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Linguistic Hegemony or Linguistic Capital? Internationalization and English-medium Instruction at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK)

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Abstract

Being a former British colony, Hong Kong is now a Special Administrative Region of China and a bustling knowledge economy. Its manpower needs require a high level of competence in English and Chinese, the latter consisting of the regional vernacular Cantonese, and the national language Putonghua (Mandarin) on which standard written Chinese is based. Since both Chinese varieties are just as important as English in Hong Kong, the postcolonial language policy came to be known as 'biliteracy and trilingualism'. For Cantonese-dominant students, however, neither English nor Putonghua is easy to learn. This chapter provides an interpretive review of the controversy surrounding the bilingual policy of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) from 2004, a university which is bound by law to use Chinese as "the principal language of instruction" since it was founded in 1963. Our analysis will focus on the extent to which the spread of English in higher education in Hong Kong is perceived as hegemony or a form of linguistic capital. We will also briefly discuss whether English constitutes a threat to the vitality of the local and regional vernacular, Cantonese.

Introduction

The global spread of English has disrupted the local language ecologies of multilingual societies to different extents. English is now virtually the preferred language of natural sciences regardless of the scientists' language background, as shown in their preference in presenting and publishing their research findings. Business subjects and economic sciences are following this trend. The higher the level of study (e.g. doctoral level), the more heavily dependent university teachers and researchers are on English terminologies.

How does an international university cope with the language needs of its staff and students? International universities, which are by definition multilingual, are clearly in need of a coherent language policy, although as Phillipson (2009) has pointed out, this is an area where more research is badly needed (see, e.g., Cots, 2008). Phillipson considers the offering of courses (exclusively) in English at different European universities a pandemic rather than a panacea, a trend which is almost like a reflex reaction of university administrators and academics to forces

of internationalization. It gives English an unprecedented status and its native speakers undue advantages, with the disruption of the local language ecologies as a consequence.

This chapter provides an interpretive review of the controversies surrounding the language of instruction policy of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) since 2004. Being one of the eight government-funded tertiary or higher education institutions (HEIs) in Hong Kong, CUHK is unique in that the use of Chinese as the principal language of instruction is enshrined in the Chinese University of Hong Kong Ordinance when it was officially founded in 1963. The controversies in the past few years were triggered by the university management's decision to offer more courses across a wide range of disciplines in English. The tensions created by the societal needs for both Chinese (the vernacular Cantonese and written Chinese) and English will be discussed with a view to addressing the question, to what extent the predominance of English in higher education is viewed as hegemony or linguistic capital, and whether English constitutes a threat to the local and regional vernacular, Cantonese. The body of data collected for this study includes primarily published reports and monographs, press materials, and extensive commentaries produced by staff, students and alumni of CUHK in the form of e-forums which are downloadable from the Internet. It is hoped that this chapter will have some reference value to other researchers, in Hong Kong and beyond, who are confronted with a similar task of formulating their own language policy for their HEI (see also Cots, Doiz et al., and van der Walt & Kidd in this volume for further discussion on linguistic strains in other multilingual HEIs).

Biliteracy and trilingualism: HKSAR's language-in-education policy

With over seven million inhabitants (January 2011) living on a land space of barely 1,054 square kilometers (425 square miles; Hong Kong Tourism Board), the Hong Kong Special

Administrative Region is one of the most densely populated places in the world. Over 95 percent of the population is ethnic Chinese, with the majority – about nine out of 10 – having Cantonese as their usual (home) language.

For over 150 years until 30 June 1997, Hong Kong was a British colony. Headed by a British Governor supported by a relatively small number of officials from Britain, successive colonial governments relied on a group of bilingual Chinese elite supported by bilingual civil servants for its day-to-day administration. English was the sole official language until 1974, when Chinese became a co-official language after a strong bottom-up social movement. Until the late 1950s, Hong Kong thrived on entrepôt trade. In the next two decades, a strong manufacturing sector became the lifeline of the local economy. From the early 1980s onwards, as the manufacturing base gradually moved up north across the Chinese border in search of cheaper labour, the main economic activities began to take another turn towards those characteristic of a knowledge-based economy. Among the most vibrant sectors are banking, investment and finance, imports/exports, tele-communications, transport and logistics, tourism, hotels, restaurants, insurance, retail trade, and real estate services.

Another important development in the 1980s is China's gradual transformation from a self-secluded communist state to an increasingly export-oriented economy. Under this open-door policy, the Beijing government was able to steer the poverty-stricken nation toward political stability and navigate an uncharted and hitherto unheard-of policy called 'Socialism with Chinese Characteristics'. From the economic point of view, this policy has produced impressive results by any standard. Revenues were generated to drive the Four Modernizations in agriculture, industry, national defence, and science and technology. By 2001, the Chinese economy was firmly integrated into the global economy, witness her accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO). The Beijing Olympics 2008, and the World Exposition 2010 two years later, were two global, landmark events which did much to showcase China's leadership in sports and socioeconomic accomplishments in a new century. In February, 2011, China overtook Japan as the world's second-largest economy as measured by its gross domestic product. The rise of China as a major player in world politics and the global economy has considerable implications for Hong Kong's manpower needs. Given that cross-border business opportunities and transactions with non-Cantonese-speaking mainlanders take place increasingly in Putonghua (Mandarin), pragmatically-minded Hongkongers have little choice but to expand their linguistic repertoire to include at least some Putonghua (Poon, 2010).

In April 2009, six pillar industries for future development were identified by a Task Force on Economic Challenges (TFEC), namely: testing and certification, medical services, innovation and technology, cultural and creative industries, environmental industries, and (international) educational services (GovHK, 2009). In addition to being seen as crucial for Hong Kong's sustained vitality and further development, these six industries have one thing in common: they

all require a fairly high level of proficiency in English, Putonghua (Mandarin) and written Chinese, in addition to Cantonese.

The above local and regional socioeconomic developments have an important bearing on the manpower needs of this self-styled "Asia's World City", including the needs for languages. English is regarded by Hongkongers as an important form of linguistic capital, which is precious for sustaining the economic vitality of this former colony (Morrison & Lui, 2000). Putonghua (Mandarin) is no less important, given its status as the national language of China, and the lingua franca among 'dialect speakers' in Greater China (Li, 2006). Both languages are generally looked upon by local parents as indispensable assets as their children struggle to climb up the social ladder.

Access to tertiary education in Hong Kong: Minimal requirements for English

Given the stake of biliterate and trilingual abilities in Hong Kong's manpower needs, it is not surprising that huge amounts of government funding in language education are invested in education, from primary to tertiary (Miller & Li, 2008; cf. Lin & Man, 2009). Competition for a place in one of the eight government-funded tertiary or higher education institutions (HEIs) is fierce. Until September 2012, the success rate in terms of government-funded university places is capped at 18 percent. One of the major challenges is the English language (Lin, 2008; Poon, 2009); successful applicants are required to have attained grade E or above in the Advanced Supplementary (AS) Level subject 'Use of English', which is roughly equivalent to an overall *International English Language Testing System* (IELTS) score of 5.5 to 6.0, and which corresponds more or less with the lower end of B2 level in the Common European Framework of Reference (IELTS homepage).

The Chinese University of Hong Kong: A case study of university bilingual policy

Founded officially through legislation in 1963, the Chinese University of Hong Kong (hereafter CUHK) was established to cater for Chinese middle school leavers' aspirations for post-secondary education, especially those who were recent arrivals from Mainland China seeking refuge in Hong Kong in the late 1950s. They had too little knowledge of English to be qualified for a place at the English-medium Hong Kong University, the only university in colonial Hong Kong at that time. CUHK was originally a federal university with only three member colleges: Chung Chi, New Asia, and United. By 2011, after expansion and development for over four decades, CUHK has evolved into a comprehensive university with nine colleges, 62 academic departments and eight faculties, offering a great variety of disciplinary and inter-disciplinary undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes, including Ph.D. In 2011-12, CUHK is ranked 151 in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings.

Of the eight government-funded HEIs, CUHK is unique in that it has a statutory mandate to teach through the medium of Chinese:

> It is declared that The Chinese University of Hong Kong, in which the ***principal language of instruction shall be Chinese***, shall continue to (i) assist in the preservation, dissemination, communication and increase in knowledge; (ii) provide regular courses of instruction in the humanities, the sciences and other branches of learning of a standard required and expected of a University of the highest standing; and (iii) stimulate the intellectual and cultural development of Hong Kong and thereby to assist in promoting its economic and social welfare. (Clause (e), Preamble of The Chinese University of Hong Kong Ordinance, cited in *Report of the Committee on Bilingualism*, paragraph 3.3, p.7, emphasis added)

To this day, this fine detail continues to be felt in the Chinese name of the university: 中文大學, literally 'Chinese-Language University'. In practice, however, English is quite often used in many disciplines other than Chinese and Chinese Culture, Chinese History, and Chinese Philosophy. Until 2004-05, the language of interaction in lectures, tutorials or laboratory sessions at CUHK was left more or less to the teacher and students at will. This is partly evidenced by the analysis of survey data on the language of instruction in 2004-05, which were collected by the CUHK Registry upon the request of the Committee of Bilingualism. It was found that:

> For instance, in science and engineering subjects, English was ***generally*** used for all forms of teaching and learning, except laboratory sessions where Chinese was more widely used. For medical studies, while English was used for lectures, tutorials, reading materials, assignments and examinations, Cantonese was also used during clinical sessions and individual supervision. For the Hotel and Tourism Management courses, lectures were ***mainly*** conducted in English, but English, Cantonese and Putonghua were used during internship. (ibid., paragraph 6.2, p.12, emphasis added)

Whereas English appeared to be more consistently used in medical studies, in other disciplines from science and engineering to hotel and tourism management, English is not used exclusively. What remains unclear, which was apparently not addressed by this survey, is the extent of code-alternation between English and Cantonese (and possibly other Chinese varieties as well) in class by the teacher and students. This point is crucial given the significant role of Cantonese in helping bilingual teachers to explicate to their students whatever technical concepts or theoretical constructs that are too complicated to be taught entirely in English (Flowerdew et al., 1998, 2000; cf. Li, 2011; Li & Tse, 2002).

The laissez-faire practice of allowing teachers and students to use Chinese or English at will or, where necessary, to negotiate the most desirable language of instruction was at stake when, in 2004, the newly appointed CUHK Vice-Chancellor Lawrence Lau, a world-renowned economist,

appealed for offering more courses in English as part of a grand vision and mega plan for the fifth decade (2004-2014) of the university, namely, to be recognized internationally for its excellence in research. Little did the former Chair Professor of Stanford University realize that such a visionary strategic re-positioning of CUHK as an international university shortly after he assumed office in July 2004 would trigger a prolonged dispute and partly emotionally charged debate between the university management on one hand, and quite a few academics, students and multifarious local and international networks of CUHK alumni on the other.

Lawrence Lau's vision, which came to be known as 求學自由行 ('education without borders'), was conceived against two important government policy initiatives in the higher education sector. First, starting from 2005-06, all undergraduate degree programmes offered by the eight publicly funded tertiary institutions in Hong Kong would be open to over four million eligible Middle School leavers in Mainland China to apply. Second, to encourage local tertiary institutions to admit non-local (mainland Chinese and international) students, the Education Bureau (EDB) set up a matching grant of five million dollars (ca. US$0.6m) per tertiary institution. The funding could be used to attract bright non-local students to study in Hong Kong (e.g. scholarship scheme or student exchange). These goals were consistent with the Vice-Chancellor's vision of promoting outgoing exchange and intercultural encounters with their non-local peers through internationalization which, in his view, was key to enriching students' learning experience and broadening their knowledge horizons.

From the Vice-Chancellor's point of view, however, toward the goal of internationalization one obstacle had to be overcome: the language of instruction. This was seen as the root cause of two main problems. First, student exchange agreements, which tended to operate reciprocally on a one-on-one basis, would be difficult to sustain if incoming exchange students could not find enough English-medium courses to study. This in turn would affect CUHK students' outgoing exchange opportunities. Second, without sufficient English-medium courses, CUHK would fail to attract bright students from other parts of the world, which would be an impediment toward enhancing CUHK's global visibility to rival world-class universities such as Oxford, Cambridge, and Yale. Until 2004, the majority of the eight per cent of non-local students came from Putonghua-dominant students from Mainland China. To enhance CUHK's appeal to English-speaking international students, therefore, several measures were proposed, including to increase the percentage of English-medium courses, and to urge CUHK students to make a greater effort to improve their English and Putonghua. Advances in these two fronts were seen as crucial toward CUHK's strategic objective of increasing the percentage of non-local students from 8% (n=280) to 25% (n=700), targeting students in East Asia, Southeast Asia, North America and Europe in addition to Mainland China. The Vice-Chancellor made it clear that, far from undermining CUHK's emphasis of and mission to promote traditional Chinese culture, CUHK would strengthen teaching and research in Sinology, promote Chinese culture by encouraging

foreign students to study Chinese classics in translation such as ‘The Dream of the Red Chamber’, ‘The Three Kingdoms’ and ‘Journey to the West’.

To assess whether there are enough resources within the university’s infrastructure to support the internationalization policy, in the fall semester of 2004-05, a directive was issued from the Vice-Chancellor’s office requiring department heads to indicate whether their academic programmes would be ready to admit non-local (Mandarin Chinese and international) students. If so, a number of logistical conditions pertaining to the language of instruction had to be met:

(a) of the core courses in a degree programme, at least one group should be taught in English, including lectures, tutorials, and practice or laboratory sessions;
(b) there should be enough English-medium electives for non-local students to choose from; and
(c) for English-medium courses, the exam paper and other assessed activities must be in English.

The directive emphasized that departments which did not wish to admit non-local students would not suffer from any cut in resources, and there was no intention to force departments or staff to switch the teaching medium to English. In response to this directive, most of the university programmes opted to admit non-local students.

The Vice-Chancellor’s move toward internationalization triggered vehement opposition from various stakeholder groups, notably the Students Union, some academic and teaching staff, and the alumni, including many residing outside of Hong Kong. After students learned about the content of the directive, the Students Union wrote angry emails in part to alert their peers of that important policy issue, but also to query the legitimacy of that hastily executed language of instruction policy without any prior consultation with staff or students. It was dismissed as 偽國際化 (‘pseudo internationalization’), with the policy directive being handed down in an undemocratic, unreasonable and irresponsible manner. Some students ran a signature collection campaign using a big poster carrying the rallying slogan 哭中大 (‘Cry for Chinese U’), and within weeks collected hundreds of signatures denouncing pseudo internationalization. This campaign was later extended globally and obtained the support of over 800 signatories (as of 15 February 2005), including a few famous CUHK professors, scholars at mainland Chinese universities and CUHK alumni overseas. A few student activists vented their anger at the 2004 CUHK Graduation Ceremony, where a petition letter was addressed to the Vice-Chancellor in person in front of many news-hungry journalists. The university management was accused of deviating from the University’s founding principle, namely to sustain, develop and promote traditional Chinese cultural heritage and language, and violating the pledge as stated in the Preamble of the Chinese University Ordinance. It was further pointed out that since departments

were only allowed to admit non-local students if sufficient English-medium courses would be offered, some departments did not dare to say no out of concerns that resources would be cut.

An e-forum was set up on the CUHK Intranet, giving focus and coherence to the collective voices of the opposition. Some of the contributions were later put together in a monograph published by 中文大學校友關注大學發展小組 (‘The Chinese University Alumni Concern Group on University Development’), or 校友關注組 (‘Alumni Concern Group’) in short. The monograph bears a satirical title: 令大學頭痛的中文 (‘That which causes headache to the University: The Chinese language ’, see University Alumni Concern Group 1, 2007). Two main arguments are put forward to denounce the ‘pseudo internationalization’ policy. First, over 90 per cent of CUHK students are Cantonese-dominant local students; neither English nor Putonghua is their first language. Given robust research findings worldwide showing that learning is most effective when one is learning through their first language, a new policy which is biased toward using English as the medium of teaching and learning is counter-productive, in that it creates learning problems for local students, stifles their intellectual interests, and violates their educational needs in Cantonese. Second, as a local publicly funded university, CUHK should first and foremost serve the needs of local students; accordingly it defies reason why CUHK should attract international students and accommodate to their language needs by artificially increasing the number of English-medium courses. A few contributions remind the reader of the tough battle back in the early 1970s during the colonial era, leading to Chinese being recognized as a co-official language in 1974. Many were worried that traditional Chinese values would be lost over time if Chinese should stop functioning as the default language of teaching and learning. In the long run, the so-called bilingual policy would in reality be lop-sided, resulting in English being valorized at the expense of Cantonese and written Chinese, with discrimination against using Cantonese (or other Chinese varieties) as a classroom language being an inevitable consequence.

Such unexpected reactions on the part of students, staff and CUHK alumni prompted the university management to set up a Committee on Bilingualism in February 2005 to review the university’s language policy with specific reference to a concern raised by many, including the query, “whether higher education would experience ‘overdominance’ of the English language, potentially resulting in the decline of the Chinese language in the face of diversification and internationalization of higher education” (*Report of the Committee on Bilingualism*, paragraph 1.1, p.5). The Committee on Bilingualism was also tasked with making recommendations for change where appropriate, in keeping with the mission of bilingual education as follows:

> To be globally competitive, CUHK must acknowledge the importance of English as an international language. At the same time, the University must also honour its mission and re-affirm its commitment to the promotion of Chinese culture and language, as well as its

> dedication to the preservation and development of indigenous culture and language in Hong Kong. (ibid., paragraph 2, p.6)

The key, it would appear, is to address "how CUHK should position Chinese and English in teaching (ibid., paragraph 1.1, p.5). After conducting five meetings and six consultations from 2005, the final report (October 2007) was submitted to the Vice-Chancellor, who according to a press release praised it for its "broad and long-term perspective" and hailed it as "a set of forward-looking and strategic principles that align with the unique linguistic environment of Hong Kong" that it offers. In the main, the Report recommends that "depending on the nature of the academic subject, the language used at lectures should be set by the Boards of various departments" (clause 14) following the principles laid out in clauses 14.1 to 14.4. Accordingly, culture-specific topics in Chinese – from Language and Culture to History and Philosophy – should be taught in Chinese (clause 14.2). In contrast, those topics which have a cross-cultural character, in particular the humanities and social sciences, may be taught in either Chinese or English (clause 14.3). Local topics with a clear focus on local society, politics and culture are better taught in the local language (clause 14.4). The boards of academic departments also have the discretion to exercise flexibility when deciding on the language of instruction for lectures, taking into account other factors such as "the language habits, the linguistic competence and the cultural background of the students and teachers, and has consulted the teachers concerned" (clause 15). Of the four cardinal principles, the most controversial is clause 14.1:

> For courses that are highly universal in nature, with little emphasis on cultural specificity, and have English as the predominant medium for academic expression and publication (such as courses in the natural sciences, life sciences and engineering sciences), English should be the preferred language for lectures so as to facilitate direct and accurate articulation of concepts, and to be in line with international practice.

The *Report of the Committee on Bilingualism* (2007) did little to placate its opponents' criticisms of the 'pseudo internationalization' policy. Two months after the Report was published, LI Yiu Kee, a third-year student of Political Science, filed an application for judicial review of his alma mater's bilingual policy, on the grounds that Chinese should be used as the language of instruction according to the 1963 Chinese University Ordinance. This turned out to be a long struggle. After four years and three legal battles, the same verdict was returned by the Court of First Instance (February 2009), the Court of Appeal (July 2010), and the Court of Final Appeal (September 2011), in that the Senate of the University has the autonomy and academic freedom "to control and direct the language of instruction" subject to the Council's monitoring, and that the Senate "is not restricted by any legal requirement that Chinese must be or remain the principal language of instruction" (*High Court rules in CUHK's favour on Judicial Review*, 9 February 2009).

Meanwhile, the University Alumni Concern Group published a second monograph in 2008, entitled 立此存照 對中大校政的批評和建議 ('For the record: Critique of and suggestions for the Chinese University management', see University Alumni Concern Group 2, 2008), where the bilingual policy is the first of six university management issues thematized. In this second monograph, the university management is portrayed as trying to get rid of the Chinese language quickly.

The row surrounding the CUHK bilingual policy presents an interesting case regarding two related questions: To what extent does the spread of English constitute a threat to the local language ecology and the ethnolinguistic vitality of the regional vernacular, Cantonese? And, is English dreaded for its global hegemony, or embraced for its empowering potential as a form of linguistic capital?

Discussion

The controversies surrounding the bilingual policy of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) epitomizes the dilemma and tension between Chinese (referring to the vernacular Cantonese and written Chinese which is modeled on Putonghua/Mandarin) and English in this former colony. The Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Lawrence Lau, who decided to step down in 2011 instead of seeking a second term of office, firmly believes that the internationalization of university education is a global trend, with competition for talents and resources getting more and more intense. As evidence, he cited the rapid expansion of English-medium courses at many universities in continental Europe (France and Germany) and East Asia (Japan and Korea). In his view, CUHK ran the risk of being marginalized if it did not follow suit. In one radio programme, Lau was quoted as saying:

> If CUHK does not position itself as an international university, if it cannot cultivate graduates who are conversant in Chinese (Cantonese and Putonghua) and English, and who possess a high level of cross-cultural awareness and intercultural competence, CUHK runs the risk of being marginalized for failing to attract talents and resources. English is the main language of academic exchange internationally, and so international universities cannot but valorize English. CUHK is no exception in this regard. (Reported in local daily *Ming Pao*, 17 February 2005; original in Chinese; my translation)

Notwithstanding his well-intentioned vision, Lau clearly underestimated the dilemma his Chinese staff and students are facing. Hardly anyone would dispute the pragmatic value of English in tertiary education. It is the carrier of new knowledge and, for that matter, the increasingly preferred language of publication by intellectuals and researchers to whom English is not a first language. But it is another matter whether Chinese students of English are linguistically capable and sufficiently well-versed to 'crack the code' of their lecturers in order to benefit from

cutting-edge knowledge in their field directly, without recourse to the vernacular, Cantonese. Except for a minority of students who are proficient in English, English as a medium of instruction is likely to be a challenge whether it is the first, second or foreign language of their lecturer. English-L1 lecturers with no awareness or training in delivering lectures to ESL / EFL students may speak too fast; their accent may not be easy to follow. On the other hand, the lectures of Chinese lecturers lecturing in English may not be any easier. In one e-forum on 'English-medium teaching', for example, many students expressed concerns about their professors' and tutors' English proficiency. The following are some examples (original in Chinese; my translation):

> "Many professors' English is very poor, what they speak cannot be called English, [you] can hardly follow what they say!"

> "Some tutors' English is more difficult to understand than what they teach, listening to their English which is incomprehensible to them, and teaching what they themselves don't understand, the whole class frowned [and felt frustrated]…."

A similar reservation is shared by another student at master's level, who was quoted as saying that some old [Chinese] professors felt ill-at-ease if they were to teach in English.

Apart from problems pertaining to the use of English by some lecturers and tutors, there are also problems at the receiving end. In the e-forums, some CUHK students felt their unsatisfactory academic results were partly due to their proficiency problems in English. The following is an instructive commentary in Chinese-English mixed code (italicized words in original; my translation):

> "I have studied [at CUHK] for three years, I write *paper* in English, follow *tutorial* in English, and attend *lecture* in English, but I don't perceive any progress in my English."

Another instructive example is adapted from a CUHK professor's comments in an e-forum (discipline not mentioned). In one of his courses, due to the presence of a couple of non-Chinese students, the language of instruction was changed to English. This triggered an exodus of one quarter of the local students, while those remaining students would ask him questions in Cantonese before the two non-Chinese students arrived. He used this anecdote to exemplify one dilemma posed by internationalization and a challenge faced by many lecturers like himself.

The dilemmas faced by different groups of stakeholders (university management, academic and teaching staff, Cantonese-dominant students, and multifarious networks of alumni cutting across different disciplinary areas and generations) are arguably rooted in the tension between Chinese and English at CUHK, which is unique in that it has inherited an institutional raison d'être of

teaching through the medium of Chinese, which may be Cantonese, Putonghua, or any other Chinese ‘dialect’ depending on the lecturer’s preference. The choice of Chinese as the “principal language of instruction” was not at all arbitrary when the Chinese University Ordinance was conceived in 1963. For over four decades, however, following the emergence of English as a de facto international language, this bilingual policy has been gradually eroded, to the point that Cantonese as a medium of teaching and learning can no longer be taken for granted. Those who are opposed to the Vice-Chancellor’s internationalization initiative as a proactive policy to admit more non-local students, tend to be those who see in the expansion of English-medium courses at CUHK as the onset of a downward path for using Chinese as a language of intellectualization, including understanding and producing knowledge, debating whose views come closer to truth or reality, conceptualizing theories, and appreciating miscellaneous objects and artefacts through the Chinese cultural lens. In essence, what is feared is a symbolic retreat of the Chinese language (Bourdieu, 1991) at a university which, to successive generations of its graduates and students, is known to have a heritage deeply rooted in Chinese language and culture. What the opponents of the internationalization initiative lament, is a projected loss of the symbolic values embodied and manifested in the Chinese language which, once lost for good when members of the CUHK community are no longer free to articulate their thoughts and views in Chinese, would risk triggering the loss of other Chinese-specific cultural, philosophical and aesthetic values and, consequently, the loss of Chinese identity.

It is interesting however that such concerns, which are articulated strongly, sometimes emotionally, by CUHK activists, including students, teachers and alumni, do not seem to be shared by their counterparts in other higher education institutions (HEIs) where English-medium instruction prevails, especially in disciplines which are “highly universal in nature”. In terms of scale, despite having generated a lot of media attention in the last few years, the ‘CUHK internationalization saga’ has remained very much a local – rather than societal – debate among various CUHK stakeholders. Several Google searches using miscellaneous keywords failed to yield any commentaries by academics from other local instructions showing concerns for using the Chinese language in university settings – unlike, for instance, in Denmark (see, e.g., Haberland, 2009; Preisler, 2009). One possible explanation is that other HEIs in Hong Kong do not have a ‘historical baggage’ of being bound by legislation to teach in Chinese (i.e., spoken Cantonese or other Chinese varieties, and written Chinese).

As for the debate at an ideological level, whether the growing presence of English constitutes evidence of its institutional hegemony (especially in postcolonial societies like Hong Kong) or popular reception as a form of ‘linguistic capital’, the CUHK internationalization saga shows that both views are supported, but to different extents. There is no question that for many students and alumni of CUHK, a shift in language of instruction from Cantonese and written Chinese to English would represent a symbolic retreat and loss of Chinese as a source of intellectualization, especially in disciplines which have a “universal” character. On the other hand, a relative lack of

similar concerns or support for that stance by staff and students in other sister institutions beyond CUHK seems to suggest that English is considered, if tacitly, quite acceptable as a medium for teaching and learning purposes at the tertiary level. Such a stance is not difficult to understand. To the extent that English is widely perceived as an indispensable asset in terms of gaining access to higher education or the ranks of professionals, a mastery of English helps one gain upward and outward mobility, and the use of English as a medium for teaching and learning in higher education is generally perceived as a catalyst toward that goal. From a more pragmatic perspective, so long as no prescriptive language-of-instruction policy is in place, bilingual teachers could always switch to the students' more familiar language if need be. This was more or less the policy before Lawrence Lau's internationalization initiative was introduced. In this light, rather than irrational paranoia or aversion toward teaching through the medium of English, perhaps the opponents' resistance to English medium of instruction could be interpreted as a concern for a loss of flexibility in addition to being a protest against the university management's infringement of bilingual teachers' rights for context-specific classroom language choice and use (Lin & Man, 2009).

The 'linguistic capital' analysis is also consistent with and supported by other evidence. Perhaps the most obvious evidence is popular social criticism of the mother tongue (i.e. Cantonese) education policy implemented since 1998, with many parents who could afford it reportedly voting with their feet by sending their child to a boarding school in an English-speaking country or queuing up for a place in a local English-medium international school or ESF (English Schools Foundation) school. The Hong Kong SAR government, on its part, continues to invest huge amounts of 'language enhancement' resources into the education sector to boost students' English proficiency at different levels, including the Workplace English Campaign (WEC), and the Common English Proficiency Assessment Scheme (CEPAS), whereby all graduating students taking the IELTS test are entitled to receiving full reimbursement of their test fees on condition that they agree to indicate in their transcript that they have taken the government-sponsored IELTS test (Miller & Li, 2008). Students may also seek additional tuition in one or more private tutorial centres such as Modern Education, British Council, Englishtown, and Wall Street Institute. The market success of these providers of English classes is partly reflected in flashy adverts that they put up in Chinese newspapers and train compartments, on TV, jumbo buses, and the Internet. Inside miscellaneous means of public transport such as buses and trains, typically after school, one could often find an eager parent or caregiver trying to help a child with the spelling and/or meaning of English vocabulary words or simple sentences. All this is arguably due to the fact that, as Hong Kong has evolved into a knowledge-based economy, a threshold standard of English is required for gaining access to higher education and an increasingly multilingual workplace.

No analysis of English popularly perceived as linguistic capital is complete without examining the role of the majority's usual language, Cantonese, and how it relates to its speakers'

ethnolinguistic identity. With no less than 55 million speakers worldwide, mainly in the Pearl River Delta and diasporas mainly in North America, Southeast Asia, Australia and New Zealand (Ethnologue, 2011; Lee & Li, in press), Cantonese is a vibrant regional vernacular whose vitality is sustained by its use in everyday communication and the electronic media, in miscellaneous artistic forms from movies and opera to Canto-pop and stand-up comedy. In addition, Cantonese is used as a medium of instruction from kindergarten to university in the two Special Administrative Regions, Hong Kong and Macao (but not in the rest of China). There is thus no question that the level of ethnolinguistic vitality of Cantonese is very high. All this helps explain why neither 'domain loss' (Haberland, 2005; cf. Ó Riagáin, 1997) nor the 'discourse of endangerment' regarding the continued well-being of Cantonese has attracted much attention beyond academia (but see Bauer, 2000; Li, 2000). Nor has there been any worry, beyond the 'pseudo internationalization discourse' among members of the CUHK community, of Cantonese/Chinese being rendered as an 'incomplete language' (Preisler, 2009). In short, while the six-year 'CUHK internationalization saga' has generated some concerns for linguistic hegemony among CUHK staff, students and alumni, for the rest of the local higher education sector, English is clearly embraced as a form of linguistic capital by all stakeholder groups (e.g. government, educationists from primary to tertiary, parents, students, etc.; Li, 2009b). The huge market demand for (good) English fuels the commodification of English, as is evidenced by burgeoning tutorial centers big and small, where a wide range of courses from pre-primary to adult education cater for the needs of learners at different levels.

Regarding the (pseudo) internationalization debate at CUHK, and its impact on the tertiary education sector in general, one key question is 'can English-medium courses be avoided?' Given that Hong Kong positions itself as "Asia's World City", and so long as two-way staff and student exchange is seen as a natural part of the university's routine teaching- and research-related activities as well as direction of development, it is difficult not to have at least some courses to be taught through the medium of English, including Chinese history, Chinese culture, and Chinese philosophy targeting non-Chinese students. Not doing so would result in graduating 'single-hoof horses' – graduates who are well-versed in engaging others in their respective areas of expertise in Cantonese, but would be sluggish once the participant structure or discourse shifts to other languages to include English. This is arguably counterproductive relative to the goal of promoting and disseminating traditional Chinese culture. Where local, course-specific language-of-instruction problems may arise due, for example, to the configuration of student mix and/or the lecturer's preferred language, so long as the lecturer in question has the autonomy to decide how best to deploy his or her linguistic resources to meet the needs of specific groups of students, the actual give-and-take in the classroom need not be rigidly confined by the label 'English-medium' or 'Chinese-medium'. Nor should it be a taboo if some Cantonese is used for sound pedagogical reasons in an English-medium course, or vice versa. We should trust the teacher with regard to language choice in their class, and teachers should be entrusted with the duty of teaching their course content effectively – in whatever (combination of) language(s) that,

in their judgment, works most satisfactorily pedagogically speaking. For content courses, beyond effective and inspiring delivery of course content, there should be no language-of-instruction concerns that would come back to haunt the teacher (e.g. violation of university language policy; allegations for teaching in a hybrid language, and the like). Quite the contrary, all university teachers who face the language-of-instruction problem should receive support from the university. To mitigate resistance against the internationalization initiative, two areas of staff training are worth exploring: induction to effective bilingual teaching strategies, and training to help academic and teaching staff cope with and prepare for the challenges arising from teaching their specialized subjects in English (e.g. providing English-medium-of-instruction training workshops). These would of course presuppose concerted efforts of one or more institutional support units to be tasked with looking after these areas of training as part of a truly well conceived university bilingual policy.

Conclusion

In the last two decades, Hong Kong has gradually evolved into a knowledge-based economy, which depends for its success in no small measure on the language and communication skills of a multilingual citizenry. This is the background to the Special Administrative Region's emphasis on biliteracy and trilingualism in its official language-in-education policy. While this goal post may sound lofty and not easy to attain for both linguistic and sociolinguistic reasons, there is no real alternative. One perennial problem is that for average Cantonese-dominant Hongkongers, neither English nor Putonghua is easy to learn (Li, 2009a, 2010).

The analysis of the CUHK internationalization saga above shows that, compared with other places where the spread of English is perceived by many local people and language policy makers as a threat to the vitality of local language(s) (see Cots, Doiz et al., and van der Walt & Kidd in this volume), Hong Kong is clearly different. Critical linguists may regard the policy-driven increase in the number of English-medium courses as evidence of yet another vindication of the global hegemony of English, but far more societal evidence points toward English being embraced as a form of linguistic capital which is crucial for sustaining the economic vitality of this former British colony, has great potential for enhancing the future prospects of university graduates, and the international standing of local universities.

In terms of language functions assigned to Cantonese in society as well as its role in education, there is little evidence that the expanding role of English (highly marked) and Putonghua (just beginning) in higher education takes place at the expense of Cantonese (Li, 2009b). Rather, both languages are embraced as useful linguistic capital for Hong Kong students.

One critical and crucial policy issue, as Bauer (2000) argues, is whether Cantonese will continue to be used as the medium of instruction (MoI) for teaching Chinese subjects from pre-primary to

tertiary levels – unlike elsewhere in Greater China (except Macau Special Administrative Region) where Putonghua is used as the MoI. Once Hong Kong children are no longer taught to read Chinese texts in Cantonese, this would be the start of a downward path in its ethnolinguistic vitality among its speakers. As of today, there is some indication that the language of instruction for the Chinese Language subject at the primary and secondary levels will gradually shift to Putonghua, but there is as yet no mention of Putonghua replacing Cantonese as the language of instruction in other Chinese subjects. In the long run, however, this may well be the real battlefield where the defence against the loss of Cantonese and language shift will play out.

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