

Language Attitudes in Hong Kong: Regional Identity, Trilingualism, and Sociopolitical Movements

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ABSTRACT

The Journal of Studies in Language 36.3, 397-415. The present study investigates changes in language attitudes toward Cantonese, English, and Putonghua in Hong Kong over the twenty-three years after the U.K's political handover of the region to China. This study also scrutinizes the relationships between language attitudes and other related factors. To this end, a questionnaire survey and follow-up interviews were carried out in Hong Kong during the pro-democracy protests. The results indicate that Hongkongers have firmly sustained the status of Cantonese as their heritage language. They are highly inclined to use English as well, whereas Putonghua was rated the lowest. This article claims that language attitudes in Hong Kong were deeply intertwined with local identity and sociopolitical movements against the power from mainland China. (Chonnam National University)

Keywords: language attitudes, Hong Kong, trilingualism, regional identity, sociopolitical movements

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본인이 투고한 논문은 다른 학술지에 게재된 적이 없으며 타인의 논문을 표절하지 않았음을 서약합니다. 추후 중복게재 혹은 표절된 것으로 밝혀질 시에는 논문게재 취소와 일정 기간 논문제출의 제한 조치를 받게 됨을 인지하고 있습니다.

1. Introduction

Hong Kong is a region with a vigorous linguistic environment, which is associated with the specific sociopolitical milieu. Notwithstanding subtle clichés in studies on language attitudes, this virtue has drawn constant attention from scholars. In fact, the studies on language attitudes in Hong Kong emerged on a new wave after 1997, when the region was returned to Chinese control after 156 years of British sovereignty. The historical watershed not only caused Hong Kong to enter a new political phase of the “one country, two systems” principle, but also underwent significant change regarding the language policy of “bilingualism and trilingualism” and education in the mother tongue.

Before the political handover, English and Cantonese formed a diglossic situation rather than a bilingual situation in Hong Kong (Ferguson, 1959; Fishman, 1967) where English functioned as an H-variety in the formal settings

of government, education, and business while Cantonese was used as an L-variety in the informal domains of everyday communication (Pierson, 1994). After the handover, however, Hong Kong entered a trilingual situation as Putonghua was declared the official language in Hong Kong. With that, it was commonly predicted that Putonghua would replace English in formal milieu in accordance with the change of the school curriculum. That is, Putonghua, which had been a subject for extracurricular activities at schools, and become a core subject in the school curriculum from Primary 1 to Secondary 3 since 1998 (Lai, 2005).

Along with these shifts in political and linguistic circumstances in Hong Kong, inevitably, studies of language attitudes have considered whether Putonghua could replace the position of Cantonese which had played a crucial role as a regional lingua franca reflecting their identity as well as that of English which held a high status during the colonial periods. Although about twenty-three years have elapsed since the handover, studies on language attitudes in Hong Kong have been continually conducted from triangular perspectives, showing that the linguistic situation there is still fluctuating and unstable.

Sociolinguistic investigations indicated that members of a speech community represent their loyalty to their local linguistic varieties as a means of sustaining sociocultural solidarity and advocating in-group identity (Lai, 2011; Wang and Ladegaard, 2008). This often causes sociopolitical conflicts over the status of specific varieties in different contexts. For instance, the Protect Cantonese Movement arisen in July 2010, showing that Cantonese is deeply rooted in Hongkongers as their heritage language, which cannot be replaced by any languages. During the movement, the participants voiced their aspirations to preserve Cantonese and demonstrated the acute panic at the thought of losing their language. In light of these findings, it may be possible to determine how Hongkongers have represented their in-group identity and positive or negative attitudes towards Cantonese, Putonghua, and English during the 2019-2020 protests. The following results from the 2019 Hong Kong Government Census Survey may shed light on the language situation in Hong Kong:

Among persons aged 6 – 65, 87.7% perceived their language competence in using Cantonese as very good or good, similar to the corresponding percentage in 2015 (86.5%). 29.0% perceived their language competence in using spoken English as very good or good, while 28.0% perceived their language competence in using Putonghua as very good or good. These percentages were higher than the corresponding percentages in 2015 (23.1% and 24.7% respectively).

(Census and Statistics Department in Hong Kong 2019, “Thematic Household Survey Report No. 66”)

As seen in the above excerpt, the degree of competence in English and Putonghua is gradually rising. However, it should be considered that Hong Kong has already been a part of China for about twenty-three years and undergone the changes in language education policies. Given these factors, it can be argued that there exists a more powerful variation in connection to the remarkably low motivation for learning Putonghua. Furthermore, a stark difference in attitudes has been reported between Putonghua and Cantonese, which implies that many other factors have affected language attitudes in the region as well. Regarding these factors, while under British rule for 156 years, Hongkongers grew accustomed to a notion of autonomy quite distinct from that of mainland China, and came to believe that they have a distinguished heritage language based on their identity. Thus, a crucial element of Hongkongers’ cultural identity, formed by adopting the beliefs and practices of their independent community (Jensen, 2008), would have been a close

adherence to localization than nationalization. This element would have been intensely involved in particular sociopolitical circumstances, thereby strongly promoted locality and the language ego.

Hong Kong has already crossed the threshold of the two decades since becoming the part of China and it is almost in the halfway point of the 50 years of guaranteed autonomy as stipulated in the Basic Law. During this time, the region has experienced substantial shifts in the educational, socioeconomic, and political spheres with continual intervention from China. Meanwhile, the 2019-2020 pro-democracy protests are recognized as a political demonstration that will never be forgotten in Hong Kong history to the extent that the international community also paying attention and engaged in it. It reflects that the Chinese government is violating the promise of the “one country, two systems” although it has been less than 50 years. Hongkongers are uneasy, fearing a transition from local to national identity that may lead their own language to become extinct.

For this reason, Cantonese in Hong Kong is their own heritage language that must be sustained, therefore it is true that Hongkongers’ attitudes toward the three official languages in Hong Kong are affected by the constant political interference from China. Thus, the present study aims to investigate changes in these attitudes towards three official languages in Hong Kong over the twenty-three years since the political handover, and to scrutinize how sociopolitical movements and strong localization impact local identity and Hongkongers’ heritage language.

2. Previous Studies on Language Attitudes in Honk Kong

The notion of “attitude” is a set of beliefs and psychological predispositions to act or evaluate behavior in a certain way (Gardner, 1985). Attitudes cannot be observed since they are internal thoughts and ideas in people’s minds, their expression mainly occurs through a certain media situations such as questionnaires, interviews, and broader social contexts whereby the participants’ demographic characteristics might have an influence (Dailey-O’Cain, 2017). A “language attitude” is a concept that combines the research methods of social psychology with sociolinguistics, and embodies the psychological state of the stimuli of language. Most often, it is broadened to include the attitudes towards speakers of a particular language or dialects as well as the attitudes towards the language itself (Fasold, 1984: 148).

Many scholars have conducted research on language attitudes in Hong Kong both before and after 1997 (e.g., Pierson et al., 1980; Pennington and Yue, 1994; Lai, 2005). Pierson et al. (1980) is influential enough to draw a few replication studies before the handover. They administered a survey to 466 secondary students in Hong Kong in order to investigate their attitudes towards English and Chinese using direct and indirect methods. For the direct measure, students were asked to rate 23 statements on a 5-point Likert scale. For the indirect method, they were requested to rate their ideal selves, as well as stereotypes toward native English and Cantonese speakers in Hong Kong. The results signaled that the participants manifested a solid in-group identity while clearly noticing the practical functions of English. However, many students asserted that they felt unpatriotic when they use English. Subsequent replication studies displayed obviously different results. Pennington and Yue (1994) revealed that participants did not have negative feelings regarding ethnic identity when using English, thus concluding that their feelings were derived from an older sense of antagonism in the 1980s.

Focusing on all three languages in Hong Kong after the handover, Lai (2005) conducted a questionnaire survey in 2001 to inspect language attitudes in Hong Kong regarding integrative and instrumental orientations towards

Cantonese, English, and Putonghua. According to Gardner (1985, 2001), integrative orientation refers to learners' desire to identify with the target language community and heritage culture, while instrumental orientation refers to values of language proficiency to obtain better opportunities. Lai (2005) applied the Gardner's education psychology model to study language attitudes of the first postcolonial secondary school generation in Hong Kong, focusing on the target language per se and its community. Based on Gardner and Lambert (1972)'s new framework, a bilingual questionnaire in Chinese and English was designed and all items were categorized along six parameters: integrative orientation towards Cantonese, English, and Putonghua and instrumental orientation towards Cantonese, English, and Putonghua. As for the methods, a 4-point Likert scale was employed to avoid a neutral inclination and a total of 1,048 questionnaires collected from 28 secondary schools in Hong Kong were used for statistical analysis. The findings revealed that the participants are largely positive in integrative orientation towards Cantonese and English, whereas their inclination for Putonghua is near the neutral point. From an instrumental angle, the participants' orientation towards all three varieties was positive, although the intensity of the positiveness is differed substantially for each variety. As such, the status of Cantonese as a regional lingua franca has been maintained, indicating Hongkonger's in-group identity. Since then, many similar studies (Gao, 2012; Lai, 2010, 2011; Li, 2006; Sullivan et al., 2012) have been conducted in relation to language attitudes in Hong Kong, and most findings are analogous. In other words, the high status of Cantonese has been preserved contrary to scholars' positive prediction based on changes in education policy and economic prospects, while Putonghua has been rated the lowest.

Meanwhile, sociopolitical protests, such as the Protect Cantonese Movement in 2010 and the Umbrella Movement in 2014, stemming from unilateral policy implementation, strengthened the attachment to the language ego (Edwards, 2016). Edwards (2016), who examined attitudes towards Hong Kong English (HKE) pre and post the Umbrella Movement, found significant differences between the two results. She contended that there may well be political tensions between the two systems, and that some Hongkongers desire to assert a unique identity from that of mainland China (Edwards, 2016).

Based on the preceding studies, it is estimated that the 2019-2020 pro-democracy protests caused Hongkongers to shift their outlook on language attitudes and further reinforce their regional identity. Hence, the present study investigates changes in attitudes towards three official languages in Hong Kong in the twenty-three years after the political handover. It also sheds light on the link between language attitudes, local identity and sociopolitical movements.

Research questions for this study are as follows: (1) What changes have taken place the language attitudes towards Cantonese, Putonghua, and English in the two decades after the change of sovereignty? (2) To what extent have the 2019-2020 Protests affected language attitudes and local identity in Hong Kong?

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

One hundred and twenty seven people were randomly recruited to respond to the questionnaire. All the participants were ethnic Chinese who were either born in Hong Kong and have lived there for their entire lives, or moved there from

mainland China. Looking at the distribution of participants, most of them are employed and in their 20s' and 30s', as seen in Table 1.

As for self-reported language information, the vast majority of participants (97%) come into daily contact with Cantonese in numerous contexts. Only a few (2.8%) use both Cantonese and English when they are with friends or at work, even fewer (0.2%) use Putonghua. This displays a far more positive inclination toward Cantonese than the government figures reported in the 2016 census, which found that 88.9% (89.5% in 2011) of the Hong Kong population uses Cantonese as a regular language, while 4.3% (3.5% in 2011) uses English, and 1.9% (1.4% in 2011) uses Putonghua (Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department 2017). As for the rather different outcomes of the current study, the 2021 census will show how the 2019 protests have affected the use of Putonghua and English, which has been steadily increasing. Regarding cultural identity, 72% of the participants reveal a strong local identity as Hongkongers, 25% claim a double identity as Hongkong-Chinese, and only 3% identify as Chinese.

Table 1. Distribution of Participants According to Gender, Occupation, Age

		Hongkongers (79.5%) (N = 101)	Mainlanders (20.5%) (N = 26)
Gender	Female	52	21
	Male	49	5
Occupation	Student	17	14
	Worker	84	12
Age	20-29	43	14
	30-39	35	9
	40-59	14	3
	60-71	8	0

The present study should be completely differentiated from previous ones conducted with a group of students in the institutional system, here, samples were randomly collected from each unspecified local people. In particular, those in their 20s and 30s, who consist of the majority of the participants, must have experienced the new language policy and may have closely watched or even participated in various sociopolitical movements after the handover. Above all, they could have been at the center of the pro-democracy protests in 2019-2020. These circumstances are supported by a South China Morning Post (SCMP) article, which reports that many protesters in Hong Kong are young and educated.¹⁾ Hence, without a doubt, the participants have definitely provided crucial answers for this study.

3.2 Research Procedures

This study involved a questionnaire survey, based on the work of Lai (2005) and included a few additional items to better fit the study and current social situation. The most noticeable difference between the two questionnaires is that

1) A survey conducted by three local scholars, who handed out questionnaires to 6,600 individuals during 12 protest events between 9 June and 4 August 2019, revealed that nearly 60% of the protesters were under the age of 30, and about 75% of the protesters had received tertiary education (SCMP, August 12, 2019).

this study exploited a 5-point Likert scale, since a neutral tendency should be respected, whereas Lai (2005) used a 4-point Likert scale. The participants were requested to provide their personal language information in the first part, and to rate each items using the Likert scale for the other two parts. Follow-up interviews were performed to find out the participants' views on the relationship between the protests and their language use in Hong Kong.

Prior to the study, a pilot test was administered to some mainlanders and several Hongkongers in order to ensure that the questionnaire items would be appropriate. More neutral words (e.g., "demonstration" instead of "protest") were selected, and duplicated items were modified after consulting with Chinese colleagues. Two items directly related to mother tongue identity, Part II -1, 2, were limited to Hongkongers. Through this process, a suitable questionnaire for this study was designed both off-line and on-line.

An off-line questionnaire survey was randomly carried out in Hong Kong mainly at the end of December, 2019, when protests occurred in multiple districts on Christmas and New Year's Eve (Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute), efforts to gather on-line data took place by the end of February and lasted intermittently until early May, 2020. Initially, there was an intention to collect a number of samples on college students as well, in order to balance students and workers in the proportion of participants, but all universities in Hong Kong were temporarily closed owing to an incident in which a student at Polytechnic University was sacrificed by the police. When visiting the university, the school fences were barricaded, all gates were thoroughly blocked by security guards. Hence, the researcher had no choice but to go into the street to randomly survey passersby.

In order to gather random samples without any bias to one side, particular times and places were not taken into account. To be more specific, the researcher first attempted to approach people on the bus heading downtown from the airport, and included the front desk and restaurant staff of every possible shift at several hotels she had stayed at. Tsim Sha Tsui and Sheung Wan on Hong Kong Island are the main areas where sample collections were carried out, and more detailed sites include downtown centers deeply related to locals' daily lives, parks where people spend leisure time, and well-known tourist attractions such as Avenue of Stars. In the morning, the researcher contacted people who spent their time alone or with others. The primary participants were holidaymakers at tourist spots in the afternoon, and people strolling down the street or eating dinner at restaurants, who mostly responded to the survey in the evening. Protests continued until late into the evening, making it difficult to proceed with sample collection outside, therefore, the researcher continued to contact people via the on-line survey.

With respect to taking steps to approach people, the researcher first asked the participants whether they could speak English since it was the only method of communication, and soon explained that she was working on a survey on language attitudes in Hong Kong as a graduate student studying sociolinguistics in South Korea. The researcher carried out follow-up interviews anonymously with participants who showed enthusiastic interest in sharing their perspectives in details. Despite the anonymous survey, most of them seemed to fear Internet Protocol (IP) tracking since Hong Kong was at the center of the pro-democracy protests at that time.

3.3 Data Analysis

A total of 127 completed questionnaires were collected. Among them, 101 samples from Hongkongers were employed for the main analysis. Based on the classification of survey samples according to their place of birth, it should

be determined that the number of mainlanders was too small to perform a statistical analysis. In addition, the number of Hongkongers and mainlanders differed remarkably, making it difficult to significantly compare attitudes between the two groups. Thus, Hongkongers' responses were adopted for the primary analysis, while mainlanders' are referred to in the discussion.

All collected data were initially coded in Microsoft Excel and score from 5 (*strongly agree*) to 1 (*strongly disagree*) according to the Likert scale. Subsequently, the file was retrieved in the SPSS 23 statistical program, after which the variables and labels were re-coded, and negatively-worded items were converted in advance for precise description. Descriptive statistical analyses were applied to each questionnaire item, displaying mean values and standard deviations (SD). Mean values greater than 3 indicate positive attitudes towards each item, and SD values show the different angles among participants in relation to the items.

The data were suitable for factor analysis with a KMO of=0.722. In order to answer the first research question, the items were grouped into six categories according to Gardner and Lambert (1972)'s sociocultural model; integrative orientations toward Cantonese, English, and Putonghua, and instrumental orientations toward Cantonese, English, and Putonghua. The Cronbach's reliability test was applied for the internal reliability of the factors, and the values are greater than 0.8. The analysis for the second research question was mainly performed through one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), a paired-samples *t*-test, and descriptive statistics. Apart from the analyses, brief follow-up interviews were held with some participants to find out their candid viewpoints of the protests, three languages, and language users.

4. Results and Discussion

This section displays the findings for how Hongkongers' attitudes towards English, Cantonese, and Putonghua have shifted over twenty-three years since the change in sovereignty. This section also demonstrates how the pro-democracy protests of 2019-2020 are involved in language attitudes. As Hong Kong entered the trilingual system, many scholars began to focus on the three languages; English, Cantonese, and Putonghua. According to various findings, Hongkongers have revealed a considerably positive inclination toward Cantonese and English, while Putonghua has always ranked last (Lai, 2001, 2005; Li and Luk, 2012; Liu, 2018). The results of this study are consistent with those of earlier ones to some extent, yet mark far more negative attitudes toward Putonghua at the central tendency. In order to exhibit the findings in more detail and discuss them, the results section is categorized into the six factors in terms of the integrative and instrumental domains. Next, language attitudes are addressed in the wake of sociopolitical movements. Last, the follow-up interviews are mentioned.

4.1 Overall Comparison

As presented in Table 2, the biggest disparity in terms of attitudes is the status of Cantonese, which is noticeably high in both the integrative and instrumental domains, as compared to that of Putonghua, which is below 3.0. As for English, the respondents expressed almost the same affection in both domains.

The following sections will center on each item of the factors in order to display details about changes in language

attitudes. They are closely related to the different variances that may occur in Hong Kong, which is still under “one country, two systems” principle. Further, language policy has failed, and we need to consider sociopolitical contexts alike.

Table 2. Means and SD of Six Factors

	Factors	Mean	%	SD
1	Integrative orientation toward English	3.97	79	.87
2	Integrative orientation toward Cantonese	4.60	92	.74
3	Integrative orientation toward Putonghua	2.78	56	1.0
4	Instrumental orientation toward English	4.33	87	.79
5	Instrumental orientation toward Cantonese	4.37	87	.76
6	Instrumental orientation toward Putonghua	2.95	59	1.03

4.2 Integrative Orientation Towards English, Cantonese, and Putonghua

As outlined in Table 3, the mean values of items related to integrative orientation towards English is 3.97, demonstrating Hongkongers’ substantially positive attitudes, despite relatively higher values of the standard deviation (SD) from 0.65 to 1.09. In particular, they indicate a considerably positive inclination toward English itself (item 3.1a) and English speakers (item 3.5a, 3.6a) with a number far greater than 3 in mean values and a lower SD. A higher mean values and a lower SD suggests that the participants’ responses are at a similar level. Meanwhile, items that reveal relatively greater SD (item 2.7, 2.8, and 2.9) also have a much broader mean than neutral values. Therefore, although the participants’ perceptions are inconsistent, English still appeared to be attributed positively to education, intelligence, and wealth (item 2.8).

Table 3. Integrative Orientation Towards English

No.	Items	Mean	SD
2.7	I would like to speak fluent English because it makes me feel modern and westernized.	3.60	1.09
2.8	A person who speaks fluent English in HK is usually educated, intelligent and well-off.	3.95	0.91
*2.10	A person who speaks fluent English in HK is usually arrogant, snobbish and show-off.	3.48	0.98
3.1a	I like English.	4.34	0.65
3.5a	I like the English speakers.	4.16	0.83
*3.6a	I tend to ignore people when they speak in English.	4.31	0.78
Factor Level Mean		3.97	0.87
*Reversed mean for negatively-worded items			

This is associated with the fact that Hong Kong has undergone remarkable changes in its education policy since the political handover. In July 1997, the Hong Kong government announced the mandatory “Mother Tongue Education” policy for junior secondary education. However, parents voiced concern that students would lose their competitive edge with less exposure to English in critical periods. Eventually, the government had to relax the policy to permit more use

of English as a medium of instruction starting in 2010, implying the policy's failure. On the whole, English clearly holds a high status as a fairly influential language in Hong Kong.

With respect to integrative orientation towards Cantonese, as displayed in Table 4, the category mean is remarkably high (mean=4.6) while the SD is relatively lower (SD=.74), indicating the participants' strong affinity with Cantonese from an integrated angle, and their responses to each item are nearly consistent. More concretely, they seem to have a powerful inclination toward Cantonese itself (item 3.1b) and are attached to its language speakers (item 3.5b), while exhibiting far stronger inclination toward the items involved in their identity (item 2.1, 2.2, 2.5, and 2.13). This suggests that Cantonese, as a regional variety, holds a great niche, demonstrating more intense inclination than the results of earlier research. Nonetheless, there appeared a relatively high SD, which could cause the respondents' opinions to diverge.

Table 4. Integrative Orientation Towards Cantonese

No.	Items	Mean	SD
2.1	As a Hongkonger, I should be able to speak fluent Cantonese.	4.65	0.83
2.2	I like Cantonese because it is my mother tongue.	4.77	0.60
2.5	Cantonese is the language which best represents Hong Kong.	4.68	0.79
*2.13	Cantonese should be replaced by Putonghua since it is only a dialect with little value.	4.50	0.91
3.1b	I like Cantonese.	4.69	0.58
3.5b	I like the Cantonese speakers.	4.34	0.75
*3.6b	I tend to ignore people when they speak in Cantonese.	4.55	0.73
Factor Level Mean		4.60	0.74

*Reversed mean for negatively-worded items

It could take it for granted that there must have existed some meaningful events, *i.e.*, the localization movement throughout the years. This is in line with the government's plan to introduce the new curriculum, which entails Moral and National Education in primary schools in 2012 and in secondary schools in 2013. This subject meant to foster national pride and solidarity among the people of mainland China, as well as to cultivate national consciousness and national identity. However, the enormous scheme was nearly scrapped by large protests, which expressed a deep antipathy among Hongkongers who recognized their innermost fear of children being brainwashed by communism due to the patriotic education.

As for the participants' integrative orientation towards Putonghua (see Table 5), the distribution is quite different from that of English or Cantonese. The factor level mean is only near the neutral point while the SD is 1.00, suggesting that respondents' tendencies towards Putonghua are negative and varied. This strikingly negative attitude relates to the status of the language as a form of social integration (item 2.4) and education, intelligence, and wealth (item 2.9), implying that Hongkongers do not wish to assimilate with mainland culture. The respondents did not care much about fluency in Putonghua, and they revealed a tepid posture about the language *per se* and its speakers.

On the other hand, Hongkongers are likely to express uneasiness that their unique locality and heritage language could become extinct regarding language use. The Protect Cantonese Movement, launched in 2010, underscores their

experience, they seem to realized that their own language was tremendously powerful in preserving local consciousness. What needs to be scrutinized here is that there is a difference between Hongkongers' view of Putonghua and its users, and their view of the language when it is placed in a macro framework such as national policy. When the Tiananmen Square massacre happened in 1989 in mainland China, Hongkongers voiced their sincere condolences. They seemed to be aware of ethnic homogeneity in exhibiting a strong desire for a democratized country. The New York Times reported that Hong Kong has long hosted the only large-scale commemoration of the Tiananmen crackdown on Chinese soil. Each June 4, the hard-surfaced soccer fields of Victoria Park have served not only as a place to memorialize the dead, but as a history classroom for the young and a canvassing site for local pro-democracy groups (The New York Times, June 4, 2020).

Table 5. Integrative Orientation Towards Putonghua

No.	Items	Mean	SD
2.3	As a Chinese, I should be able to speak fluent Putonghua.	3.02	0.98
2.4	Putonghua should be more widely used in Hong Kong so that Hong Kong will quickly assimilate with the PRC.	2.12	1.03
2.9	A person who speaks fluent Putonghua in HK is usually educated, intelligent and well-off.	2.51	0.83
*2.11	I'm afraid that if I speak fluent Putonghua in HK, others will think I am a new immigrant from the mainland.	2.62	1.09
3.1c	I like Putonghua.	3.02	0.96
3.5c	I like the Putonghua speakers.	3.05	0.91
*3.6c	I tend to ignore people when they speak in Putonghua.	3.10	1.22
Factor Level Mean		2.78	1.00

*Reversed mean for negatively-worded items

Summarizing the findings of Hongkongers' attitudes towards English, Cantonese, and Putonghua from the perspective of integrative orientation, the participants were most inclined toward Cantonese, using the language widely in everyday communication. Despite 23 years of political transfer, their attitude towards the colonial language of English remained positive. In contrast, the status of Putonghua remained remarkably low despite the new language policy, displaying a significant mean difference from English in terms of education, intelligence, and wealth. This suggests that Putonghua occupies a much lower position than English, and the prestige of Cantonese in Hong Kong is still incomparable with other languages.

The mainlanders who took part revealed quite different results from those of Hongkongers, displaying mean values of more than medium for all three languages. They are positively attached to Putonghua (mean=3.8), but this outcome is considerably different from the overwhelming level of Hongkongers' inclination toward Cantonese (mean=4.50). Interestingly, they are not very against Cantonese (mean=3.55) unlike Hongkongers' negative attitudes toward Putonghua (mean=2.85). In particular, the mainlanders exhibited incredibly positive attitudes on the items of "Cantonese is the language which best represents Hong Kong." and "Cantonese is highly regarded in Hong Kong society." with the mean values 4.08 and 4.27 respectively. This can be accorded with the aforementioned different perspectives of Hongkongers on the individual and policy levels. As for English, they showed positive attitudes, but the mean value was below 4.0, which implies simple acceptance of its status as an international lingua franca.

4.3 Instrumental Orientation towards English, Cantonese, and Putonghua

Table 6 shows the participants' attitudes towards English from the instrumental angle. Categorically, high mean values for each item exhibit Hongkongers' positive inclination for the value and status of English. They strongly want to have a high English proficiency (item 3.4a) and tend to agree that it is helpful for better future (item 3.2a). These outcomes show quite lower SD, which may signal a significant consensus among the participants. English seems to be a crucial factor contributing to Hong Kong's prosperity and is still necessary to increase the competitiveness, as people have stuck to this belief even after the political handover.

Table 6. Instrumental Orientation Towards English

No.	Items	Mean	SD
2.6	I should be able to speak fluent English to get a better job or education.	4.34	0.79
*2.12	English is less important in Hong Kong after the change of sovereignty.	3.95	1.05
2.14	The use of English is one of the most crucial factors which have contributed to the success of Hong Kong's prosperity and development today.	3.92	1.02
2.15	To increase the competitiveness of Hong Kong, the English standard of Hong Kong people must be enhanced.	4.31	0.74
3.2a	English will help me much in getting better career opportunities or for further studies.	4.69	0.67
3.3a	English is highly regarded in Hong Kong society.	4.41	0.70
3.4a	I wish to master a high proficiency in English.	4.71	0.57
Factor Level Mean		4.33	0.79

*Reversed mean for negatively-worded items

The status and function of English has been predicted to weaken since 1997, but the current findings reveal a different perspectives. It can be interpreted that language prestige is determined in terms of a specific language's instrumentality, and the prestige of English is highly attributed to its status as an international language.

It is noteworthy that English, a colonial variety, has been considered a prestigious language across time. In a similar vein, looking at other colonial countries in Asia, French is not sustained any more in Vietnam (Wright, 2002). In Macau, a former Portuguese colony, people were not eager to learn Portuguese even during the colonial period, since it was not seen as useful (Adamson and Li, 1999). In fact, there are some similarities between Hong Kong and Macau, both are Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, speak Cantonese. The East and the West coexist in both places as well. Given these facts, it is inevitable that the status of English in Hong Kong would eventually be linked to internationalization. Meanwhile, English has been actively used in former British colonies such as Singapore and India, since the language has evolved into an international lingua franca (Jenkins, 2003; Kirkpatrick, 2007). Therefore, fluency would be an important asset for a professional career in the multilingual workplace (Li, 2009). It can be construed that Hongkongers have a positive inclination towards English, they hardly speak it in everyday life (Li, 2009), yet, need it for a more prosperous future. It is supported by this result that English is more salient in the instrumental orientation than the integrative orientation.

Table 7. Instrumental Orientation Towards Cantonese

No.	Items	Mean	SD
3.2b	Cantonese will help me much in getting better career opportunities or for further studies.	4.06	0.93
3.3b	Cantonese is highly regarded in Hong Kong society.	4.56	0.62
3.4b	I wish to master a high proficiency in Cantonese.	4.49	0.72
Factor Level Mean		4.37	0.76

As portrayed in Table 7, Hongkongers' attitudes towards Cantonese are conspicuously positive, with the high mean values for each item. The participants strongly agreed that Cantonese is highly regarded in Hong Kong, showing a higher mean value than that of English. They claimed that Cantonese is helpful for better opportunities, and they wish to have a high proficiency in this language. This suggests that Cantonese as a regional variety still plays a crucial role in its instrumental value in the speech community. As regards this, many of previous studies have reported that Cantonese has lower prestige than that of English (Groves, 2010; Liu, 2018). However, Ho and Richards (2013) showed that Hong Kong students did not have a consistent attitude as to whether Cantonese is a prestige language or not. In their study, the participants exhibited the most positive attitude towards Cantonese, and the researchers believed this was due to the fact that Cantonese is promoted strongly in Hong Kong, such as, the Protecting Cantonese Campaign (Ho and Richards, 2013).

In short, language attitudes can be flexible depending on the social situation, as proven by the present study. After the change in sovereignty, Cantonese has consistently maintained its unique status as an indicator of identity under the localization movements. Surprisingly, the regional vernacular has become prevalent for politics and administration instead of the national language. The Basic Law states that Hong Kong is to be governed by local Hong Kong permanent residents and the lifestyle of people is to remain unchanged for 50 years (Basic Law, Article 5). This means that the current autonomy and democracy would no longer be guaranteed after 2047, when the law will become ineffective. Although Hongkongers are only halfway to that point in time, they have experienced numerous instances of interferences from mainland China in different domains, which have continued since the handover. Examples include the National Security Reform of 2003, limiting Cantonese in the media in Guangzhou in 2010, the introduction of Moral and National Education in 2012, Hong Kong's electoral system reform in 2014, the extradition bill in 2019, and the National Security Law of 2020). As such, Hongkongers should not be censured with the desire to sustain their own culture, identity, and heritage language. We postulate that these historical events are inescapable factors that have led to significant differences in attitudes towards Cantonese.

Table 8. Title Instrumental Orientation Towards Putonghua

No.	Items	Mean	SD
2.16	If Putonghua is widely used in Hong Kong, Hong Kong will become more prosperous.	2.45	0.98
*2.17	Putonghua is NOT an important language in Hong Kong.	2.81	1.10
2.18	The importance and status of Putonghua will soon be higher than that of English in HK.	2.39	0.94
2.19	Putonghua will be used as a lingua franca (common language) for Mainlanders and Hongkongers in the future.	2.63	1.08
3.2c	Putonghua will help me much in getting better career opportunities or for further studies.	3.59	1.07
3.3c	Putonghua is highly regarded in Hong Kong society.	3.25	0.90
3.4c	I wish to master a high proficiency in Putonghua.	3.51	1.15
Factor Level Mean		2.95	1.03

*Reversed mean for negatively-worded items

Looking at Hongkongers' view toward Putonghua in Table 8, we can see the participants' negative perception of the language in the instrumental orientation, indicating a far lower status than that of English or Cantonese. To put it more precisely, the participants seem to hold dichotomous attitudes toward individuals and society. As for the individual stance, Putonghua is considered fairly high in Hong Kong, displaying greater mean values in relation to future development. The participants perceive the language as highly regarded in the society, revealing an aspiration to become highly proficient in the language. On the other hand, from a societal angle, such as prosperity and language status, they have an even more positive inclination towards English and Cantonese, showing that the prospects for Putonghua in Hong Kong are considerably negative. As mentioned earlier regarding perception of Cantonese, this reflects Hongkongers's negative views of the mainland, which has experienced unstable social conditions since 2003. Given that the SD is notably high, there seem to be distinctive individual differences in attitudes toward Putonghua among the participants compared to English or Cantonese.

Pierson (1998) predicted that Hong Kong would become a triglossic society of two high varieties and a low vernacular in the local community. Putonghua would play a role in politics and public administration, English would be a vehicle for technology and commerce, and Cantonese would be used for everyday communication. However, the findings of this study demonstrate that his predictions were incorrect, because he did not take into account the strong and unique locality of Hongkongers, who have stuck to their convictions for 150 years. Moreover, with China's sociopolitical and international expansion, the demand for the Chinese language has been increasing all over the world, therefore, the fluency in Putonghua seems to be a crucial asset to professional career (Li, 2009). Nonetheless, Putonghua has played a limited role in business communication in Hong Kong. On the other hand, Cantonese has been the medium of communication in the civil service (Evans, 2010a) and preserved its centrality in employment (Evans, 2010b).

To sum up, Hongkongers showed clearly positive attitudes towards English and Cantonese, but not towards Putonghua. Contrary to expectations, Cantonese was ranked first in the integrative orientation, although there is no significant difference from English. This suggests that the status of Cantonese, the local variety, is secure in Hong Kong, indicating that Hongkongers' strong attachment to their heritage language. The other noteworthy phenomenon is that the perception of Putonghua has been the lowest as ever. Linked to this, Lai (2005) argued that Putonghua was ranked the lowest since it was new to the sociolinguistic scene of Hong Kong, and its role as a second language was not yet consolidated. The language's position, however, is misaligned with this view, indicating that it holds an even worse position compared to twenty years ago. Hence, we postulate that there are other crucial factors deeply rooted in the position of Putonghua, and these are detailed in the following section.

4.4 Language Attitudes and Sociopolitical Movements

The primary aim of this section is to discern the relationship between language attitudes and sociopolitical movements. The term "demonstrations" refers to the 2019-2020 protest, and this survey was conducted at the time.²⁾

2) The Hong Kong protests began in 2019 in opposition to a proposed extradition law that would have allowed the transfer of fugitives to mainland China, among other jurisdictions. The demonstrations escalated into a much wider and prolonged anti-government movement that resulted in increasingly violent clashes between protesters and police across the city (SCMP, nd).

The aforementioned studies only focused on one of Hong Kong's three linguistic varieties. This survey, however, is different in that it has attempted to explore how political movements have influenced Hongkongers' attitudes towards the region's three official languages of Cantonese, English, and Putonghua. Hongkongers responded that the protests made them more attached to Cantonese, and revealing a marked antipathy toward Putonghua, and yet they have a positive inclination toward English.

Table 9. Language Attitudes Regarding the Demonstrations

No.	Items	Mean	SD
3.7b	Since the demonstration, I have been more attached to Cantonese.	4.30	0.89
*3.8b	Since the demonstration, I have been more against Cantonese.	4.45	0.74
Mean		4.38	0.82
3.7c	Since the demonstration, I have been more attached to Putonghua.	2.50	0.82
*3.8c	Since the demonstration, I have been more against Putonghua.	2.58	1.15
Mean		2.54	0.99
3.7a	Since the demonstration, I have been more attached to English.	3.89	0.81
*3.8a	Since the demonstration, I have been more against English.	4.13	0.76
Mean		4.01	0.79

*Reversed mean for negatively-worded items

Considering that the nuances accepted by the participants may be different, the items for the three languages were set up for both positive and negative approaches, and the analysis was interpreted based on the central tendency. As shown in Table 9, the findings indicate that Hongkongers' attitudes were in line with the features in the integrative and instrumental orientations. As predicted, the attachment to Cantonese was ranked at the top and a sense of generosity towards English emerged. On the other hand, the mean values of attitudes towards Putonghua were significantly low (mean=2.54), while the SD was higher (SD=0.99), signaling that the respondents undoubtedly have a negative view of the language, yet some of them are likely to be attached. A paired-samples *t*-test confirmed significant differences among the languages ($p < .001$), implying that the political protests affected Hongkongers' language attitudes.

The situation at the time of previous research was mainly related to political sovereignty between two countries, while the core of this study was centered on the relationship between language attitudes and the protests that have continued under two different systems since 1997. The social and political protests that have occurred in Hong Kong since 2003 are aimed at defending liberty against the preposterous pressures of a huge power with a different ideology (i.e., China). From a sociolinguistic angle, however, this could be perceived as a dangerous scenario that could lead to China's compulsory annihilation of a language, and not to natural language extinction for Hongkongers. Hence, we must accept Hongkongers' struggle to preserve their culture and heritage language, as well as the regional identity that retained 150 years as a British colony.

4.5 Follow Up Interviews

The follow-up interviews revealed a close association between local identity and language. The interviewees claimed that Cantonese is not a dialect, but their own heritage language which best represents their identity as Hongkongers.

I: I think the status of Putonghua may have risen due to the internationalization of China recently, what do you feel about the use of language in Hong Kong?

P1: I actually feel the same as before, Hongkongers have used Cantonese for a long time and we are used to speaking it.

I: But... officially, Hong Kong belongs to China, and Cantonese is just a dialect from the international standpoint?

P2: It doesn't matter. We speak English to foreigners, anyway. Putonghua is also just a dialect, as a Hongkonger, why should I speak the Beijing dialect?

I: Then, when strangers ask you something in Putonghua how do you act?

P2: I'm not happy, just answer simply. But, these days... I have pretend not to understand since the protests. I met some Korean people and they tried to speak Putonghua, but here, speaking English is much better. One tip for you, don't wear black clothes during you are here because you are Asian anyway...

The interviewees recognized Hong Kong as an independent country, not just a region. As such, they expressed subtle uneasiness at the question of whether they should speak Putonghua, the national language, as Chinese people. Furthermore, they revealed antipathy toward mainlanders who have flocked to Hong Kong and mostly occupy the business fields, and seemed to feel that Cantonese is under the threat of becoming extinct.

I: This may be a sensitive question, but...Hong Kong is a small region officially belonging to China, It looks like there is a significant anti-Chinese sentiment, what do you think?

P3: Okay... Hong Kong is different from the mainland. We have our own flag and language. I think we should use Cantonese and protect it as Hongkongers. That's why this protest is really important. Actually I don't even go to large shopping malls because the owners are mostly mainlanders. How would you feel if I said that South Korea and North Korea were the same country?

To sum up, the interviewees displayed enormous affection for their heritage language and the region. They seemed to consider that Cantonese is the symbol of their own culture to protect them from mainland China.

4.6 Cultural Identity, Localism, and Language Attitudes

Earlier sociolinguistic studies have dealt with the unique role of language in the formation of social identity (Irvine and Gal, 2000). Among others, Labov (1963)'s seminal work, *The Martha's Vineyard* focused on the use of a local vernacular in order to assert their regional identity. Based on the earlier studies, the present study sheds light on the dynamics between language attitudes, sociopolitical movements and localized ethnic identity in Hong Kong. Language attitudes, cultural identity and sociopolitical movements are strongly intertwined (Gao, 2012; Edwards, 2016). However, neither attitudes nor the identities are emotionally secure, they can change over time and are closely tied to relationship between power and sociopolitical circumstances (Pavlenko, 2005). In light of this, Gao (2012) examined Chinese netizens' discourses in online discussions immediately following the Protect Cantonese Movement. The netizens acknowledged that Cantonese, as a regional lingua franca, has sustained a vibrant regional culture, and placed Cantonese at the core of their local identity (Gao, 2012).

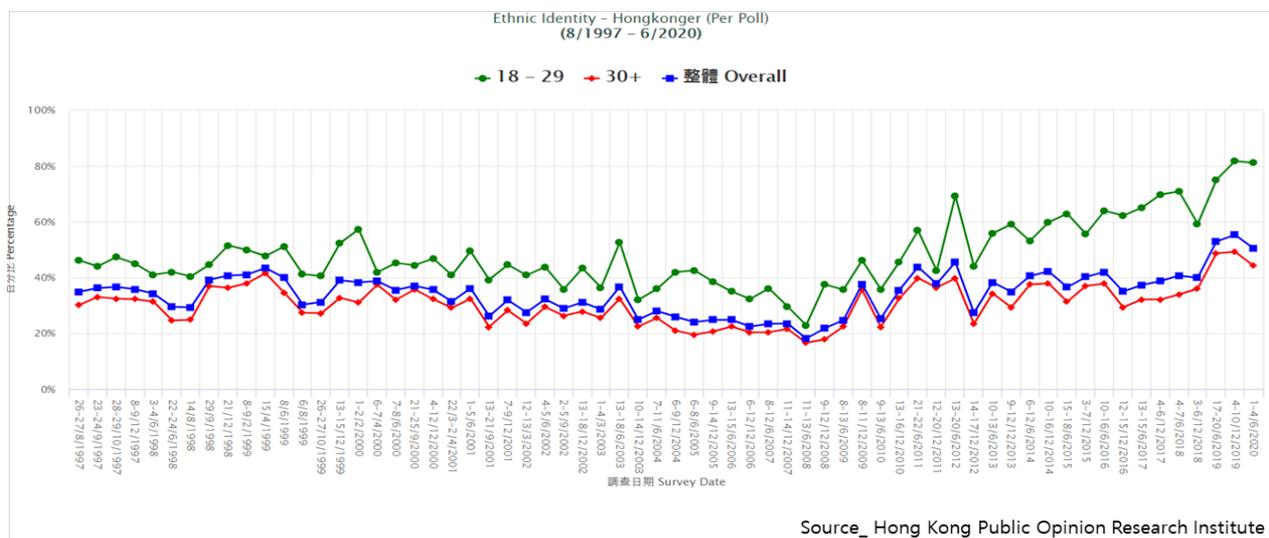


Fig. 1. Perception Change of Hongkongers' Identity

Furthermore, Edwards (2015, 2016) administered an online survey on attitudes, identity, and the use of Hong Kong English (HKE) to students at a tertiary institute in Hong Kong just before and a year after the Umbrella Movement. Edwards reported that there were significant differences between the two parts of the survey. As for ethnic identity, the majority of respondents, 61.24% in 2014 and 73.97% in 2015, identified themselves as Hongkongers, displaying tensions between the two political systems, and the desire of some Hongkongers to assert a unique identity independent from that of mainland China (Edwards, 2016). The results are also supported by the findings of the present study, whereby large majority of the participants identified as Hongkongers (72%), 25% claimed a double identity as Hongkong-Chinese, and only 3% perceived themselves as Chinese. Aside from identity, there has been a substantial change in the recognition of HKE as a real variety of English, from 30.61% to 42.80%, implying how political movements impacted on language attitudes (Edwards, 2016). These outcomes are aligned with the results from Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute, indicating that young Hongkongers are increasingly unlikely to identify as Chinese (see Figure 1). This seems deeply related with the fact that Hong Kong was a separate colony for 150 years and formed a regional sense of solidarity. Hence, its people have social, cultural, and systemic reasons why they do not identify with their compatriots in mainland China.

The responses of the 26 mainlanders were not aligned with those of Hongkongers. According to a one-way ANOVA, between group attitudes toward English were not significantly different from the greater value than the median ($p > .05$). However, there seemed to be distinctive viewpoints between the two groups regarding Cantonese and Putonghua. The mainlanders argued that the protests caused a negative impact on Cantonese (mean=2.96), and that they themselves had become positively inclined toward Putonghua (mean=3.8). The one-way ANOVA showed that the discrepancy is significant ($p < .001$). In short, language attitudes are strongly tied to identity and sociopolitical situations, but the variables are changeable. From this perspectives, it remains to be seen where there is room for improvement regarding the vitality of Putonghua in Hong Kong, although the status of the language is still low at the moment.

5. Conclusion

Hong Kong people have strongly sustained the status of Cantonese as their heritage language over the twenty-three years after the political handover, and they were very keen on English as well. However, despite the educational, political, and economic changes during the period, they showed incredibly negative attitudes toward Putonghua. Regarding the low status of Putonghua, Lai (2005) contended that it was because Putonghua was new to the sociolinguistic situation of Hong Kong, and its role as a second language was not yet strengthened. Given the similar results even after two decades, however, this study claims that it is related to the sociopolitical movements against the power from mainland China that have steadily taken place in Hong Kong since the change of sovereignty. Furthermore, it revealed that language attitudes in Hong Kong were deeply intertwined with their unique regional identity. On the basis of the findings, this study postulates that the mainland China should absorb the aspiration of Hongkongers pursuing democracy rooted in regional values in order to balance the use of the official languages and to have the moderate nationalism in the future.

The present study is meaningful in that the survey was randomly conducted, in contrast to the fact that most previous studies have uniformly collected the samples through established educational institutions. It is also of sociolinguistic significance that this study sheds light on whether there is a change in the connection between the unique identity and their language attitudes toward the three official languages in Hong Kong after the recent sociopolitical protests.

Nonetheless, there still exist a few limitations. Firstly, due to the limitations of the researchers' language ability, only those who can speak English took part in the study, without reflecting the reality of the coexistence of three languages in Hong Kong. In addition, the small sample size and the variety of pathways to participate in the survey must be mentioned as clear-cut drawbacks here. With further studies taking into account these shortcomings, it is believed that the language attitudes of Hong Kong people could be explained more clearly and accurately.

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