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From perceptual dialectology to perceptual multilingualism: a Hong Kong case study

Nathan John Albury[a] (iD) and Max Diaz[b]

[a]Leiden University, Leiden, The Netherlands; [b]Department of English, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom, Hong Kong

ABSTRACT

This paper proposes *perceptual multilingualism* as a research interest within the broader folk linguistic enterprise. By drawing on the geolinguistic mapping tasks popular in perceptual dialectology – whereby participants are asked to draw and depict dialectal diversity in a given region – we show that perceptual multilingualism can elicit knowledge and reasoning in the community about linguistic diversity more broadly. To do this, we analysed and discussed 41 perceptual multilingualism maps produced by high school students in Hong Kong about societal multilingualism across the Hong Kong region. On the one hand, the maps allowed us to quantify which languages manifest in the youths' metalinguistic awareness and where. On the other hand, we positioned the maps as discourses to be compared and analysed through a critical social theoretical lens. Doing so revealed implicit and contested power relations as they manifested in epistemic claims in dialectic relation to broader sociopolitical narratives in Hong Kong. This included Hong Kong's contentious transition to governance by Beijing and the marginalisation of the blue-collar workforce. Beyond the empirical metalinguistic data, our paper shows that perceptual multilingualism can contribute to critical sociolinguistics by helping to reveal power relations, hegemonies and ideologies, and resistance.

Introduction

Building on *perceptual dialectology* as an area of folk linguistics that examines metalinguistic awareness of dialectal diversity, this paper introduces *perceptual multilingualism*, which we define in this paper as metalinguistic awareness of different languages in a region. Folk linguistics shows us that people have metalinguistic awareness about a range of linguistic matters they observe, from variation in their own languages, to how languages are acquired and the pragmatic intentions of others, and they can hold feelings towards such matters. Researching what community members may know and feel about these topics close to the hearts of expert linguists is in itself an entertaining endeavour, but it can also produce valuable critical sociolinguistic data. From a critical perspective in sociolinguistics – with its concern for inequalities between languages and speakers (Mesthrie, 2000) – differences in

language behaviour undergo processes of perception, discussion, and even regulation by those who encounter them. This idea has been theoretical fodder for the now extensive library of language ideology and attitude scholarship. It has also been the fodder of folk linguistics and its tradition of *perceptual dialectology,* which tasks community members, on the one hand, to geospatially map the occurrence of different dialectal features within their languages and, on the other hand, to describe those features in evaluative terms. This is typically laden with ideology and power relations between speakers and dialects (Preston, 1999; Williams et al., 1996).

In this paper, we show that in as much as geolinguistic mapping can reveal how a community perceives dialectal variation, so too can it elicit what a community claims to know about its own societal multilingualism. We take Hong Kong as a contentious case study as a predominantly Cantonese-speaking city undergoing its handover to a Mandarin-speaking government in Beijing. This political transition has led to violent pro-democracy demonstrations that have seen millions of Hong Kongers take to the streets – often defying the authorities – against the Chinese Communist Party seen as meddling in Hong Kong affairs. This anxiety has already played out in language policy discourses, such as when Hong Kong loyalists fear that Beijing's increasing influence is jeopardising the status of Cantonese. However, Hong Kong is a major world centre and home to many other indigenous and migrant languages, and English retains postcolonial prestige.

We researched perceptual multilingualism in Hong Kong as an Australian and an American within a year of employment as academic staff at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. At the time of data collection, we were both teaching in linguistics, including critical discourse analysis, media, and sociolinguistics. Our own observations of multilingualism in Hong Kong, plus the vexed political situation frequently featuring in the classroom talk and assessment work of our students, piqued our interest in grassroots ideological stances vis-à-vis Hong Kong's linguistic diversity. Based on an activity we conducted with high school students visiting the university, we analysed the perceptual multilingualism maps made by 41 Hong Kong pupils for what languages featured in their metalinguistic awareness, and whether metalinguistic awareness included geolinguistically locating languages. We also interpreted the maps as discourses and found that perceptions of multilingualism are embedded in sociopolitical contexts, including Hong Kong's colonial history, relationship with mainland China, and marginalisation of foreign domestic workers. Our analysis shows that perceptual multilingualism can contribute to critical sociolinguistics by revealing and visualising linguistic hegemonies and ideologies, dominant metalinguistic knowledge, as well as discursive resistance to these. To begin, we contextualise multilingualism in Hong Kong, where diversity is so defining that Hong Kong is dubbed *Asia's World City*.

Multilingualism in *Asia's World City*

Linguistic diversity in Hong Kong is informed by colonial history, capitalism, and Chinese reunification. During and subsequent to the Opium Wars (1839–1842, and 1856–1860), the British gradually colonised what is now Hong Kong. Hong Kong Island fell into British hands in 1842, followed by Kowloon in 1860, and the New Territories and outlying islands in 1898. These areas are shown in Figure 1. China then leased Cantonese-speaking Hong Kong to the United Kingdom for a period of 99 years (Flowerdew, 1998).

Figure 1. Map of Hong Kong's main areas.
© China Discovery https://www.chinadiscovery.com/hongkong-tours/maps.html

Under British rule, English assumed prestige that would alter the linguistic repertoires of Hong Kongers. Colonisation saw a largely monolingual and struggling Cantonese community living parallel to a largely monolingual and affluent British community (around 29,000 in the early 1900s). However, this continued only until after the second world war. Whereas the Cultural Revolution took hold in China in 1966 and Mao Zedong's Communist ideals 'wreaked havoc…to prevent China from embracing capitalism' (Lu, 2004, p. 5), Hong Kong's rapid capitalist expansion into a global financial hub meant that Hong Kongers became motivated by the mobility associated with English (Boyle, 1997). English was no longer just the language of the coloniser, but had become core to Hong Kong's internationalised market economy. Hong Kong embarked upon a language policy agenda to facilitate participation in that market. English-medium education at the tertiary level expanded, including within the Chinese University of Hong Kong despite policy to the contrary. The introduction in 1986 of the *Expatriate English Teachers Scheme* recruited native speaker teachers from abroad, typically with more favourable employment conditions than for local teachers (Boyle, 1997). All this would consolidate the English language proficiencies of Hong Kongers.

As economic performance rendered Hong Kong 'one of the "four little dragons"' (Poon, 2010, p. 5) alongside Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea, the city attracted educated, non-local professionals, especially from English-speaking countries, Europe, and Northeast Asia. This internationalisation has a sociolinguistic reflection. English is the predominant lingua franca of Hong Kong's international workforce. This workforce is especially visible in areas of Hong Kong Island that host the city's financial centre and where non-local professionals commonly work and play. This includes the business zones of Central and Admiralty, and the shopping, entertainment, and residential districts of Soho, Aberdeen, Mid-Levels, and Kennedy Town. It also includes villages along Hong Kong's coastlines known for their idyllic vistas. This concentration is weakening, however, with rising property costs leading

to a trend of non-local families settling beyond their traditional enclaves (Singh, 2017). The importance of English as a language of business with the non-local professional community is reflected in the linguistic landscape, especially in expatriate hubs. There, monolingual English signs and bilingual Chinese/English signs are more common than elsewhere (Lai, 2013). However, non-local professionals with non-English language backgrounds maintain their own heritage languages to the extent that, as Lai (Lai, 2013) mentions, 'Japanese, French and other European languages [are] also easily discernible, embellishing and enriching the cityscape' (p. 261). This may not exclusively be a response to the non-local professional community, given that workforce is generally English-proficient. In our view, Japanese and French are afforded prestige in that they are seemingly used for advertising rather than for instrumental communication. This needs further empirical investigation, but Figure 2 offers an example of Japanese and French in a shampoo advertisement in Hong Kong, taken in the Hung Hom Mass Transit Railway (MTR) station. The advertisement relies on the linguistic proximity of French to English, and of Japanese to Chinese. *Parfum de shampooing* harnesses French prestige while not impeding meaning-making with those literate in English. The pink title is in Chinese script, but enlarged characters also appear in Japanese, and the title includes the Japanese possessive marker の that adds a Japanese quality.

Today, Hong Kong is under transition to rule by Beijing. The current *one country, two systems* model sees Hong Kong under mainland Chinese sovereignty, but allows Hong Kong to retain some autonomy – such as civil liberties including freedom of speech, and its own immigration, education and economic policies – for fifty years from 1997 (Postiglione, 2017). While this autonomy is assured in theory, critics warn that mainland China does not want in Hong Kong 'a truculent, disobedient polity' whereby 'the central government's deepening involvement in the territory's politics is a subject of growing controversy' (Brown, 2017). International media has been awash with this controversy. Anxieties about mainland China jeopardising Hong Kong's freedoms in favour of authoritarianism have manifested in violent pro-democracy demonstrations and counter responses. While initially triggered by a

Figure 2. French and Japanese in the linguistic landscape of Hung Hom MTR station.

controversial bill to allow extradition to mainland China, the unrest indexes a broader local resistance to Chinese Communist Party ideology and assertions that the rights of Hong Kong are being eroded.

Changes in local language have also been perceived by many in Hong Kong as resulting from Beijing's increased presence in local affairs. The government has mandated that education and the public service are biliterate in Chinese and English and trilingual in Mandarin, Cantonese and English (Bolton, 2011). An important observation is that Mandarin and Cantonese are, from a linguistic perspective, distinct codes that are not mutually intelligible. Nonetheless, Chinese script can be used for all varieties traditionally perceived as Chinese, either in its traditional form (as for Cantonese in Hong Kong) or in its simplified form (as for Mandarin in China). Mutual unintelligibility can extend to the standard written forms of these languages and has been a source of contention between the Hong Kong public and language policy guidelines suggested by the mainland government. Nevertheless, the policy of biliteracy currently does not specify a specific Chinese standard or script. Added to this, Chinese immigration and the rapid expansion of the mainland Chinese economy means Mandarin is increasingly heard, seen, and indeed instrumental. It is the official language of the mainland Chinese, who now enjoy more relaxed immigration requirements, including a policy that allows 150 Chinese nationals to settle in Hong Kong per day (Immigration Department, 2016). As Li (2017) explains, 'to the extent that business opportunities and transactions with non-Cantonese-speaking mainlanders take place increasingly in Putonghua, pragmatically minded Hongkongers have little choice but to expand their linguistic repertoire to include at least some Putonghua' (p. 180). Anxieties about an influx of mainlanders altering Hong Kong's identity have led to discourses about keeping Hong Kong Cantonese-speaking, contextualised by broader tensions in the Hong Kong-China relationship. Hong Kong loyalists also worry that the rising capital attributed to Mandarin is revalidated by language-in-education policy that reminds Hong Kong of China's influence.

Beyond the three languages that feature in policy, and the languages of white-collar expatriates, Hong Kong is also home to a plethora of minority languages. Around 0.6% of Hong Kongers use Hakka – a threatened variety (Ethnologue, 2018) – as their main language (Li, 2017), with another 3.5% able to speak it as an additional language. The Hakka minority is considered Indigenous to the New Territories of Hong Kong, subsequent to historic migrants from northern China. In the early 1900s, around 255 villages were predominantly Hakka, but most Hakka have now urbanised (Cohen, 1996). Other Chinese varieties are also present, including Hokkien (spoken by just under 4% of the population), Teochew (about 3.5%) and Shanghainese (just over 1%) resulting from migration from mainland China (Census and Statistics Department, 2016c). Britain's 19th century colonial defence policy for Hong Kong encouraged migration from South Asia, including today's Pakistan, India and Nepal. Hong Kong's economic success in the second half of the 20th century then attracted white-collar migration from South Asia, followed later by a wave of migrants to reunite with their South Asian relatives in Hong Kong but often with lower socioeconomic outcomes (Tonsing, 2013). The languages of the latter wave of migrants have become especially visible in areas such as Tsim Sha Tsui that hosts the (in)famous Chung King Mansion: 'the haunt of South Asian merchants, African entrepreneurs, Indian temporary workers, African and South Asian asylum seekers, and penurious travellers from across the globe…a ramshackle building in Hong Kong's tourist district that is a hub of "low-end globalization"' (Mathews, 2011, p. 3).

Hong Kong also participates in a global trend of attracting domestic labour from the Philippines and Indonesia. The government reported that in the 2016 census, ethnic Filipinos made up 31.5% of Hong Kong's 584,383 ethnic minority group members, followed by Indonesians at 26.2% (Census and Statistics Department, 2016b). The presence of these domestic helpers is visible. Media reports regularly feature cases of worker abuse and of demands for improved labour conditions. Domestic workers commonly gather in small groups on Sundays, sitting on cardboard boxes in public spaces across Hong Kong Island, to share food and socialise. Central Hong Kong transforms, one day a week, from a locus of international finance to one that renders Hong Kong's most marginalised workers visible.

Beyond the fact that diversity is inherent to contemporary Hong Kong, our interest is to what extent this diversity features in the metalinguistic awareness of Hong Kong youths. This includes whether youths see this diversity as spatially located as a matter of perceptual multilingualism, which we now introduce and apply as a new paradigm in folk linguistics.

Theory: from perceptual dialectology to perceptual multilingualism

Perceptual multilingualism is born from perceptual dialectology. The latter is defined as

> …an area of sociolinguistics and dialectology which investigates metalinguistic attitudes and folklinguistics. Various techniques can be used such as giving respondents blank maps of countries on which to draw in what they perceive to be the main dialect regions, and then characterize those regions in their own words (Llamas et al., 2007, p. 225).

The notion is that beyond analysing how language is used, perceptual dialectology examines how communities explain sociolinguistic variation vis-à-vis their own epistemic lenses laden with ideological and other social values informed by culture, intergroup relations, histories, collective memories and psychosociological associations (Preston, 1986, 2002). Researching perceptions of linguistic difference is therefore a window into social relations.

For perceptual dialectology, a popular research method has been to task a cohort of speakers in and from a particular place to draw on a map where they perceive dialect boundaries to exist. Collating responses en masse allows the researcher to measure perceptions of where dialectal in-groups end and where the adjacent out-groups begin (cf. Benson, 2003; Preston, 1996b; van Keymeulen, 2009). Long (1999), for example, conducted such research by tasking 62 participants in the broader Osaka-Kyoto area of Japan to indicate the boundaries of the Kansai dialect region. By compiling the drawings of participants, the research showed that these Japanese folk linguists universally agreed on where the dialect begins, but not on where it ends. From a critical sociolinguistic perspective, it appears that the respondents unanimously agreed that the speech of people from Osaka and Kyoto is authentically Kansai, but that in-group membership as a Kansai speaker becomes increasingly questioned to the east and west. Data such as this asks us to consider how ideas of linguistic authenticity manifest in metalinguistic awareness.

We also know, however, that societies are rarely monolingual (Spolsky, 2004), even if nation-states favour specific ethnicities and languages for political reasons. Often, minority languages linger at the periphery of social discourses (Wright, 2003). This is often the case for Indigenous peoples – such as in Australia, Japan, and Scandinavia – whose languages were marginalised or even forbidden under colonisation. An imposed dominant language came to index the state and national identity, such that public knowledge about Indigenous

languages becomes scant. It is also the case for new minorities, whose constructed positionality as non-native may render their languages absent from mainstream metalinguistic consciousness. What is more, multilingualism in public spaces is a visible index of migration that has rendered places diverse in culture, ethnicity and language (Blommaert, 2013). Hong Kong is one such place where immigration parallel to rapid economic success transformed Hong Kong from a trading port into *Asia's World City*.

For these reasons, we feel that folk linguistic research can usefully include not just *perceptual dialectology*, but also *perceptual multilingualism*. We define this as the metalinguistic awareness of individuals and collectives vis-à-vis different languages in a given community, whereby researching this awareness can reveal the content and borders of knowledge about linguistic diversity. That knowledge may host or reproduce linguistic discourses, ideologies, and power relations relevant to multilingualism in society.

It is entirely feasible that people may claim knowledge about, as well as subscribe to ideologies towards, different languages in their communities. This was reflected in Wong and Babel's (2017) work that shows that experience and familiarity with linguistic diversity influence perceptions and knowledge about that diversity – in Wong and Babel's case, in Vancouver. Experience and familiarity with linguistic diversity become especially dynamic in groups such as Hong Kong youths. They interact with that diversity to varying degrees through networks, language acquisition, multilingual language practices, and daily interactions mediated by economy, identity maintenance, labour migration, education policy, the local linguistic marketplace, and broader sociopolitical processes. It therefore stands to reason that the knowledge of Hong Kong youths about Hong Kong's multilingualism will be influenced by how, where, and to what extent they have engaged with it – whether in practice or in discourses about it. In as far as different languages can be associated with different domains and different urban places and spaces, then it also seems feasible that research in perceptual multilingualism can include whether and how people geospatially represent the local linguistic diversity of which they are aware.

Perceptual multilingualism is oriented in an epistemology of knowledge as socially-constructed regimes of truth (Foucault, 1980). Expressing certain knowledge claims not only elevates a specific epistemic perspective, but also works to validate and perpetuate those claims. Accordingly, and rather than seeing truth as an existing reality to be discovered, our postmodern view sees truths about the sociolinguistic world as potentially multiple, conflicting, and often personalised by experience such that different people may express different claims in favour of different world views. This is never value-free but embedded in political, religious, and epistemological biases, and can therefore be empirically dubious. Nonetheless, claims may be *true* for their believers and orient perceptions and discourses. This is salient to emic research like folk linguistics.

The relevance for this paper is that people need not be linguists to hold and verbalise claims of truth, and that claims may be ideological and far from empirical. They are, nonetheless, epistemic resources that structure people's ideas and discourses (Foucault, 1980). Regardless of empirical accuracy, this amounts to the discursive (re)construction and (re) validation of specific regimes of truth. This includes the potential for metalinguistic awareness to construct specific claims about the linguistic world that silence or render invisible some aspects of it while promoting other perceived truths. This view on knowledge sees that any expression of a claimed truth is 'inherently power-laden' (Albury, 2017, p. 39). For example, the imposition of one specific claimed truth, such as about what constitutes correct

speech, has at best the impact of fostering a common language between speakers, and at worst the impact of discriminating against those who deviate from norms in education (Sterzuk, 2015), judicial and socioeconomic processes (Cocchiara, Bell, & Casper, 2016; Lippi-Green, 1994; Rickford & King, 2016), and transnational spaces (Rahman, 2009). Its expression perpetuates a narrative about linguistic normativities. Knowledge claims can therefore be traced to, and also perpetuate, belief systems and relations between groups. By seeing community knowledge as powerful and in part constitutive of social relations, then folk linguistics – the enterprise of investigating what people in the community claim to know about language matters and indeed what knowledge they offer about it – elucidates 'processes by which systems of social inequality are created and sustained' (Tollefson, 2006, p. 43) through epistemic claims about sociolinguistics.

This current research in perceptual multilingualism built conceptually on a trial exercise carried out by (Albury (co-author of this paper)) in New Zealand. Eleven public servants in Wellington were tasked to depict linguistic diversity on a map of Europe in an exercise inspired by broader research by the National Centre for Research on Europe (2003) into social psychological perceptions of Europe amongst New Zealanders. In the first place, the eleven maps solicited in (Albury's) work revealed knowledge about linguistic diversity in Europe. Of special interest was the commonly held belief that German and Russian occupy much larger ethnolinguistic spaces than they actually do, the absence of Indigenous languages, and a belief in homogenous languages such as *Scandinavian* and *East European*. Most salient, however, was how the participants approached the task. As a collective, the maps revealed two epistemologies of multilingualism. Around half reproduced the *monolingual assumption* of the one-nation one-language ideology by demarcating ethnolinguistic areas, generally but not always along national borders. This implied correlations between spaces, ethnicities, and native languages. The other half, however, did not demarcate ethnolinguistic areas on the maps but produced what we call the *multilingual assumption*. They described different nation states as having diverse multilingual repertoires, without concern for ethnolinguistic borders nor for distinctions between first and second languages. By focusing on repertoires, these maps presupposed the normativity of multilingualism in contemporary European lives. The trial suggested that perceptual multilingualism is placed not only to elicit metalinguistic knowledge about multilingualism in a geolinguistic zone, but that how participants approach the task can implicitly reveal epistemologies of language.

Methodology

We conducted a folk linguistic mapping exercise with Hong Kong high school students in July 2018. The students were visiting the Faculty of Humanities at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University on a programme to familiarise them with university life and promote the faculty's degrees. The students were aged between 15 and 17, and attended one of three one-hour lessons given by the authors of this paper. The lesson was titled *We're all linguists aren't we?* (see Appendix 1 for lesson plan). The lesson introduced students to multilingualism as a cognitive, behavioural, and societal phenomenon. For the latter, the lesson discussed, in broad terms, language policy as a government activity, and urban linguistic diversity resulting from migration. As an example case, the lesson discussed linguistic diversity in New York City to raise the students' awareness that despite dominant ideology and English being the city's dominant language, Spanish is a large and visible minority, and a plethora of other

languages are also spoken. To do this, the students were shown Figure 3 (below). The map on the left shows the most dominant second languages in New York's boroughs, and the right shows the most predominant third languages.

The students were then each given a map of Hong Kong and we asked the class whether Hong Kong's multilingualism can be represented on that map and, if so, to do so as they see fit. The map will be shown in examples during discussion of the findings. Because the map does not use standard roman spelling for local places, but was the map we found that gave students the most space to write on, we gave the students a more detailed supplementary map to help them locate different locations. That map outlined Hong Kong's MTR system which the students could use to orient their entries. The students could also use that map to complete the task, if they so wished. The students were given around 15 minutes to complete the exercise. It was not methodologically ideal that the students were firstly shown that multilingualism can be represented geolinguistically in New York, as this possibly prompted the students to represent Hong Kong's multilingualism spatially where they may not have otherwise. In any case, the discussion about New York did help them to cast their minds to their metalinguistic knowledge. The students were also advised that if multilingualism cannot be represented geolinguistically, then they should note this in their responses. A total of 41 maps were collected. All the maps were completed by the students individually, except in a few cases in the July 2018 session. At that time, some international students had flown to Hong Kong for the orientation and were not familiar with the city. These international students were paired with local Hong Kong students, and the task was augmented by the Hong Kong student describing multilingualism in Hong Kong to the international student with the help of the map.

We approached the data as products of metalinguistic knowledge, and this comprised two analytical directions. Firstly, we analysed the maps quantitatively for their content, including which languages were represented, the frequency of those languages within and across maps, and whether or not this manifested geolinguistically. This meant collating the maps and quantifying their content to identify trends in epistemic perception (Benson, 2003). Secondly, and more substantively, we compared the maps and analysed them
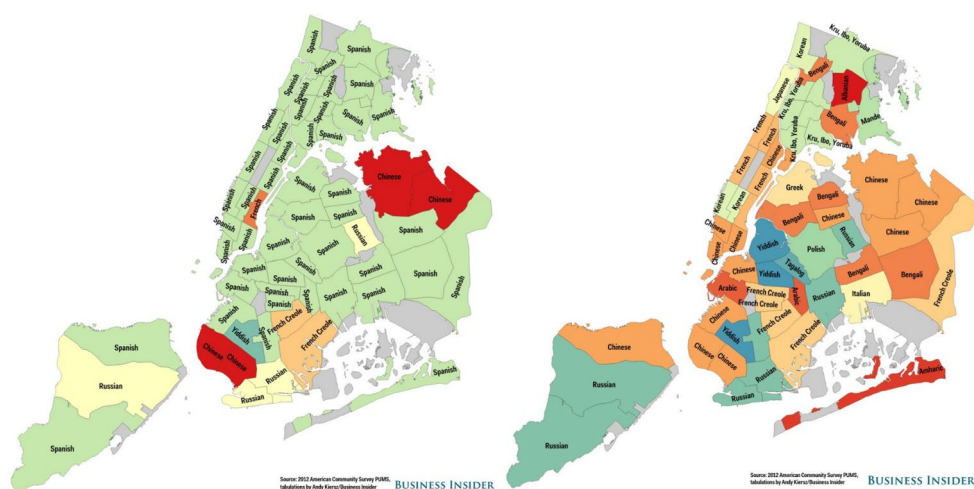
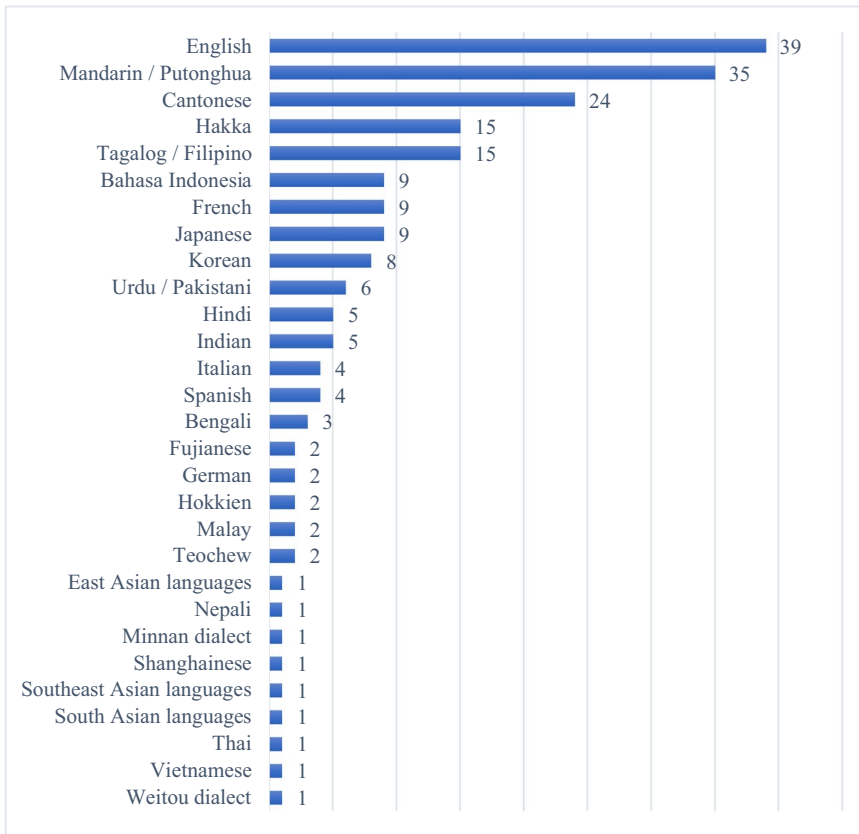**Figure 3.** Second and third languages in New York boroughs.

critically as discourses. Describing the maps for content is one thing, but we saw the maps as socially-conditioned like discourse about language more broadly (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000) such that the epistemic nature of folk linguistic maps is not value-free. As such, positioning the maps as discourse would allow us to investigate 'opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control' (Wodak, 2001, p. 2) as they manifested within and across maps. Following critical discourse analysis, our concern, therefore, was for 'social inequality as it is expressed, signalled, constituted, legitimized and so on by language use (or in discourse)' (Wodak, 2001, p. 2) whereby the maps constitute a discourse of what is known about multilingualism, how it is discursively represented, and indeed what knowledge prevails, is disguised, or is absent.

This meant analysing and interpreting each map in its own right, but also analysing and interpreting the sum of the maps together. This enabled us to identify bias patterns relevant to critical discourse analysis. In practical terms, this amounted to reviewing, comparing, and analysing the content of the maps, and trends across them, and interpreting these vis-à-vis literature about, and our own knowledge of, Hong Kong histories, ideologies, politics, social relations, and identities (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). To aid this process, we drew on Preston's (1996a) theory of modes of folk linguistic awareness. What people claim to know about language matters is examinable vis-à-vis how *available* linguistic knowledge is; that is the extent to which people have something to say about a linguistic topic drawing on their knowledge and societal discourses. It is also examinable by the level of *detail* to which the folk engage a linguistic topic; that is to say the extent to which knowledge about a linguistic topic is superficial or sophisticated. Knowledge is also examinable for its *accuracy*. As noted, our postmodern bias means empirical correctness is in itself not a primary concern, but it may be of interest in researching misconceptions and the operation of discourse and ideology above fact where these have impacts on social relations.

We now offer analysis and discussion that integrates our quantitative and critical approaches. Ideally, we would have also sought to interview the students after they completed the exercise and ask that they reflect on and explain their depictions. This would have allowed for a richer and triangulated investigation of the epistemic reasoning that underscored the maps. This was not possible in the context of the students' busy orientation during their one-day visit. Also, we did not wish to ask the students to provide their names and contact details for follow-up or a potential interview as this may have jeopardised the research. The political tensions between Mandarin and Cantonese index a much deeper tension between democracy and loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party. If the students had self-identified with their names and contact details, then it is feasible that they may have completed the maps in a way they saw as politically acceptable or innocuous. The set of maps we collected is therefore a result of a generally anonymised data collection method whereby students were largely uninhibited in expressing their beliefs. We interpreted the maps, however, in the context of our lived and industrial experiences as foreign staff in Hong Kong who had continuous contact with youths whose discourses and assessments often addressed the political situation in Hong Kong.

What languages and where?

To start, we reviewed the 41 maps and created a frequency table for the languages that featured in the students' knowledge of Hong Kong's multilingualism. This data is presented

English — 39
Mandarin / Putonghua — 35
Cantonese — 24
Hakka — 15
Tagalog / Filipino — 15
Bahasa Indonesia — 9
French — 9
Japanese — 9
Korean — 8
Urdu / Pakistani — 6
Hindi — 5
Indian — 5
Italian — 4
Spanish — 4
Bengali — 3
Fujianese — 2
German — 2
Hokkien — 2
Malay — 2
Teochew — 2
East Asian languages — 1
Nepali — 1
Minnan dialect — 1
Shanghainese — 1
Southeast Asian languages — 1
South Asian languages — 1
Thai — 1
Vietnamese — 1
Weitou dialect — 1

Figure 4. Tallied representation of specific languages from 41 maps.

in Figure 4. If a student noted a specific language more than one time, such as in different areas of Hong Kong, this counted only as one response from that map. Some students mentioned *Chinese* as a language without further detail. To deal with this, if a student listed *Chinese* and *Mandarin* on the map, *Chinese* was taken to mean Cantonese (and vice versa).

Striking from the tally is that Cantonese and English – the two major languages associated with Hong Kong – were not noted on every map. This likely speaks to Cantonese and English being the city's unmarked languages, meaning they did not necessarily spring to mind when thinking about diversity. It is also noticeable that the youths showed more detailed awareness of languages closer to home by mentioning varieties from East Asia and from Southeast Asia. This no doubt results in part from perceptions of politics and migration (in the case of Mandarin), tourism and prestige (Japanese), tourism and the popularity of K-pop (Korean), the domestic labour workforce (Tagalog and Bahasa Indonesia), and the visibility of South Asian people and cultures especially in Tsim Sha Tsui (Hindi, Bengali and Urdu). Awareness of European languages was more limited in detail, and only included large Western European language communities. Despite the presence of African people, especially in Tsim Sha Tsui, no African languages were mentioned, suggesting that metalinguistic awareness about them was not available.

A second quantitative interest was whether, and how, the youths represented multilingualism spatially. All but two maps attributed different languages to specific localities, or

more generally to broad areas of Hong Kong. That is to say, in some case students specifically defined locations and attributed languages to them, such as in Kennedy Town, Tsim Sha Tsui, Sham Shui Po, and the airport, and in other cases they simply wrote the names of languages across more undefined areas, without demarcating zones in detail, such as in the New Territories, Sai Kung, Hong Kong Island, and Lantau Island. The collated geolinguistic data is presented in Figure 5. This image is a general attempt to represent all the contributions as a collection. Specific areas are identified by a circle. General areas are not circled, and are purposely vague in their boundaries. Demarcating general areas is not a perfect science because the students were free to complete the task as they wished. To address this, the languages attributed to general areas in Figure 5 are given at the average point of the contributions that referred to that general area.

The collated maps in Figure 5 suggest that awareness about geolinguistic diversity was, in general, both available and oftentimes detailed, meaning geolinguistic orientations were part of the youth's perceptions of Hong Kong. That is to say, the students seemed to have preconceived a geography of where certain languages tend to be used. The perceptual map in Figure 5 comes as no surprise to those familiar with Hong Kong, in that languages were attributed to geographic spaces already known locally to host residents and tourists of certain ethnicities. For example, western expatriate hubs, such as Kennedy Town, Central, Sai Kung (the area on the map in which Long Ke is located), Stanley Bay, and Discovery Bay

Figure 5. Collated responses.

were demarcated as hosting languages typically associated with non-local professionals. This especially included English, but also French, Spanish, Italian, Japanese, and German. Of note here is that despite our own observations that French and Japanese appear to enjoy prestige and feature in advertising, the youths' treatment of these languages seemed confined to their association with expatriates or tourists. It seems then that they mentioned these languages with communicative language practices in mind, whereby those practices gather in specific hubs, rather than the linguistic landscape whereby French and Japanese can be found across Hong Kong. Tsim Sha Tsui was described as especially diverse, but with a focus on South Asian languages mirroring its demography. Sai Kung in eastern Hong Kong was similarly diverse, likely based on knowledge that it is a popular weekend destination for locals and non-locals alike, as were Disneyland and the airport as international hubs. The students showed a very acute folk linguistic belief that Hong Kong's multilingualism assumes some geolinguistic characters.

Where is Mandarin?

Only 35 of the 41 maps included Mandarin. Whereas excluding Cantonese and English from some maps perhaps resulted from the normativity of those languages, Hong Kong's contentious and ubiquitous discourses about its political future – including the role of Mandarin – suggest to us that excluding Mandarin was potentially deliberate. This may have been a discursive expression of the youths' resistance to Mandarin under Hong Kong's transition to Beijing. On this note, it is especially striking that Mandarin was almost entirely absent from Hong Kong Island's financial district on the students' maps. This may result from a sustained ideology of central Hong Kong being first and foremost a (post)colonial zone that retains some distinctly British and non-Chinese characteristics. This includes a history of hosting a British parliamentary system, democracy, and free-speech. Indeed, Central has been a primary site of protests against the perceived encroachment on economic and civil liberties under Hong Kong's handover (Ortmann, 2015). Central is also the traditional focal point of Hong Kong's open free market economy. This collective memory of colonial and economic history means central Hong Kong may inspire mental images that render it less Mandarin in perception than other areas.

Instead, and other than noting Mandarin is used in tourist hubs, the youths especially positioned Mandarin as a language of northern Hong Kong. This may be an inaccurate perception. In those northern districts, such as North, Tuen Mun, and Yuen Long, Mandarin is only reportedly used by 0.18%, 1.11% and 1.21% of the residing population respectively (Census and Statistics Department, 2016a). This contrasts with Mandarin reportedly used by 4.19% of the population in Central and 3.82% in Wan Chai (Census and Statistics Department, 2016a), both in Hong Kong Island's financial zone. This perception may have multiple origins. The youths may believe that northern areas attract Chinese day-trippers, often to purchase cheap Hong Kong pharmaceuticals (Khan, 2015). They may believe that the linguistic ecology of the north is simply likely to have more Mandarin speakers given its proximity to China and that Shenzhen – just across the Chinese border – is a Mandarin-predominant city. To this end, the students may have engaged anxious discourses about the threat of Mandarin to Hong Kong's identity by constructing the ethnolinguistic border of Mandarin as encroaching from the north. On the other hand, Lai (2013) notes that in Hong Kong's linguistic landscape, simplified Chinese – the script used in mainland China and associated with Mandarin

– 'appears with more noticeable frequency in areas further north, indicating stronger main-land influence closer to the border' (p. 260). The youths may have brought personal obser-vations of this to the task.

Reproducing and contesting official language ideology

It is also notable that 16 of the 41 maps only identified English and some variety of Chinese, and were entirely silent on other languages (Figure 6). It appears that the folk linguistic perceptions of these youths lacked detail. This could be explained by the teenagers' daily routines rotating around the home, school, and extra-curricular activities, whereby they may not regularly encounter linguistic diversity. However, we also note that indexes of multilin-gualism in public spaces – whether this be the linguistic landscape, migrants, or even being attended to by domestic workers – is ubiquitous. This suggests that the students were prob-ably aware of more diversity than they illustrated, but reproduced the dominant state-spon-sored discourse about the relationship between Chinese and English (see discussion above) as the primary linguistic description of Hong Kong. This discourse is seemingly so pervasive that it structured these 16 maps, even though the students completed the maps directly after a discussion about New York City and diversity-in-practice despite ideology.

In other cases, the official discourse was challenged. Whereas that discourse's treatment of Chinese varieties is limited to Cantonese and Mandarin, Hakka was represented on 13 maps, as well as Hokkien and Teochew on 2 maps, and Shanghainese, Minnan, Weitan, Fujianese and Taiwanese on 1 map each. These youths especially brought attention to

Figure 6. Example of map reproducing official language ideology.

Hakka as a local indigenous language, even though it is spoken by a very small minority of people, by providing it spatial parity with Mandarin. This is a pertinent sociopolitical observation. In as much as these students represented Mandarin, as the language of their sovereign government, they also legitimised Hakka as a core contributor – in ideology if not in practice – to their constructions of Hong Kong (Figure 7). In one case, a student even represented Minnan, Weitou, and Hakka as minority Chinese languages but excluded Mandarin (Figure 8). These maps speak to the rise of localism in Hong Kong. The notion is that in as much as Hong Kong is becoming politically Chinese, Hong Kongers have also turned to, and seek to express, their local culture and values. As Heunggongyahn 香港人 (Hong Kong people) (Veg, 2017), this localism includes disconnect and non-identification with mainland culture and politics. The maps therefore provided a space for the sociolinguistic reproduction of localism.

Chinese, Cantonese, or Mandarin?

For some students, the maps provided an opportunity to assert or resist the Chinese mainland ideology that the term *Chinese* is synonymous with – and only with – Mandarin to the exclusion of other Chinese varieties. This is about more than China having instituted Mandarin as its national language. Non-Mandarin Chinese varieties are, in popular discourse, constructed not as languages in their own right but as dialects of Mandarin. This is despite matters of mutual intelligibility. In official Chinese ideology, Mandarin is a symbol of Chinese 'homogeneity and uniformity' (Dong, 2009, p. 117) whereby dialectal fragmentation has
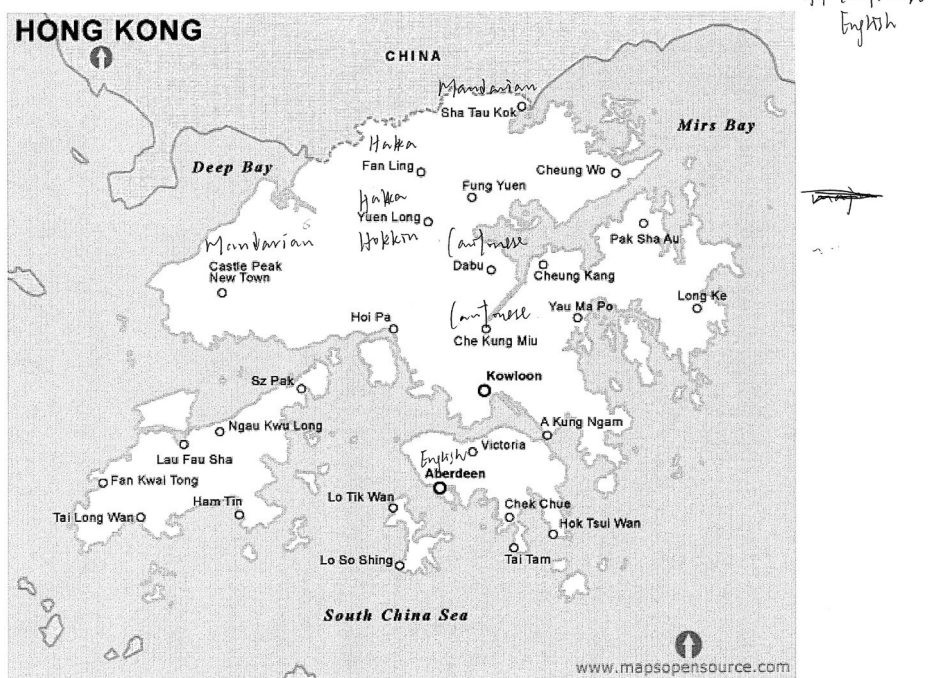

Figure 7. Example of map challenging dominant ideology with Hakka.

Figure 8. Map excluding Mandarin in favour of Chinese minority languages.

been seen as jeopardising China's cohesion. Positioning non-Mandarin varieties as dialects of Mandarin asserts linguistic unity in ideology if not in practice, and reaffirms the overriding status of Mandarin as the single bona fide Chinese language. This perception is also shared in the broader Chinese diaspora. Malaysian-Chinese communities, for example, have elevated Mandarin to index Chinese ethnicity and ancestry, despite it not being a language of historic migrations. Nonetheless, an epistemology exists, at least amongst Chinese-Malaysians, that Mandarin is the mother tongue of all ethnic Chinese people, irrespective of actual proficiency (cf. Albury, 2017). This becomes a core reference in the linguistic identity of individuals. Under such thinking, if all Chinese varieties can only ever amount to Mandarin dialects, Mandarin can by default be considered synonymous with the term *Chinese*. In Hong Kong, the strained political context means equating *Chinese* with *Mandarin* is especially contentious.

It was therefore salient that the majority of youths identified Cantonese and Mandarin separately, whereby the cognitive availability of this delineation was acted upon. Doing so can be seen as the discursive affirmation that Cantonese is indeed Cantonese, and neither Mandarin nor part of a homogenous notion of *Chinese*. These youths, it seems, reasserted a Hong Kong linguistic identity that ensured the language of Hong Kong was not conflated with that of mainlanders. In one case, a youth even challenged dominant discourse by describing Cantonese as *Chinese* yet still distinct from Mandarin (Figure 9). This can be understood as a protest to presupposing that *Chinese* must have a mainland-centric definition, and as

the student's quest to redefine what *Chinese* can mean. Figure 10, on the other hand, shows the map given by the only student who equated Chinese with Mandarin. This student still included Cantonese but it is not known if the student assumed Cantonese to be a dialect. Alternatively, the student may have used the map as a protest against Hong Kong's handover
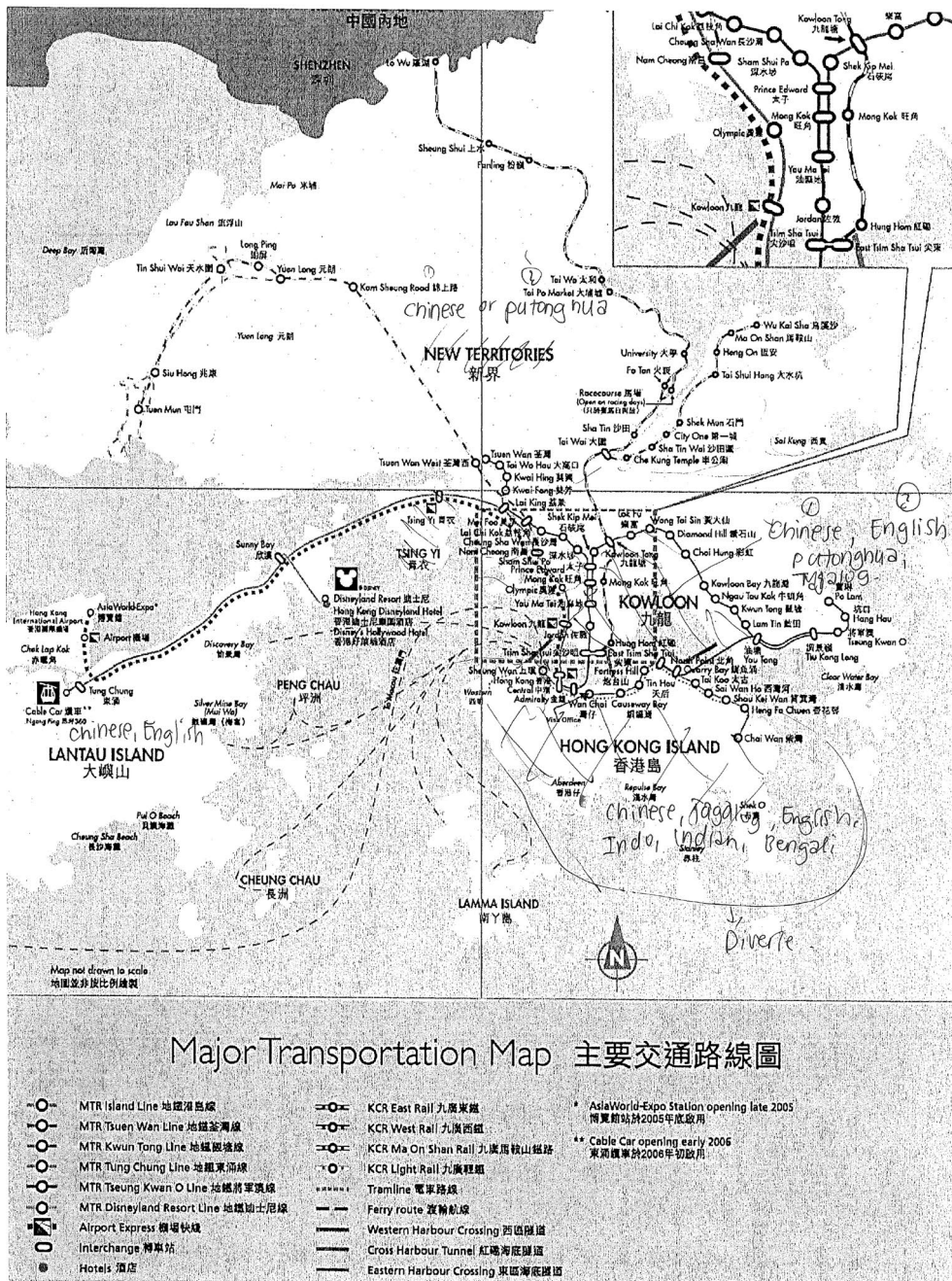

Figure 9. 'Chinese' as 'Cantonese'.

Figure 10. 'Chinese' as 'Mandarin'.

by intentionally disassociating Cantonese from *Chinese*, whereby *Chinese* indexes the mainland.

Marginalising blue-collar languages

Our final reflection is that the majority of youths excluded from their maps the languages of non-permanent residents, such of Filipino and Indonesian domestic helpers, who tend to be overrepresented in the non-professional, non-local work force. One could argue that knowledge about these languages lacked detail or was unavailable. However, a critical interpretation of these omissions is that they do indeed feature in metalinguistic awareness given they are ubiquitous in Hong Kong media and public spaces, but were excluded through the workings of broader social ideological forces. This exclusion may parallel the ongoing discrimination and discursive marginalisation of Hong Kong's lower income workforce. This discrimination is well documented in scholarship and the media. Ladegaard (2012), for example, describes the narratives of Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong as one of powerlessness and suppression, whereby a Chinese tradition of keeping in-house maids has now translated into a belief that foreign domestic workers are 'to be subservient and humble and obey their master without question' (p. 451). When discussing South Asian migrants, Erni

and Leung (2014) even argue that racism and cultural indifference are core values within Hong Kong's Cantonese cultural dominance. As for African migrants, Mathews (2011) explains they are Hong Kong's 'feared "other"' (p. 61). Discrimination in Hong Kong has attracted international attention. The United Nations has called Hong Kong to task over its treatment of ethnic minority children in its public-school system (Lum, 2018). The concern is that the social and linguistic needs of non-Chinese children are overlooked, including the poor provision of Cantonese language classes. This impedes integration with the Chinese majority, resulting in societal fragmentation along ethnic lines.

As such, we believe that the omission of these blue-collar worker languages from the folk linguistic maps sooner speaks to the forces of discrimination and marginalisation than to actual metalinguistic awareness. Indeed, Bun (2006) explains that although discrimination against these workers is rampant, it is 'largely unarticulated and undocumented in Hong Kong. Making people invisible is one way of marginalizing and socially excluding them' (p. 287). This invisibility was seemingly reproduced in the maps. These critical views align with reflections from Law and Lee (2012) that although transnationalism is inherent to Hong Kong's development into *Asia's World City*, the city can be better described as a cultural pluralism. People and cultures live side-by-side, rather than in an integrated melting pot, and marginalisation remains common.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that the geolinguistic principles of perceptual dialectology can be applied to folk linguistic research that elicits metalinguistic awareness of societal multilingualism, and we called this perceptual multilingualism. In Hong Kong, a cohort of high school students showed different levels of available, detailed, and accurate awareness about what languages are spoken in Hong Kong, and that the vast majority of them felt that this linguistic diversity has geographic characteristics. The availability of knowledge about dominant language ideology which especially focuses on the vexed relationship between Cantonese, Mandarin, and English permeated almost half the maps. Nonetheless, the geolinguistic dimensions of other maps were also detailed. Here we found that shared perceptions of the city's demography – situated within broader knowledge of colonial history, economics, tourism, and migration – meant that the youths depicted specific areas as hosting speakers of specific languages. English, for example, was by far the most commonly attributed language to the international financial district. Rural areas were assigned the local Indigenous language Hakka, and the languages of white-collar expatriate workers and tourists were dotted across Hong Kong in hubs known to host foreigners. The northern reaches of the region were perceived – albeit perhaps inaccurately – as more Mandarin than other areas of Hong Kong.

Beyond discussing these maps as representations of what was known or not about societal multilingualism, we positioned the maps as discourses to be analysed critically. We found that the content of the maps was in dialectic relationship to sociopolitical narratives in Hong Kong whereby the task of mapping societal multilingualism gave the youths as a semiotic space to elevate or disguise knowledge claims which in turn reproduced and challenged language ideologies, inequalities, and hegemonies. These included the assertion of Cantonese as a distinct language rather than a Chinese dialect, and the exclusion of Mandarin in defining central Hong Kong. Although these constructions are empirically unreliable, they

may index sociopolitical discourses, including anxiety about Hong Kong's handover to Beijing and the increasing influence of mainland culture. The maps also commonly omitted the languages of Filipino and Indonesian domestic workers. This may be due to unavailable folk linguistic knowledge, though it may also be interpreted as the reproduction of discriminatory ideology. Ultimately, our critical approach to the maps allowed for the identification and elucidation of social power relations embedded in the youths' epistemic constructions about multilingualism.

Beyond the empirical insights this paper has offered, we believe that perceptual multilingualism can be applied in many more ways and in many more situations. Of course, the mapping exercise can be a tool for surveying metalinguistic awareness of diversity in any multilingual society, motivated by locally-relevant questions that warrant such research. Much value could come from also interviewing participants and tasking them to reflect on their maps. This would allow researchers to better understand the maps through the participants' own explanations and motivations. This may include discussing how the task was approached, questioning participants on specific aspects of their maps, identifying any extra knowledge that is actually held but was not represented on the maps, and therefore more robustly accounting for the languages and people who fall within and outside the parameters of metalinguistic awareness. In other cases, mapping may help to survey, for example, the salience of Indigenous languages – such as in Australia or Canada – in the national psyche. This could support broader research into the state of ethnic relations and public engagement with Indigeneity during processes of postcolonial reconciliation. What is more, perceptual multilingualism could be researched using purely qualitative approaches. This may be through conversations with community members in and about a multilingual society, possibly guided by topics such as the society's language policies or its multilingual linguistic landscape (Albury, 2021). Perceptual multilingualism could even be researched through indirect approaches. Specific discourses or texts, such as policy documents, political debates, journalistic media, or literary works, could be investigated through discourse analytical techniques to reveal their apparent epistemic parameters and treatment of multilingualism in their host societies.

Researching perceptual multilingualism need not assume the critical approach we took. Mapping exercises may be useful within citizen sociolinguistics whereby data valuable to the academy is collected by community members who, with guidance and advice, are tasked to investigate or represent their knowledge about local sociolinguistic affairs (Svendsen, 2018). Sketching out the multilingualism of a community through citizen sociolinguistics speaks to the postmodern decentring of knowledge authority in describing the social world, such that grassroots perspectives are given a voice in knowledge narratives. It can also shed light on the linguistic and ethnic make-up of a community in the absence of census data, and in turn inform academics designing and tailoring their research projects. Perceptual multilingualism may also be usefully pursued outside academic work. Mapping multilingualism could serve as a useful pedagogical instrument for school teachers seeking to engage their pupils with matters of cultural diversity. In this sense, maps might serve as anchors for pedagogical discourses about diversity, with the view that pedagogy and conversation is maximised when oriented in a task (Mertz & Yovel, 2009).

In any case, we hope to have introduced perceptual multilingualism as a research paradigm open to diverse methodologies. In as much as people have knowledge about dialectal

diversity, so too do people claim to know some things about societal multilingualism. Perceptual multilingualism is therefore well-placed, we feel, to contribute to folk linguistics and grass-roots investigations of societal multilingualism.

Disclosure statement

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Notes on contributors

Nathan John Albury, PhD, is a policy advisor and sociolinguist at Leiden University in the Netherlands. His research focuses on the politics of societal multilingualism at the metalevel and through emic community perspectives on diversity.

Max Diaz, EdD, is an Instructor in the Department of English at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Dr Diaz's research focuses on educational technology, foreign language learning and teaching anxiety, and anxiety related to technology usage among teachers.

ORCID

Nathan John Albury ⓘD http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3471-4939

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Appendix 1: Lesson plan

Lesson plan: High-school student orientation Faculty of Humanities, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
19 July 2018, 3 × 1-hour sessions
Presenters: (Author) & (Author)

We're all linguists, aren't we?

15.00–15.05	Welcome and introduction
15.05–15.10	**What is multilingualism?** • A cognitive phenomenon. • A communicative practice. • Linguistic diversity in society.
15.10–15.15	**Class discussion of societal multilingualism using linguistic landscape** • Display various images of linguistic landscape in Asia (see below). • Ask the students to guess which languages are represented. • Ask the students to guess which country the signs are in.
15.15–15.30	**Urban multilingualism** • Ask the students the critical question whether countries and cities speak one language (raising and challenging one-country, one-language ideology). • Show and discuss with students maps of New York of 2nd and 3rd languages per borough (see article text for maps).
15.30–16.00	**Activity** • Give the students a map of Hong Kong. Display the same map, but much larger, on a white board for the class to see. • Ask the students 'Can we represent different languages in Hong Kong like we can in New York? If so, show on the map. If not, write why not'. • Ask the students to also put each of their entries onto a post-it note and then stick that post-it note on the corresponding location on the map on the whiteboard. • When finished, the students gather around the whiteboard map and see/reflect on/discuss the collated responses of the class as a whole. • Hold a semi-structured chat with the group about whether they are surprised or not, do they agree with other students, what is missing etc.