, such as employment, business, higher education, and a better social status (Vavrus, 2002).

Commodification of Language

The value of a language depends on its market value which makes it a commodity. The significant placement of a language as a capital in the global economy has widened the ways people think about its utility. With more firm links to political economy, languages themselves (e.g. English, Chinese) become commodities with value on the global market (Del Percio, 2015; Heller & Duchêne, 2016; Holborow, 2018). It is not only a skill but a flexible economic resource (De Costa et al., 2021; Heller, 2010) that depends upon communicative resources and their possible economic value in the conditions in which potential “commodity values are negotiated, decided upon, and made possible” (Muth & Del Percio, 2018, p. 130). These conditions, in turn, become commodified landscapes for the language in question (Tavares, 2017). In a sense, this commodification impacts the “production, distribution, and attribution of value to linguistic resources” (Heller, 2010, p.358). Subsequently, this impact leads to the establishment of state-run educational institutes, organizations, and language centers to serve their interests on different platforms.

This process of marketization reinforced rivalry over linguistic resources. One such scenario shows English with some other languages, particularly Chinese, as central to entering global markets. When new forms of linguistic resources emerge, individuals and states reshuffle their ideological stands in favor of the existing as well as the new linguistic conditions (Heller, 2010). The predictable response covers both the safety of the prevailing market and the emerging ones. On these grounds, Pakistan is applying both strategies. On the one hand, it is trying to function in the existing market (with English as the linguistic resource), while on the other hand looking to attain a better place in the emerging markets, particularly the CPEC (with the Chinese as the potentially major linguistic resource). In the existing situation of the region, China stands as a worldwide

economic giant. Against this background, Chinese is perceived as a better linguistic capital and a power resource possessing a higher potential for employability. Hence, this new linguistic resource found a ready reception in the education sector of Pakistan where the number of its learners has been rapidly increasing at schools, universities, and language departments.

Language as a Source of Power

Language operates in certain boundaries. These boundaries make explicit circles of power relations. These relations imply each other in expert discourses (Fairclough, 1992, 2001, 2006, 2018; Foucault, 1995; McKay, 2013) and are exercised through language (Van Dijk, 1997, 1998, 2008). As such, language influences as well as reflects the way we think (Culbertson, 2016; Patrao, 2018). In this process, when a language becomes dominant, it converts into a power-tool. As a result, its market-value increases as it tends to provide more advantages based on its employability potential. In the context of the CPEC, the Chinese is growing dominant with its increased market-value. It provides relatively more opportunities to the youth in business, higher education, and employability. Due to the power-holding role of this language in respect of employability, political structure, and economic status, investing in this language may prove a better linguistic resource. Therefore, not only individuals but also the state of Pakistan willingly accepted it in the education sector so that people may invest their energies for a brighter future.

This study aims to find out how learners of Chinese in Pakistan invest in English as the existing market language, how much they attach their future imagined-identities with the Chinese as a new linguistic resource, and the economic benefit they perceive in the context of this new identity. These objectives were based on two research questions: 1. How much invested are Chinese language learners in their existing identity of English as the present language of the market and their future/imagined identity linked

with the Chinese as an emerging linguistic resource? 2. What benefits do they perceive when they invest in this new linguistic resource in a habitus shaped/reshaped by the dominant ideologies of the future linguistic market?

Research Methodology

This study takes academicians, administrators, students, and business persons investing in Chinese language. The rapid spread of this language was boosted by CPEC. Its learners increased to thousands in number in less than a decade (Pakistan-China Institute Annual Report, 2013, 2018). The institutes/organizations active in elevating this language are, therefore, somewhat lesser in number. Hence, the sample size in the population was kept limited to the active organization through purposive sampling. To reach the essential elements of why they invest in this language, seven (07) in-depth interviews (structured/semi-structured) with thirty-one (31) participants were conducted face-to-face at the Confucius Institute (CI) Islamabad, the Department of Chinese National University of Modern Languages (NUML) Islamabad, and the China Study Center University of Peshawar. The participants were academicians, people in the administration, research scholars, HSK students, parents, and persons from the corporate sector. Parents and students were also involved in focused group discussions. The questions asked covered the economy, employability, academics, higher education, and innovative Chinese technology. Based on the power dimensions of this language in terms of its employability potential, power theory based upon Van Dijk's *Structures of discourse and structures of power* (2008) was applied as the theoretical framework. This theory is centered on discourse as the ground for exercising power. Power presupposes knowledge, beliefs, and ideologies to sustain and reproduce it (Van Dijk, 1998; 2008), and communication in the shape of text and talk molds and reshapes these ideologies. Moreover, thematic analysis based on Saldana's (2013) theoretical model was

used as an analytical tool with *In Vivo* and *Pattern/Axial Coding*. Darwin and Norton's (2015) Model of Investment was used as an analysis model to reach the objectives of this study. Investing learners in a new language shifts their present as well as future identities when they are placed in a habitus of shifted ideologies. As per the standards of this model, the habitus for investing in this language has been structured

through different CPEC projects. These projects developed an environment with affordances/advantages suggesting a new identity in the shape of Chinese as an emerging linguistic resource. This environment helps shifting ideologies in the new direction of imagined/future identities attached to investing in this language.

Figure 1

Darvin and Norton's (2015) Model of Investment



Note: This model is based upon the intersection of capital, identity, and ideology creating the perceived benefits of investment in a language. From “Identity and a model of investment in applied linguistics” by R. Darwin and B. Norton, 2015, *Annual review of applied linguistics*, 35, p. 42. Copyright 2015 by Cambridge University Press.

Analysis

The analysis of the interviews and focused group discussion done through *In Vivo*, *Pattern*, and *Axial Coding* has been presented in tabular form. The four tables here represent sample analysis of each category followed by its major theme. Table 1 represents students, Table 2 people in the administration, Table 3 people in academics, and Table 4 parents' point of view.

Table 1

Codes, Sub-categories, Categories, and Themes in Students' Interviews/Interview 1

Students: M. Phil (Male=01, Female=01) Department of Chinese NUML Islamabad; HSK (Male=08, Female=11) China Study Center University of Peshawar

Categories	Sub-categories	Sample Codes
Chinese has become the language of the international market, global trade, employability,	China as a well-developed economic power; CPEC and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) are centers of the future market; a technology power and nucleus of	China is a well-developed worldwide economic power; a superpower; a developed state; developing strategies for the future; job prospects in CPEC and

scholarships, higher studies, giving incentives and job prospects to the youth.	higher studies; scholarships in academic exchange programs Chinese as a key	BRI; language of the upcoming market; a technological power; an international center of higher studies; trade in the international market; welcoming relations between the two countries; scholarships; academic exchange
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Theme: Chinese is the language of global trade, higher studies, the employment market, and innovative technology. It plays a significant role in CPEC and BRI projects.

Table 2

*Dr. Zhang Wei, Director Confucius Institute Islamabad
Codes, Sub-categories, Categories, and Themes in Interview 2*

Categories	Sub-categories	Sample Codes
Powerful economy, technological progress, and international trade—pushing forces for the speedy expansion of Chinese language and culture globally; Chinese language teachers are trained skillfully; significant function of the Confucius Institute (CI)	China shifted its focus from class struggle to economic growth; many business partners globally; economic incentives appeal to more Chinese language learners; CI—an educational and cultural platform centering on Chinese language and culture in response to international demand for the Chinese;	China's ideology; class struggle; changed this focus to economic development; economic incentives draw learners; every Chinese institution wants to go international; Chinese language is made known at different levels; Chinese language necessary to work better with Chinese corporations; not many people in Chinese language teaching training in more than 100 universities; CI, a cultural and educational exchange program; growing demand for learning Chinese language as the main motive behind opening CIs globally.

Theme: A powerful economy, technological developments, and international trade are the pushing forces for the rapid expansion of Chinese language and culture globally. In response to the

increasing demand for this language, Confucius Institute was established (2004) functioning globally in activities about Chinese language, Chinese language teachers' training, and culture.

Table 3

*Dr. Aftab Azeem, HoD Department of Chinese, National University of Modern Languages Islamabad
Codes, Sub-categories, Categories, and Themes in Interview 3*

Categories	Sub-categories	Sample Codes
CPEC boosted learning Chinese; it is ideologically loaded with Chinese language, and supported by China's powerful economy; Chinese is learned by students and	CPEC boosted Chinese language; China's powerful economy—security for jobs in Chinese language; CPEC is ideologically loaded with learning Chinese; Chinese is learned by students, youth, and business people as a	CPEC—a booster to Chinese language; powerful economy as attraction; CPEC—ideologically loaded with Chinese language; improved communication; Chinese as a skill to gain chances worldwide; learners are students,

business persons to gain chances worldwide; Chinese is competing with English, and may replace it in future.	skill; Chinese language grows against English and may replace it in many functions in future; support by teacher training programs in Chinese universities	youth, and business-persons; Chinese language is growing with English as adversary; it has surpassed English; in future, it may replace English; Asian countries are supporting Chinese language preferably; fully-funded teacher-training programs at 100-plus Chinese universities.
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Theme: Based on China's powerful economy, CPEC boosted Chinese language. This language is growing side by side with English and will likely replace it in various functions. Its learners rise rapidly due to China's technological developments and economic incentives.

Table 4

Parents: Male=05, Female=03

Codes, Sub-categories, Categories, and Themes in focused group discussion

Categories	Sub-categories	Sample Codes
Chinese has developed into a language of the international market, opening new spots of employment opportunities, particularly in CPEC. As a technology power and hub of higher studies, Chinese has got significance in global trade, availing of scholarships, and the employment market.	China as a world power; CPEC and BRI are centers of future commerce; Chinese as a key-skill for employment; China—a global center of higher educations; worldwide trade and scholarships.	Opening different places; a skill for more employment opportunities; CPEC—a project of the new era; global contacts in BRI; language of the market; China is a technology center; an international center of higher educations; corporate leader in the international market; scholarships chances.

Theme: Chinese has grown into an investment in the future linguistic market because of its significant role in global trade, the job market, innovative technology, and higher education.

Findings and Results

Chinese is considered an authoritative language of the future linguistic market. It is believed as a hub of opportunities and scholarships for higher studies by students belonging to business studies, the medical profession, technological sciences, and Chinese linguistics. They aspire to learn this language as a skill for better employment chances like they learned English. Due to China's stronger position in Asian politics, this language is believed to be an emerging

linguistic resource. Parents also respected the decision of their children for investing in this language as they believe in the opening of new venues in the business and job market by this emerging capital. As a representative of the people in the administration, Dr. Zhang Wei, Director Confucius Institute Islamabad, appreciated China's move for promoting Chinese language. CI provides an easy access to learners at the grassroots levels in schools, vocational centers, and universities. Dr. Aftab Azeem, HoD Department of Chinese NUML Islamabad, on behalf of the academics side, pointed out CPEC as a booster to promote Chinese faster during the last decade. Technological advancement, a stronger economy, and grants for higher education interest learners to discover

opportunities. Promoting this language preferably is the essence of its potential as an emerging linguistic resource.

China's powerful economy, advanced technology, global trade, and prospects of higher studies in China function as stronger pushing-forces for the fast expansion of this language worldwide. As a better linguistic resource, specifically in CPEC, Chinese is considered a replacement for English in several functions of the market. Collaboration between China and Pakistan may improve the economy, business sector, and language if healthier language policies are developed by both countries.

Discussion

Analysis of the interviews results in themes that describe a complementary connection of Chinese language with China's highly developed economy, worldwide business partners, higher education, and innovative technology. These characteristics make the Chinese a power-center and a global skill with employability potential. The interrelationship of these main categories leads to three major themes:

1. **An essential skill for employability in the international market:** Chinese is a necessary skill and an emerging resource for career opportunities in CPEC and the worldwide market.
2. **A different identity with a powerful economy:** Chinese is an important language to attain a stronger financial status which stimulates a new identity.
3. **An instrument of exercising power:** Chinese language is an instrument used for power-exercise, particularly soft-power.

These themes center on the Chinese as potentially a stronger linguistic resource. They can be clustered as language-based, ideology-centered, employment-focused, and resource-driven. Therefore, they tend to inculcate an ideological shift to improve the learners' "social, cultural, and economic capital" (Norton, 2015, p.

387). These themes indicate an overlapping inter-relationship of this language with power through employment, a stronger economy, shifting-ideology, worldwide trade, and higher education. These inter-relationships point out that Chinese in itself is a power-hub, a stronger resource, and an essential qualification for a better career. Language is the source of thoughts and ideologies, affecting people's behavior through discursive effects (Pennycook, 2000). In its discursive effects, Chinese is molding the manner people think, mostly through its capability as a better resource for employability. People are influenced through this discourse to willingly invest their time, skills, and abilities in learning this language. As users of a particular language re-value their linguistic resources in different environments (Zschomler, 2019), learners of Chinese in the existing situations in Pakistan invest themselves after re-valuing this new resource.

Speakers of stronger languages (like English and Chinese) constantly reshuffle their identities in the present as well as in the future. They aim to move into the imagined communities of the future with a *new identity* of a more *powerful linguistic capital* (Kim, 2023). Chinese has been accepted by its learners as a significant resource to move into the world of valuable opportunities in CPEC. The learners of this language, therefore, invest themselves in learning this linguistic resource as a significant part of their imagined identities (Darvin & Norton, 2015; Norton, 2013, 2015). Darvin and Norton (2015) in their Model of Investment place investment at the crossroads of identity, capital, and ideology. In turn, these crossroads produce an opening into how they exercise power. Significantly, the ideologies of the learners are shifted and restructured into a new identity in the form of beliefs in marketability, employability, and business opportunities. Political and socioeconomic influences form power relations (Foucault, 1995, 2007; Van Dijk, 1997, 1998, 2008). In the context of the present study, it is believed that CPEC forms power-relations, better exercised through

Chinese. This is how “the commodification” of Chinese occurs in the “globalized new economy” (Heller, 2010, p.358). Subsequently, it has turned into a different source of attracting learners to invest in learning this language.

Linguistic resources are valued on the basis of the surrounding environment. Therefore, speakers of a particular language have to re-evaluate their linguistic resources in new environments (Hurst, 2017; Zschomler, 2019). The utilizing value of a language (such as Chinese in the context of this study and English in general) as a linguistic resource is dependent on the surrounding context and market (Codó & Riera, 2022). In the present context, Chinese is believed as a better linguistic resource to be utilized as the potential language of the market, especially in the surrounding context of CPEC and the shifting economic landscape of the region. Though the dominance of English in the existing conditions is a structural barrier (Ryan, 2023), investing children in Chinese as an emerging linguistic resource would influence their current ideologies by incorporating their future identities to re-construct their existing identities. This ideological shift is one of the main reasons why this language has become a significant part of the schools (like The Roots Millennium, The City School, and The Beaconhouse), university departments (such as the Department of Chinese NUML Islamabad, China Study Center University of Peshawar), and vocational/language centers nearly all over the country. Moreover, schools at the government level are encouraged to project the significant role of the Chinese as an essential skill for a brighter future. Therefore, the number of its learners has increased manifold in the last decade.

Conclusion

In Pakistan, English as the present identity exists as a stronger linguistic capital. This capital is used as a resource for better employability in various government and private sectors. This distinguishing feature of English is now shared

by Chinese language (as the future imagined identity) in CPEC projects where this linguistic skill gets more advantage. In turn, it has produced competition in the linguistic market where the Chinese possibly shares the power-circle of English, especially in the corporate sector. In the context of CPEC, therefore, learning this language has become a valuable investment. The ideological shift owned by this linguistic capital has produced an imagined identity for the learners who possess a present identity in English as a language of the market.

Chinese in the form of a growing linguistic capital is functioning as an effective resource in twofold directions: (1) it is an additional linguistic skill functioning along with English as an empowering skill for employability, and (2) it is creating in new identity attached with the potential empowering status of this language. The present stage in the promotion of this language shows that its learners are incorporating this linguistic resource with English—their current linguistic skill functioning as a linguistic capital of the market. Moreover, the huge investment in the CPEC project by the Chinese companies stimulated learning this language as efficiency in this language is preferred by the Chinese counterparts. In turn, the growing demand for this language was responded to at the platforms of CI by providing teachers, teachers’ training, and additional supporting material at the grassroots as well as higher levels. Regionally, the neighboring countries like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Afghanistan are better breeding grounds for this emerging linguistic resource as they have become active parts of BRI. Globally also (as the wide-reaching network of more than 550 CIs shows), this language is proving a well-equipped pushing-force for developing a new (hybrid-)identity together with English and/or other functional languages.

The increasing demand for Chinese in Pakistan has been responded to at multiple levels. This language is promoted through CIs (five CIs

working currently all over the country) at higher education institutions, schools, vocational centers, and Pak-China collaborative organizations. Over the last few years, the number of its learners increased manifold. Presently, “26000–30000 students are studying Chinese at various levels in Pakistan” (Chinese language teachers in Pakistan, 2021), a greater number than any other foreign language learners. This indicates the growing investment of learners in this emerging linguistic capital. Moreover, it has been placed as an important part of various levels of the education system, including schools and universities where it is promoted as an emerging linguistic resource.

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