The Ideologies of English Language in the Identity Construction of

Beijing as Olympic City

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Abstract

Confronted with the complexities of rapid changes in China since the reform and opening-up in 1978, China’s international image has failed to keep up with these ceaseless changes (Ramo, 2007). China’s image misalignment at home and abroad has become a strategic threat in her efforts to better integrate with the international community. Since Beijing’s successful Olympic bid in 2001, China has carried out an intensive nation-wide Olympic action plan in order to construct a new identity for Beijing as well as the whole nation, in which English popularization in Beijing is a top priority. Olympic English popularization in Beijing involved over 4,000 athletes, judges, BOCOG staff; 1,500,000 Olympic volunteers and several million Beijing residents as learners of English as an additional language.

The relationship between language and identity has relatively recently taken up a central position in studies of sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology (Duranti, 2005). Both disciplines study the ways in which identities are produced and reproduced through discourse. Based on critical analysis of official Olympic publicity discourses and in-depth interviews with Olympic volunteers, English teachers and administrative staff involved in English training for the purposes of the Olympics, this paper will investigate the ideologies of English language learning and teaching underpinning the identity construction of Beijing as an Olympic city. This paper addresses four questions:

1. How has the Olympics-driven English popularization in Beijing been implemented?
2. What has been driving such omnipresent “English desire” in China’s widespread national discourses?
3. How has English been legitimized as a desirable linguistic identity in the discursive construction of Beijing as Olympic city?
4. What are the underlying ideological and pragmatic issues in the Beijing-based English popularization campaign?

This paper also discusses the English Paradigm in the Olympiad-driven Beijing-based English popularization and the nativization of English in China.