# Language and Identity in Hong Kong: "In-betweenness," Its Complexity

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**Abstract:** In the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (hereinafter "Hong Kong") of the People's Republic of China (hereinafter "China"), the relationship between language and identity is very complicated due to the sovereignty shift in 1997. Therefore, the real transition might be a matter of language and identity, not of sovereignty. Hong Kong people (Hong Kong residents speaking Cantonese as usual) continue to experience "in-betweenness." In the colonial days, they used to be "in-between" Britain and Hong Kong. Nowadays, they are "in-between" mainland China and Hong Kong. Unlike other Asian countries, even in the postcolonial era, their experience is not "independence," but just a "sovereignty shift." Therefore, their identity is often not "fixed," but "floating" (Tam 2005, 168). This paper explores, from a postcolonial perspective, Hong Kong's complexity reflected in the people's languages in their own unique way.

**Keywords:** *In-betweenness, negotiation, postcoloniality, Hong Kong identity, Hong Kong language policy*

## 1. Introduction

In 1997, Hong Kong sovereignty was transferred from British colonial rule to reunification with mainland China. This sovereignty shift, at the same time, brought about a language shift among Hong Kong people. In the process, Hong Kong's identity is becoming increasingly complex.

This paper aims to examine how such a shift in sovereignty has influenced Hong Kong's language and identity. Firstly, two factors (policies) that contribute to its complexity are explained, along with the definition and phases of identity. Secondly, it is illustrated how each factor contributes to the complexity faced by Hong Kong people in the postcolonial context. In this paper, "Hong Kong identity" is defined as "'Us' differentiated from the mainland(ers)" (Tanigaki 1998, 74).

The paper is not a prescription that poses or solves some problems of the Hong Kong linguistic society. It is only a description which reveals the complexity, "in-betweenness" of Hong Kong, from the postcolonial theoretical point of view and a practical analysis using a questionnaire.

## 2. Two Policies

The two policies leading to the complexity of Hong Kong's identity are referred to here.

## (1) "Biliterate and Trilingual" Policy

After the 1997 Handover, the Hong Kong government required Hong Kong people to become biliterate (in Standard Written Chinese and English) and trilingual (in Cantonese, English and Putonghua) (Phillipson et al. 2010, 2). In the colonial days, the official languages of Hong Kong were only Cantonese and English. English functioned as a "High Variety" used mainly in the public domain, while Cantonese functioned as a "Low Variety" used mainly in the private domain (Li 2008, 220–223).

However, since 1997, three spoken languages have emerged for Hong Kong people to learn: Cantonese, English, and Putonghua. Each spoken language differs in status, role, and function in Hong Kong society, and each language has a symbolic meaning. To put it simply, Cantonese represents Hong Kong identity, English represents Westernized identity, and Putonghua represents Chinese identity, respectively. With these languages used differently depending on the domain and the speaker, Hong Kong people have constructed a three-layered identity (Lai 2001, 125).

Certainly, not all Hong Kong people necessarily have multi-layered identities with the proficiency in these languages that the government requires. However, they are, consciously or unconsciously, always sensitive about each linguistic boundary by which they construct their own identity.  Table 1 shows the changes in Hong Kong's linguistic situation over time.

Table 1. Proportion of Population (Aged 5 and Over) by Usual+Selected Spoken Languages

| Year | 1996 | 2011 | 2021 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Population | 5,877,875 | 6,808,433 | 7,179,127 |
| Cantonese | 95.2% | 97.4% | 96.0% |
| English | 38.1 | 45.1 | 57.7 |
| Putonghua | 25.3 | 49.5 | 56.5 |

\* Figures exclude other languages.

(Created by the author based on Hong Kong Government population census, 2021/ Snapshot of the Hong Kong Population 2021 p.2/ 1996 Population by-census p.26/ 35).

In addition to the three official spoken languages, before and after 1997, "mixed-code" (Cantonese and English) might be the fourth language for Hong Kong people because "mixed-code," in practice, best represents their identities, as a "hybrid identity" (Bolton 2002, 4; Lai 2001, 125). Phillipson et al. (2010, 7) argue, "Code-mixing is thus an indication that a Hong Konger is to be neither Western nor Chinese, but a unique hybrid of both worlds". In the context of postcolonial theory, "hybridity" is defined as "the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization" (Ashcroft et al. 2000, 118).

In the late 19th century, the world's power had been concentrated in Europe. Euro (Anglo)-centrism is regarded as a binarism of the West as "center" and the East (or the rest of the world) as "periphery." In other words, a binary opposition divides the world into two parts. The English language is directly linked to the centralized Europe constructed as a sign of "modernity" in Hong Kong people's minds. Modern, logical and Western values were regarded as "advanced," while traditional Eastern values were equated with "behind" (Ashcroft et al. 2000, 23–27, 36–37, 90–92).

Hong Kong people have long dwelled in the "in-betweenness" space of "East meets West." Also, by using mixed-code, they dwelled in the "in-betweenness" space of Hong Kong as advanced

and China as behind. Unlike monolinguistic and Sino-centric China[1] (Park 2023; Tanaka 2021), Cantonese mixed with English makes them feel superior in that they are differentiated from the mainland(ers). When we define Hong Kong identity, this is a key point.

Naturally Cantonese was tied to the colonizer's language (English), and the dual position of Hong Kong people led to them having a "dual identity." Cantonese mixed with English has been supported by the symbolic value of the educated and sophisticated middle class of Hong Kong.

## (2) "One Country, Two Systems" Policy[2]

During the territory's separation from mainland China (1842–1997), especially after the 1960s, Hong Kong began to develop its own identity (Murai 2016, 83). At the same time, to Hong Kong people, Putonghua was associated with the "backwardness" of the Chinese economy and the "uncivilized" social manners of Chinese people (Bacon-Shone and Bolton 2008, 27; Pan 2008, 302). When we discuss Hong Kong identity, "othering" is an important point.

Originally, "othering" was coined by the renown postcolonial theorist, Gayatri Spivak. Simply speaking, "otherness" refers to "non-West," the "rest of the world," or the "them" side in "them and us" (Ashcroft et al. 2000, 169–173). In colonial days, Hong Kong people were regarded by the British colonizers as the "them" side. Nowadays, Hong Kong people tend to regard the mainlanders as "them" and themselves as "us." This dichotomy between "inclusive" and "exclusive" is a feature of the postcolonial era (Kachru 1990, 8).

Also, Ashcroft et al. (2000, 169) claim "The colonized subject is characterized as 'other' through discourses such as primitivism… as a means of establishing the binary separation of the colonizer and colonized." Despite being of the same race, Hong Kong people tend to distinguish Chinese people in their minds, and the Cantonese language serves as a means of distinguishing Chinese people ("them") from Hong Kong people ("us"). This is supported by Cheung's remark as a general theory: "Language has been used to unite and to divide people" (Cheung 1985, 198).

Since 2014, due to several political tensions[3] between Hong Kong and mainland China, Hong Kong identity has become increasingly complicated. The widest gap between the two is societal values such as democracy and freedom, which are derived from Britain (Murai 2016, 86). Linguistically, under "One country, Two systems," it seems that Hong Kong people are united with Chinese people by the Standard Written Chinese and Putonghua, but are divided from Chinese people by the Cantonese language.[4]

# 3. What Is Meant by "Identity"?

Firstly, the definition and some phases of "identity" will be shown here. "Identity" is a sense of "who I am/who I am not" and/or a sense of "belonging to a group." Also, there might be a desire to become someone or to belong to certain groups (Eberhard 2021, 11–12, 28–29; Lewis 2021, 38–

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1  In the 1980s Deng Xiaoping encouraged people to learn English under the "Open Door" policy.

2  A promise of a "high degree of autonomy" for 50 years is stipulated in the Basic Law based on the Chino-Anglo Joint Agreement in 1984 (Bolton 2002, 6–7).  And thereby "the Hong Kong government has the discretion to implement its own policies except in international and military matters" (Phillipson et al. 2010, 2).

3  2014 the Umbrella Movement; 2016 the National Security Law; 2019 the Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill movement etc. These incidents were triggered by the Chinese government preventing Hong Kong democracy and freedom of opinion in public (Chan 2024, 6).

4  Precisely, Cantonese is used as usual language in Guangdong of the mainland as well.

39). In addition, identity could be defined as recognition of similarities and differences between the self and others. In this paper,  I continue the discussion on the premise that identity refers to "social" (regional) and "cultural" (linguistic) identity.

Next, I will introduce some remarks on the relationship between language and identity.

- "Language is one of the identity markers that fosters tradition and culture" (Hong 2021, 136).
- "Language is … tied up with identity, in that individual speakers express their choice of identity by their choice of language" (Pennington 1998, 9).
- "Language choice is a tool to influence one's position in society" (van Dam 2021, 271).

However, we should keep in mind that there are negative perspectives about the relationship between language and identity. According to the latest survey by some researchers, language is not necessarily the primary emblem of identity. For example, blood is what counts most in being Frisian (Feenstra 2021, 76). For another example, religion and tradition determine the Jews' identity (Myhill 2003, 77). John Myhill argues that not native language, but religion and tradition are central to Jewish identity. If the native language were the most significant criterion for identity, Jews would be perceived as inherently "inauthentic." The tie of language and identity is only one possible ideology of identity (Myhill 2003, 84, 86, 96). Myhill shows four ways of defining "identity": "1. Citizenship/ state/ native land 2. Native language 3. Religion/ tradition 4. Ethnicity/ people/ ancestry/ race/ nation" (Myhill 2003, 83). In this paper 2, the Native language is adopted.

To date, some studies about the relationship between language and identity seem overly generalized and simplified. For example, Kwok-kan Tam (2009, xix) argues, "In Asia, Westernization and Englishization go hand-in-hand in the forging of new identities". However, as far as I read, he does not discuss the definition of identity in the book. On the contrary, Clifton and Tiessen (2021, 250) explain well about the nature of "multiple identities," and then they insist that "learning…the languages of the colonizer…does not necessarily change one's identity". Furthermore, Ehala Martin (2018 as cited in Feenstra 2021, 75) suggests four ways of holding two identities as follows:



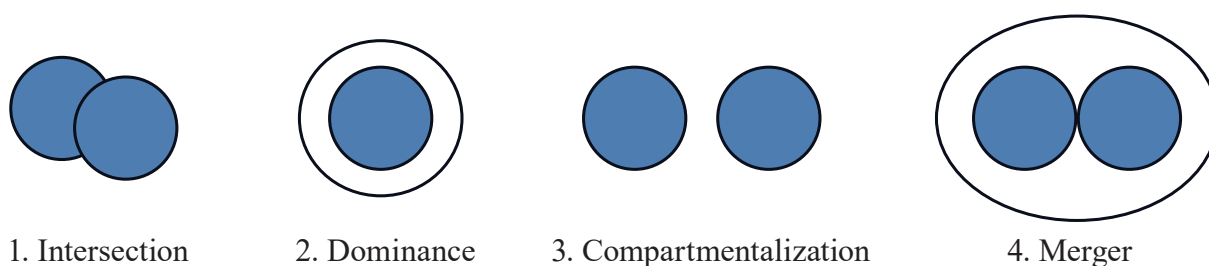|  1. Intersection | 2. Dominance | 3. Compartmentalization | 4. Merger |

Figure 1. Images of Holding Two Identities
(Arranged by the author based on Figure 3 in Feenstra 2021, 76).

These "identity negotiations" are based on the immigrant's language shift. Ehala (2018 as cited in Feenstra 2021, 75) points out, "People seek ways to reconcile their inconsistent identities." If these models are applied to Hong Kong people's identity negotiation, which case is the best fit? Though this question is not currently being addressed, it would be an interesting challenge, because Hong Kong people are always exposed to the process of identity negotiation. The way of thinking of identity negotiation will be discussed in Section 5.

Lastly, Hong Kong identity is introduced briefly here. When I am asked what Hong Kong identity is like, it is very hard to answer; perhaps someone who is different from or distant from the

mainland(ers) as defined in the Introduction. It seems that the question itself is already complicated.

According to Cheng and Wan's observation of the web posting around the 1997 Handover, even if Hong Kong people hold affection towards the mainland, the affection sometimes shows a "gradation"; some accept the mainland "Either" culturally or socially, and others accept "Both" (Cheng and Wan 2005, 183–192). In this regard, Yat-shing Cheung forecasted before 1997, "Since Hong Kong is geographically and culturally close to but politically segregated from China, there are competing identities" (Cheung 1985, 195).

# 4. From "Either" Towards "Both"

The practical movement of complexity, as observed and documented in the questionnaire answered by Hong Kong residents is referred to here. Some issues raised in the previous sections are taken up in greater detail and in relation to specific topics.

## (1) From Eurocentrism Towards Pluricentrism?

There was an experiment at Guangdong University of Foreign Studies targeting 400 students including both English and non-English majors, to find out how Englishization affected their lives (Yan and Yingtao 2009, 140–161). It was found that both English and non-English majors "partly" accepted Western values. Yan and Yingtao concluded that Chinese students may not be "Englishized," however much they master English. This experiment is likely to apply to the Hong Kong case too. Ken Hyland had already foreseen the shift from "Either" West or East to "Both" West and East; "Hong Kong Chinese may respect the skills of Westerners but do not wish to become Westerners, preferring to sample the best from both cultures" (Hyland 1997, 204).

The West's superiority had been sustained by the East's distorted image (inferiority) within an asymmetric cultural balance (Shi-xu and Kienpointner 2005, 96). However, due to the rise of the US, China and other emerging powers in the postcolonial era, Eurocentrism is disappearing. Nevertheless, the English language in Hong Kong remains, in another sense, as a significant player such as a global language beyond the "ownership" of the English language in postcolonial societies. Cantonese mixed with English is attached not only to the past English value, but also to the present value, and lies in Hong Kong people's special pride and confidence (Lai 2001, 128–129).

One of the features of the decolonization process has been a shift and an overthrow of the global "center;" from "Euro-centric" to "pluri-centric." Jacques Derrida calls a break in the hierarchy "deconstruction" (Storey 2001, 74). The clear contrast between "center vs periphery" is blurring, and binarism is becoming obsolete as well. Hong Kongers' identity, which was built around the 1960s, has been deconstructed and recreated since 1997.

Nowadays, the power of language spreads in multiple directions. For example, as the use of Putonghua is expected to increase among Hong Kong people in the near future, will Cantonese mixed with "English" be replaced by Cantonese mixed with "Putonghua" as a combination of languages? Since many studies have looked at mixed-code between Cantonese and English only, research on mixed-code between Cantonese and Putonghua may signal a new phase of the Hong Kong language society.

## (2) From Othering Towards Inclusion?

According to the past survey, not all Hong Kong people were always "in-between" China and Hong Kong. Originally, they were immigrants from the mainland, mostly from Guangdong province.

It was after the 1960s that Hong Kong's identity itself was shaped as mentioned in Section 2-(2). According to Lau's research (1997, 5/Table 1), the informants who had selected "Either" Hongkongese only or Chinese only as their primary identity could be found in the interviews of 1985.

In fact, there was a discrepancy among some Hong Kong people. Since they tend to equate Putonghua with mainland China, Putonghua shows a low score when the number of Hong Kong people's affection towards "Chineseness" is low. On the contrary, Putonghua shows an upward trend as its popularity rises. For example, around the time of China's entry into the World Trade Organization (2001), and around the time of the Beijing Olympic Games (2008), the rise of Putonghua can be seen. However, at the time of the 2014 political conflicts, the numbers decreased (see Figure 2). Also, they regard China's dark side as "mainland," while they regard its bright side as "Chinese" (Murai 2016, 83–87).

The discrepancy of Hong Kongers' identity between British and Chinese languages could give rise to their mixed feelings about the Handover; an ambivalent attitude regarding recognizing the benefits of English, using the vernacular —Cantonese— as a symbol for Hong Kong identity, and learning Putonghua as the national language (Chan 2024, 16–17). The voices of Hong Kong around 1997 were "the confusion of identity, loss, nostalgia and uncertainty" (Tam 2005, 175). Hong Kong people surely faced a dilemma. Tam claims that the voices of the Hong Kong people are the "voices of the missing" as follows:

> The postcoloniality of Hong Kong lies exactly in its in-betweenness of cultural anomaly. This cultural in-betweenness in the case of Hong Kong has been vividly represented as voices of the "missing" (Tam 2005, 174).

However, Putonghua speakers are increasing (see Section 2/Tabel 1), while keeping affection towards Cantonese at a higher level (see Figure 2). Mee-Ling Lai (2001, 125) claims that Hong Kong people holding a "double identity" with "Chinese" desire to speak Putonghua fluently because it makes them feel more "Chinese." In fact, recently, Hong Kong people have been shifting from just "Hong Kong people (HK)" to "Hong Kong people but also Chinese (HK+CH)" (see Figure 3). It is found that a new identity – "from Either towards Both"– is growing. As China's economy is rising, and as the cultural and human exchange between China and Hong Kong is increasing, Putonghua is needed more in Hong Kong. Therefore, the Hong Kong people's tendency towards "inclusion" of the Chinese might have accelerated first for business reasons, and then for familiarity reasons.

Though Putonghua had lost its speakers around 2014, it has gradually recovered. It might be an indication that Hong Kong people's "othering" towards "Chineseness" is fading out and "inclusion" is increasing instead.



affection shift (%)

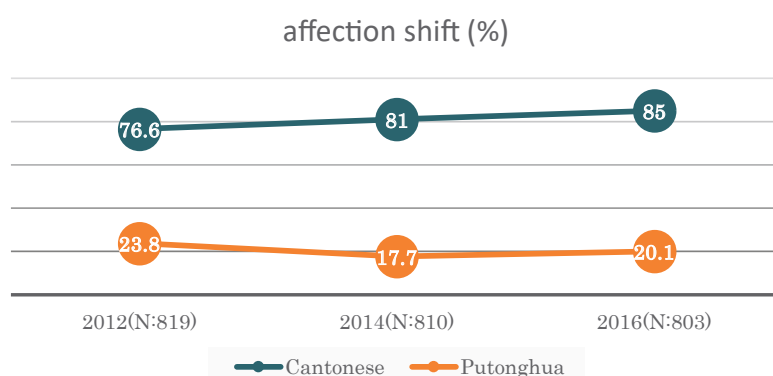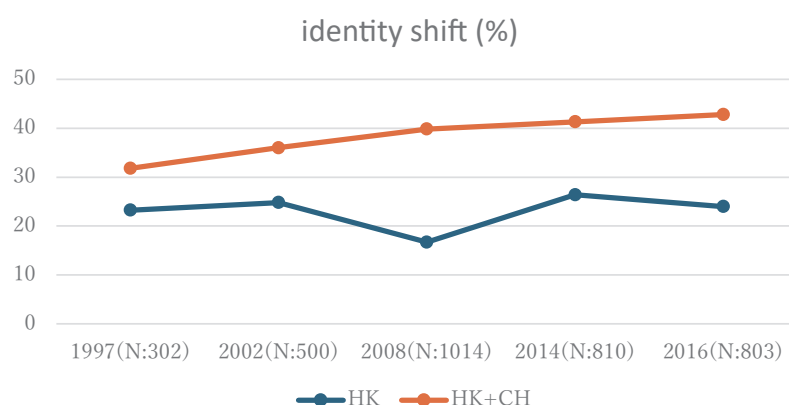| | 2012(N:819) | 2014(N:810) | 2016(N:803) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Cantonese | 76.6 | 81 | 85 |
| Putonghua | 23.8 | 17.7 | 20.1 |

Figure 2. Percentage of Respondents Feeling Affectionate Towards Putonghua and Cantonese
(Created by the author based on the data sourced from the Centre for Communication and Public Opinion Survey/ The Chinese University of Hong Kong).

identity shift (%)



*The drop of 2008 (Beijing Olympic year) is due to the identification of HK as "Chinese."

Figure 3. Hong Kong People's Identity Shift
(Created by the author based on the data sourced from the Centre for Communication and Public Opinion Survey/ The Chinese University of Hong Kong).

Finally, without yet knowing the tensions that would follow in 2014, in 1997, Lau was optimistic that identity formation in Hong Kong was very likely to merge the current Hong Kong and Chinese identities to build a new identity (Lau 1997, 27). It is because Hongkongese and Chinese share many similarities in attitudes and common elements of "Chineseness" (Lau 1997, 9). Therefore, instead of two mutually exclusive identities, the identities of Hongkongese and Chinese overlapped inclusively (Lau 1997, 11–12). Lau concluded "The differences between them were thus a matter of degree rather than of kind" (Lau 1997, 12).

Thus, Hong Kongers' subjectivity was reconstructed in the very process of negotiating the sovereignty shift. Ueno and Mori (2000, 167) point out, as general postcolonial feature, that the next generation is expected to redefine their identity, shifting from an "Either-or" level to a "Both-and" level in "in-betweenness."

# 5. Voices From "In-betweenness"

The practical analysis using the questionnaire is referred to here in order to clarify how the sovereignty shift influences the language and identity of Hong Kong residents.

**Research Method**

The investigation uses a qualitative and micro-sociolinguistic approach through a questionnaire. A total of five informants are Hong Kong residents, white-collar workers, and users of the official three languages for daily communication. Both A and B are my friends whom I met through sociolinguistic class activities of the Open University of Hong Kong (currently Hong Kong Metropolitan University) about 15 years ago. In addition, the investigation is supported by their children (A jr. 1, A jr. 2, and B jr.) in order to research the identity shift in the second decade of postcolonial Hong Kong. It is admitted that collecting data from a broader range of social strata would have yielded a more satisfying result.[5] The questionnaire form and its results are given at the

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5  It is regrettable that Hong Kong identity-related research is becoming increasingly sensitive under present-day circumstances. These informants were limited to long-standing personal acquaintances within Hong Kong's current socio-political climate. Some results are against the general findings.

end of this paper as appendices.

## Commentary

The findings and discussion from the results are referred to here.

Q1.    *The linguistic distance between Putonghua and the informants is still far even 28 years after 1997.*

In 2010, the "Protect Cantonese" Movement happened. The Chinese government tried to change a TV channel from Cantonese to Putonghua in Canton city. Consequently, Cantonese citizens expressed their anger with the slogan "Cantonese up, Putonghua down!" Though over a decade has passed since 1997, this is still a good example of strong in-group identity against outsiders (Li-Li 2010).

Now, one more decade has passed since the Movement. Despite the earlier compulsory education as the national language,[6] Putonghua has not permeated among the postcolonial younger generation in their twenties, who have been under pressure from the political tensions. In the questionnaire, A jr.1, A jr.2, and B jr. do not give top priority to Putonghua in all questions of linguistic distance (Q1.1-8). Family A barely put Putonghua on the position equivalent to C and E (Q1.5,6,8). I assumed that the second generation felt closer to Putonghua than the colonial generation (parents) did. However, this comparison led to the further thought that not simply the generation gap but also the informants' various backgrounds might be intricately intertwined.

Q2.    *Mixed-code is still controversial in education*

Generally speaking, mixed-code is preferred by the educated middle class in Hong Kong. However, mixed-code is a kind of "taboo" in the educational class because it deviates from the formal and authentic English language. A and A jr.2 are English teachers. Though they agree that Cantonese mixed with English represents Hong Kong identity (Q2.4), they insist that they themselves do not use it (Q2.8). A told me before that English lessons should be taught in English, not in mixed-code. If A and A jr.2 value "norm" over "local creativity" —Cantonese mixed with English, in a sense, it denies "Pluricentrism," because "Pluricentrism" challenges a traditional orthodox approach dependent on the authority of the native-speaker norms — "Eurocentrism."

In addition to academic career and vocation, the living environment may be an important factor for mixed-coding. Family A live in the suburbs of the mainland. On the contrary, family B live near Central district on Hong Kong Island, and B has worked at a global trading company for 35 years, where mixed-code is actively used in daily life.

Q2'.    *No generation gap of identity negotiation can be seen.*

Both B and B's child answered "agree" to Q2.8 and Q2.9. In other words, they can negotiate their identity well, at the same time, they value their original (Hong Kong) identity. Basically, it is said that B's generation (50s) is most keen on searching for their Hong Kong identities (Bolton and Lim 2002, 306). However, the generation gap cannot be seen here.

According to Sunny Hong's study on immigrants' identity negotiation (Hong 2021, 138), three patterns of responses can be seen when they leave their home country and move to the host country;

1.    to need the dominant language for their lives, holding their native language to protect their innermost identity.

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6  Primary and secondary school of Hong Kong adopted Putonghua as the medium of instruction for Chinese-related subjects in 2009 (Standing Committee on Language Education and Research 2008).

2.    to choose the dominant language as an instrumental language, but to keep their mother tongue as their language of identity.

3.    to learn the dominant language in order to assimilate into mainstream society.

In the Hong Kong case, if Hong Kong people choose language and identity wisely depending on the situation, as family B do, then option 2. would be the best fit. I assumed that the younger generation (B jr.) does not persist in their original (Hong Kong) identity very much, though.

Q3.    *Cantonese vs Putonghua*

Hong argues that language strengthens the ingroup connections, whereas it weakens the outgroup connections to nonusers of the language (Hong 2021, 136). In other words, Cantonese includes Hong Kong people, whereas it excludes Chinese people. Four informants answered "agree" about this (Q3.3). On the other hand, their purposes for the use of Putonghua differed: pragmatic and private for family A, pragmatic only for family B (Q3.2).

In fact, "code-switching"[7] between Putonghua and Cantonese in business has become active after 1997. Yuling Pan (2008, 313–314) analyzed code-switching as "an indicator for social relations," and there are three types: 1. situational code-switching 2. metaphorical code-switching, and 3. pragmatic code-switching. In his 2008 observation, much code-switching between Cantonese and Putonghua was due to 3. "pragmatic function" triggered by the increasing contact between customers speaking Putonghua and local service staff speaking Cantonese. Therefore, he concluded that Putonghua was regarded as an instrumental language for pragmatic reasons, rather than one closely related to identity.

Nearly two decades have passed since Pan's research. Is it still possible to say that Putonghua is regarded as an instrumental language for pragmatic purposes only? Or does the growing use of Putonghua psychologically unite Hong Kong with the mainland?

Let me add a few more words, Chinese people prefer Putonghua to Cantonese as the official language of Hong Kong. Lau's 1992 survey showed that 52.4% of Chinese informants answered affirmatively; by contrast, only 33.5% of Hong Kong informants agreed (Lau 1997, 14-15/Table 4). Follow-up research from the Chinese people's side would be interesting.

Q4.    *No one in the next generation belongs to a new Hong Kong identity.*

Originally A was raised in Malaysia. Despite being a Malaysian Chinese, she is a Cantonese native speaker; at the same time, she studied at a Chinese primary school in Maylasia using Putonghua as the medium of instruction. Though she has lived in Hong Kong for over 30 years since her marriage, she and her children (born and raised in Hong Kong) may hold less emotional attachment to Hong Kong identity than family B do.

To Q4, all of the A family members specify their positions after 1997 as "Chinese." Though A and B are in the same generation, A does not seem to feel resistant about being a "Chinese" because of her own history. On the other hand, B is typical of a generation most keen on maintaining its original (Hong Kong) identity. At the same time, her generation does not feel any resistance to British identity.

Nearly three decades have passed since the Handover, and whether Hong Kong identity is constructed as "Either" or "Both" Hong Kong and/or Chinese remains a controversial and sensitive issue. Only B identifies herself as "Both" — "Hong Kong but also Chinese" after 1997. These results

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7  Code-switching as well as code-mixing refers to the alternate use of two languages. Whereas code-mixing is a word switch within the same sentence, code-switching is the whole sentence switch among sentences (Bacon-Shone and Bolton 2008, 39-40; Pan 2008, 305-313).

might suggest that Hong Kong people are perplexed by the co-existence of affection and resistance towards "Chineseness," or by the gap between common backgrounds and different societal systems. Also, the struggles after 2014 might have cast a shadow over the familiarity between the two.

To sum up, this investigation describes how people in "in-betweenness" have to confront complex struggles within themselves. It was found that the factors involved are not simply a generation gap, but multiple dimensions such as origin, vocation or family situation. Therefore, their language and identity should be neither generalized nor stereotyped. I conclude this paper with B's impressive voice as follows:

> Even after the handover, there was still a lingering attachment to the status of being a British colonial citizen. Since then, 27 years have passed, and now I have more realistically re-evaluated my identity. The attachment to being a British colony has gradually faded. As long as there is still a border between Hong Kong and China, the persistence of Hong Kong people in their identity as Hongkongers will continue. If someone asks "which country I'm from," I would answer "I come from Hong Kong," but if asked about my race, I will say "I am Chinese." Still, original Hong Kong identity remains in my heart.

# 6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have described how the sovereignty shift influenced the relationship between language and identity for the Hong Kong people. Firstly, I picked up the two policies: the "Biliterate, Trilingual" policy and the "One Country, Two Systems" policy. After connecting these policies with postcolonial theories, I discussed how these factors developed into the social practice of the Hong Kong linguistic situation. Binarism such as "us/them" or "West/East" is now obsolete. The pluri-centric value has emerged, replacing Eurocentrism. Whereas language divides and excludes some, it unites and includes others.

It has been clarified that Hong Kong people have been exposed to "in-betweenness" of identity negotiation with the three official languages and mixed-coding. As a result, these factors are likely to bring about a new identity of Hong Kong people—from "Either" towards "Both." However, some results of the questionnaire do not support intellectuals' arguments or my expectations. We might say that the complexity of "in-betweenness" itself, is Hong Kong.

Under the current political circumstances of Hong Kong, the next challenge, to conduct identity studies, will be much harder. Though the questionnaire was very useful for this research, I confess that I became very nervous about asking the informants some of the more delicate questions. Nevertheless, a broader sample would contribute to enhancing the reliability of the questionnaire and satisfying our concerns about Hong Kong's new identity in the near future.

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# Appendix 1

2025. 3. 21

## The Questionnaire on Language and Identity in Hong Kong

This questionnaire is used for academic purposes only.
The confidentiality of the information you provide will never fail to be protected.
If there are any questions that are difficult to answer, you can skip them.
Many thanks for your cooperation.
Personal information
age (    )        vocation (     )        academic career (            )
language use/ competence (                            )

Q1.   Arrange the following three languages in order from closest to you to describe linguistic distance between you and the languages.   ex. C > P > E (C: Cantonese P: Putonghua E: English)   C is closest to you.  P is closer to you than E.   C = P same level

   1. biological or geographical origin (            )
   2. cultural access (habit, value) (            )
   3. social beneficiary (status, evaluation) (            )
   4. economic contributor (income) (            )
   5. political importance (policy, ideology) (            )
   6. psychological acceptance (familiarity, relaxation) (            )
   7. in public (school, office, meeting etc.) (            )
   8. in private (family, friends, café etc.) (            )

Q2.   Circle one or more for the following questions. If "others," fill in the blanks (no character limit).

1. Mixed-code* (C+E) symbolizes (politics/ fusion of West & East/ educated/ cosmopolitan/ business/ modern/ traditional/ local/ familiarity between the two languages/ others _____)

2. The more I master English, the more my mind and identity* are Westernized.
agree    disagree    don't know

3. Code-mixing reflects the speaker's identity-mixing.
agree    disagree    don't know

4. Mixed-code (C+E) as well as the Cantonese language represents Hong Kong identity.
agree    disagree    don't know

5. Cantonese mixed with Putonghua is less than Cantonese mixed with English around you now.
agree    disagree    don't know

6. Cantonese mixed with Putonghua will be increasing in the near future.
agree    disagree    don't know
(reason:                                    )

7. Mixed-code (C+P) symbolizes (politics/ educated/ cosmopolitan/ business/ modern/ traditional/ local/ familiarity between the two languages/ others _____)

8. In switching to other languages case by case, I can keep a dual loyalty to each language, even if the two languages have contradictory values respectively (ex. East/ West, local/ global, public/private etc.).
agree    disagree    don't know

9. Even if I switch from Cantonese to another language, I choose to keep my Cantonese identity.
agree    disagree    don't know

Notes mixed-code: a word shift within the same sentence (ex. 在 Victoria Park 的 Causeway Road Exit).
        identity: recognition of who I am or of belonging to a certain group.


Q3.   Do you agree with the following questions?

1. Putonghua of Hong Kong tends to be recognized as a tool to unite with the mainland.
agree    disagree    don't know

2. Putonghua is important for pragmatic (ex. employment) reasons, not in private.
agree    disagree    don't know

3. Cantonese is a device which has both functions; to strengthen its speakers' ties and to increase the distance from non-speakers.

    agree    disagree    don't know

Q4.  Choose one number for each parenthesis.

I identify myself with (before 1997/    )  (around 1997/    )  (after 1997/    )

1. Hong Kong people OR British subjects
2. Hong Kong people AND British subjects
3. Hong Kong people OR British subjects OR Chinese people
4. Hong Kong people AND British subjects AND Chinese people
5. Hong Kong people OR Chinese people
6. Hong Kong people AND Chinese people
7. others (                    )

If you have any comments, please write here freely.
    (                                    )

## Appendix 2. Results of the Questionnaire

| name | A | Ajr.1 | Ajr.2 | B | Bjr. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| age | 52 | 29 | 26 | 57 | 22 |
| vocation | kindergarten teacher | Chinese medicine practitioner | teacher | executive secretary | medical field |
| Q1. 1 | C > P > E | C > P > E | C > E > P | C > E > P | C > P = E |
| 2 | C > P > E | C > P > E | C > E > P | C > E > P | C > P = E |
| 3 | C > E > P | C > P > E | C > E > P | E > C > P | C > E > P |
| 4 | C > E > P | C > P > E | C > E > P | E > C > P | C > E > P |
| 5 | C = E = P | C = E = P | C = E = P | C > E > P | C > P > E |
| 6 | C = E = P | C = E = P | C = E = P | C > E > P | C > E > P |
| 7 | C > E > P | C > P > E | C > E > P | C > E > P | C > E > P |
| 8 | C = E = P | C = E = P | C = E = P | C > P > E | C > E > P |
| Q2. 1 | educated/ cosmopolitan | educated/ cosmopolitan | educated/ cosmopolitan | educated/ cosmopolitan fusion of W & E business/ local/ politics | cosmopolitan/ fusion of W & E |
| 2 | disagree | disagree | disagree | agree | disagree |
| 3 | agree | agree | agree | agree | disagree |
| 4 | agree | agree | agree | agree | agree |
| 5 | agree | agree | agree | agree | agree |
| 6 | (three of us think that no one mixes the two dialects) | | | don't know | agree (guess the rise of people from Mainland) |
| 7 | (three of us think that there is no such code-mixing) | | | politics/ business | politics/ business familiarity between the two languages |
| 8 | (three of us don't do mixed-code speaking) | | | agree | agree |
| 9 | don't know | | don't know | agree | agree |
| Q3. 1/ 2/ 3 | agree/ disagree/ agree | agree/ disagree/ agree | agree/ disagree/ agree | agree/ agree/ agree | don't know/ agree/ don't know |
| Q4. before/ around / after 1997 | 1/ 5/ 5 (Chinese) | −/ −/ 5 (Chinese) (born in 1995) | −/ −/ 5 (Chinese) (born in 1998) | 1/ 2/ 6 | −/ −/ 5 (born in 2002) |