The sociolinguistics of Hong Kong and the space for Hong Kong English

KINGSLEY BOLTON

Introduction

The starting point for this chapter is Kachru's call for a paradigm shift and pluricentric approach to World Englishes. Today it is something of a cliché that English is a global language, no longer the property of Britain or the United States, and that, in McCrum's words, '[t]here is not one English language anymore, but there are many English languages' (McCrum, cited in Iyer 1993: 53). The effects of this paradigm shift have been felt in many societies where English has the status of a second language or 'outer circle' variety, including such Asian societies as India, Malaysia, Philippines, and Singapore. Previously, the notion of Hong Kong English has received more support in the international sociolinguistics literature than it has in the territory itself (see, for example, Todd and Hancock, 1986: 233-5; McArthur, 1992: 483-4). On 30 June 1997, Hong Kong ceased to be a British crown colony and became the HKSAR (the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China). The change in sovereignty not only signalled a transition from a colonial to a post-colonial society, but also, marked the transformation of a colonial city to a global city, 'with a form of governance that has no clear historical precedents ' (Abbas, 1997: 2). This chapter explores the sociolinguistic background to the recognition of a local and global space for Hong Kong English, in a community that was promised a 'high degree of autonomy' in the negotiations that decided its future.

A paradigm shift for English in Hong Kong

Over the last fifteen years or so, Braj Kachru has suggested a model of global English in terms of 'three concentric circles', *the inner circle* (societies such as Britain, the USA, Australia, New Zealand, etc. where English is the 'first language' of a majority of the population), *the outer circle* (societies such as India, the Philippines, etc. where English has the status of a 'second language') and *the extending* (or *'expanding') circle* (societies such as China or J a p a n where English has the status of a 'foreign language ') . In a sustained academic campaign for a non-Eurocentric approach to the study of World Englishes, Kachru has challenged a number of assumptions about the study of English as a global language.

In particular he has been eager to kill off such 'sacred cows of English' as the 'native speaker' versus 'non-native' speaker dichotomy, and to argue for a 'pluricentric' approach to the acquisition a n d use of 'new' varieties of English, or, m o r e precisely, 'world Englishes' in such outer-circle areas as Bangladesh, Kenya, Malaysia, Nigeria, the Philippines, Singapore, etc. This has evolved into a challenge to such 'myths' as the 'native speaker idealization myth', the 'native vs. non-native speaker interaction myth', the 'culture identity (or monoculture) myth', the 'exocentric n o r m myth', a n d the 'interlanguage myth' (Kachru, 1997: 10). Kachru has also been concerned to challenge the dominance of the Anglocentric literary canon, to argue for the recognition of bilingual creativity in the 'new literatures' in English that have appeared in Africa, Asia, a n d t h e Caribbean, a n d to illuminate the e x t e n t to which these 'contact literatures in English' have u n d e r g o n e *nativization* a n d *acculturation.* Kachru argues that in West Africa, South Asia a n d Southeast Asia, these literatures are thus 'both nativized a n d acculturated' as instanced by the work of Wole Soyinka from Nigeria, a n d that of Raja Rao of India, a n d that the issue of the bilingual's creativity is an important area for linguistic, literary and pedagogical research (Kachru, 1990: 159-73). T h e notion of 'multi-canon' attempts to accommodate the current sociolinguistic reality in world Englishes where speakers of a wide range of first languages communicate with o n e a n o t h e r t h r o u g h English, so that, 'a speaker of a Bantu language may interact with a speaker of Japanese, a Taiwanese, an Indian, and so on'. As a result English has become acculturated in many 'un-English' sociolinguistic contexts, in many African a n d Asian societies where there is no shared Judeo-Christian o r E u r o p e a n cultural heritage, or shared literary canon, a n d thus the English

language has b e c o m e 'multi-canonical' (Kachru, 1991).

Kachru has further urged a re-think towards the teaching of English worldwide, calling for a two-fold 'paradigm shift' in approaches to English studies:

> First, a paradigm shift in research, teaching, and application of sociolinguistic realities to the functions of English. Second, a shift from frameworks and theories which are essentially appropriate only to monolingual countries. It is indeed essential to recognise that World Englishes represent certain linguistic, cultural and pragmatic realities and pluralism, and that pluralism is now an integral part of World Englishes and literatures written in Englishes. The pluralism of English must be reflected in the approaches, both theoretical and applied, we adopt for understanding this unprecedented linguistic phenomenon. (Kachru, 1992: 11).

In a recent paper o n 'English as an Asian Language', Kachru reviews the contemporary spread of English in the region, noting that at present the English-using population of Asia totals 350 million o u t of an estimated population of 3.5 billion; that India is the third largest English-using nation after the USA and the UK; that English is the language most in demand for acquisition of bilingualism/multilingualism in Asia; a n d that in some societies, including Singapore, English is assuming the role of first language, 'whatever we m e a n by that term' (Kachru, 1997: 7). Kachru argues for an acceptance and utilization of 'English on Asian terms', noting that, in Asia, English has a potential as a liberating language, and that '[o]nce a language establishes its autonomy, it is actually liberated, and its "liberated" uses and functions have to be separated from its non – liberated uses '. Again, Kachru notes the importance of literary creativity in this context , and arguess for the acculturation of English to the needs and visions of Asian societies, in such societies as India, Malaysia, the Philippines a n d Singapore:

> The architects of each tradition, each strand, have molded, reshaped, acculturated, redesigned, and - by doing so - enriched what was a Western medium. The result is a liberated English which contains vitality, innovation, linguistic mix, and cultural identity. And, it is not the creativity of the monolingual and the monocultural - this creativity has rejuvenated the medium from 'exhaustion' and has 'liberated' it in many ways. (Kachru, 1997: 23)

In the case of Hong Kong, two related questions arise: First, is it possible to argue that the conditions now exist for a recognition of the autonomy of Hong Kong English, on a par with other Englishes in the Asian region? Second, has the time also come to recognize the creativity of English in Hong Kong, as evidenced by a range of literary initiatives in recent years? These are two of the themes explored in this book.

From Canton English to Hong Kong English

The origins of English in China, and of Hong Kong English itself, may be traced back to the early seventeenth century, when the first British trading ships reached Macau and Canton (Guangzhou). With the development of the Canton trade in the eighteenth a n d early nineteenth century, a distinct variety of Chinese pidgin English Emerged at Canton and Macau. In the early nineteenth century, this was referred to as Canton 'jargon', and it was not until 1859 that the term 'pidgin English' began to be used. With the annexation of Hong Kong during the First Opium War between Britain and China in 1842, and the development of the 'treaty port' system from the 1840s onwards, English began to spread through education, notably through the various mission schools that were established in Hong Kong and throughout China. Early mission schools like St Paul's College (1851), Diocesan Girls' School (1860), Diocesan Boys' School (1869), and St Joseph's (1876), were complemented by the government-run Central School (1862) which later became Queen's College. Such schools played a significant role in the linguistic history of Hong Kong as a British colony, in educating a compradore class of merchants who played a key role in Sino-European and Sino-American trade, as well as the promotion of modernity in late nineteenth-century China (Smith, 1985).

The establishment of the early system of mission schools did not mean that the study of Chinese was typically neglected. Western missionaries who arrived in China from the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards encountered a rich literate culture that, as in the case of India, spoke for an advanced

civilization with its own strong literary and philosophical tradition. Many of the largely Protestant educators who set up the first missionary schools had a profoundly orientalist interest in the Mandarin language as well as the dialects of South China, notably Cantonese, Hakka, and Chiu Chau. Consequently, Chinese language and literature was taught at most mission schools, alongside English, thus creating a category of school referred to as 'Anglo-Chinese', a term which survives until today, referring to schools where English is the declared teaching medium and the printed medium for most textbooks. In 1911, the University of Hong Kong was established, and although this increased the demand for English-medium education, large numbers of Chinese-medium schools were established in the 1920s and 1930s (So, 1992: 72). In 1963, the Chinese University of Hong Kong was set up, with the mission of providing Chinese-language university instruction. After the Communist led riots in 1967, there followed the 'Chinese language campaign' of the 1970s which pressed for greater recognition of Chinese. In 1974, Chinese was first recognized as a co-official language, and in 1974-8, education reforms took place at both the primary and secondary levels, and an era of 'mass education' began to be established. In recent years, other social and political events have contributed to the contemporary history of both English and Chinese. Such events include the rise of a popular Cantonese culture in film and music from the 1960s to the 1990s, the expansion of university education from 1989 onwards and recent policy changes in relation to the use of English as an official language and a teaching medium in schools.

As in other Asian societies such as India, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore the role that English plays in contemporary Hong Kong society has been shaped by specific historical processes, including British colonialism, which in the case of Hong Kong spanned the years from 1842-1997. What distinguishes the Hong Kong experience, however, is the relative longevity of the colonial era in the 'territory', as it was referred to in the era of late British colonialism which lasted from the mid-1960s until the 'Handover' of sovereignty to the People's Republic of China five years ago. This period of 'sixties to nineties' was crucial to the formation of 'modern Hong Kong' in a number of ways, as it saw the economic transformation of Hong Kong from a relatively p o o r refugee community to a wealthy commercial and entrepreneurial powerhouse. The Hong Kong 'success story' in the postwar period involved a number of factors closely related to the politics and economics of mainland China, including the influx of Shanghainese industry and capital; the UN trade blockade of China from the early 1950s to the 1970s; the growth of the city as a financial centre during the 1970s; and the move of Hong Kong businessmen into China trade throughout the 1980s.

The same period also saw rapid rises in the population of the territory. In 1945, the population was just 600,000; by 1961, because of waves of immigration from the People's Republic of China, it had increased to 3.1 million. This was followed by continued increases over the next three decades; by 1971, the total was 3.9 million; by 1981, 5.1 million; by 1996, 6.2 million, and by 2000, approximately 7 million. From the late 1950s until the 1970s, much of Hong Kong was a refugee immigrant community. Until 1980, the Hong Kong government maintained a 'touchbase' policy which stipulated that once illegal immigrants reached the 'urban areas' of the colony, they would be allowed to settle permanently. This policy ended in 1980, but in the following decades illegal immigration continued, as its does today. In addition to the arrival of 'lis' (illegal immigrants), there has also been a system of legal immigration from the late 1970s onwards. Legal immigrants in the 1980s were arriving in Hong Kong at the rate of 75 a day, by the mid-1990s this figure had risen to 150. The underside of the officially endorsed economic success story was the social reality of the refugee fight for survival in a rapidly modernizing urban metropolis. This was also a story of living space, as a refugee immigrant community struggled for room to live in a city that was frequently ranked the world's most crowded.

During this era of late British colonialism, Hong Kong people were denied the opportunity of political involvement in the political process until the arrival of Christopher Patten, the last governor of Hong Kong (1992-7), by which time it was largely too late to establish a strong system of democratic representation. During the period of reformism from the 1970s to 1990s, the government did, however, contribute to the social transformation of Hong Kong society in a number of ways, through public housing programmes, the provision of low-cost medical services, the reform of the police force, anticorruption campaigns, and civic education. From the 1980s, local sociologists were noting the growth

of a 'new middle class', whose membership ranged from junior clerical staff and secretaries to the executives of major corporations (Leung, 1996: 12).

In this same era of economic and social transformation, the nature of public education changed dramatically, and this was to have a major impact on the learning of languages, and the degree of multilingualism in Hong Kong society. In the 1960s, typically only the socially privileged were able to provide their children with a complete secondary education, and as far as English was concerned, a system of *elitist bilingualism* existed within education (Bratt- Paulston, 1980: 2). Children progressed from an elite (or 'famous') primary school to an elite secondary school and then to either the Chinese University of Hong Kong or the University of Hong Kong. By the 1980s, the rich had started sending their children overseas for higher education, and, from the 1970s, basic educational reforms providing for compulsory primary and secondary schooling gave all children the opportunity to gain an education, which meant that increasing numbers of children from poorer backgrounds were able to go to university. The earlier system of elite schooling in English and 'elitist bilingualism' began to shift towards a system of *mass bilingualism* (or *folk bilingualism),* which, in spite of great imperfections, gave a large proportion of children at least the opportunity to acquire some English in 'Anglo-Chinese' secondary schools, where English textbooks were used. The proportion of children going to universities increased from around 2-4% at the beginning of the 1980s to something like 17% by 1996. In 1989, the government upgraded a number of post-secondary colleges and financed the establishment of a new university of science and technology, and today there are eight local universities, compared with two at the beginning of the 1980s, where English is widely used as the language of lectures and textbooks. The educational reforms of the 1970s and 1980s have contributed more than any other factor to the spread of a knowledge of English within modern Hong Kong society. The census figures for the period indicate a rise in the proportion of the population claiming a knowledge of English from 9.7% in 1961 to 43.0% in 2001, as illustrated in Figure 1.1.
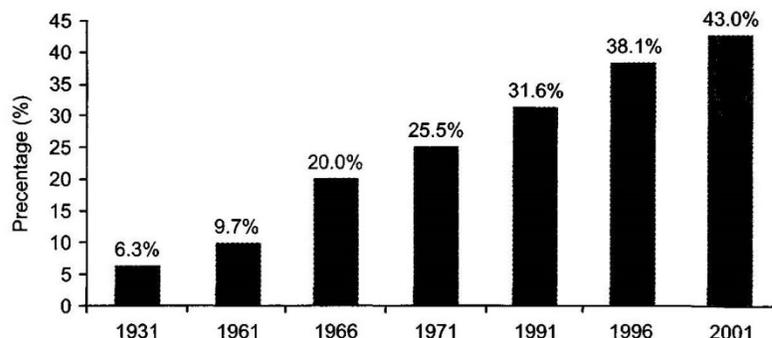

Figure 1.1   Census results for knowledge of English in Hong Kong 1931–1996

In the late colonial era, however, when a knowledge of English was spreading throughout the population at an unprecedented rate, official g o v e r n m e n t language policy began to move in the other direction, towards the p r o m o t i o n of the Chinese language in a n u m b e r of official domains, as is explained in the following section of this chapter.

Language planning in Hong Kong

The specific history of Hong Kong has helped determine the space allocated to the English language in the current language hierarchy of what is now the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), as well as the language policies that have recently been formulated by the Hong Kong government. During the period of late British colonialism from the late 1960s to the late 1990s, the colonial government failed to formulate a clear language policy for the community, a lack of will often excused by

the government as ' non-interventionism', but described by others as political 'vacillation' (Branegan, 1991:27).

It was n o t until 1974 that Chinese was recognized as a co-official language in the territory, and during the period of British colonial rule, the English language had the status of the official language of government, the official language of law, and was *de facto* the most widely used m e d i u m of secondary and university education. Its functions included its use as an official language, its use in education , its use in industry, trade, business, finance and communications. The Official Languages Ordinance of 1974 established that Chinese and English would thenceforth 'enjoy equality of use'. A decade or so later, after the negotiations between Beijing and London determined the arrangements for the 1997 'Handover', the position of Chinese was further strengthened by the publication of the Basic Law of the H o n g Kong Special Administrative Region, in which Article 9 stated that: 'In addition to the Chinese language, English may also be used as an official language by the executive authorities , legislative and judicial organs of the Hong Kong Administrative Region' (Chinese Government, 1992).

In 1995, the Hong Kong government announced that its new language policy would be 'to develop a civil service which is biliterate in English and Chinese and trilingual in English, Cantonese and Putonghua ' (Lau, 1995), an official policy statement which is still in force. In the years immediately prior to the July 1997 Handover, an increasing proportion of Cantonese was used in Legislative Council speeches, a n d since July 1997 the Provisional Legislative Council has mainly used Cantonese to conduct its proceedings. Attempts have been m a d e by the government since the early 1990s to provide training courses in Putonghua for Hong Kong civil servants, but, at present, Cantonese, rather than Putonghua, is still the dominant variety in this domain. Similar changes

have taken place in the legal system in Hong Kong, and through the 'Bilingual Laws Project', from 1986 onwards, a large proportion of the written laws of Hong Kong have been translated into Chinese. From the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, amendments to the Official Languages Ordinance extended the use of spoken Chinese into the higher courts. In December 1995, the first civil High Court case was heard in Putonghua, and in August 1997, the first criminal case was conducted in Cantonese in the High Court (Cheung, 1997).

In Hong Kong, many local linguists have been less concerned about a conflict between English and Chinese, and more anxious about the possible tension between the use of Cantonese and that of Putonghua. The use of Cantonese in Hong Kong is obviously out of step with the language policies of the People's Republic of China (PRC), which specifically promote the national language Putonghua, together with the written correlate of simplified Chinese characters instead of the 'full characters' used in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Hong Kong is the Cantonese-speaking capital of the world, and in the HKSAR, Cantonese, a mere 'regional dialect' in the PRC, enjoys a preeminent position, not only in intimate domains such as family and friends, but also in employment, public life, social activities, and even in such official and semi-official domains as the government, civil service, and education. It is also the dominant language of Hong Kong popular culture, which finds expression in television, popular music, and films. In many ways, Cantonese can be regarded as *the* language of Hong Kong. Sin and Roebuck thus comment that, given the wide use of the language in education, religion, the print and broadcast media, and the government, 'the status of Cantonese is much higher than is normally thought and cannot be simply brushed aside as the "vernacular"' (Sin and Roebuck, 1996: 252).

The stated official language policy of the PRC is essentially opposed to the use of 'regional dialects' such as Cantonese, Fukien, Shanghainese in government, education, and other official domains of use. Language planning in the PRC since the revolution has been presented in the form of a national 'language reform policy' (Cheng and Pasierbsky, 1988), which attempts to tackle four main issues: (1) illiteracy, (2) the development and promotion of a standard national language, (3) the promotion of simplified Chinese characters, and (4) the promotion of the Latinized alphabetic writing system, 'Pinyin', for certain specialist purposes. A *China Daily* newspaper report on language policy in 1992 emphasized the standardization of language, especially in its written form, noting that: 'The State Council demanded that all departments and local governments support the work of the committee by assuming leadership of the language and Chinese characters' *{China Daily,* 1992). It is thus evident that, in Hong Kong, language planning

diverges from that of the PRC in a number of important respects, notably where official policy stipulates the promotion of the national language *(Putonghua),* the use of simplified characters, the use of the Pinyin writing system, and the standardization of written characters. On this last point, it should be noted that in Hong Kong the use of 'written Cantonese' is popular in advertising, newspapers, a n d comic books, and a number of local linguists have expressed concern about the future 'autonomy' of Cantonese (Bauer and Benedict, 1997: xxxii; Chin, 1997: 88).

The 'medium on instruction' issue in Hong Kong

The policy vacuum that existed before 1997 can be seen most clearly within education, although, in fact, the British colonial administration attempted as early as the mid-1970s to introduce a policy of vernacular language education. In 1973, the government published a 'Green Paper', or policy proposal, in favour of using Chinese as the teaching medium in the lower forms of all secondary schools, explaining its thinking thus:

> The medium of instruction bears significantly upon the quality of education offered at post-primary level. Pupils coming from primary schools where they have been taught in the medium of Cantonese have a grievous burden put on them when required to absorb new subjects through the medium of English. We recommend that Chinese become the usual language of instruction in the lower forms of secondary schools, and that English should be studied as the second language. (Hong Kong Government, 1973: 6, cited in Gibbons, 1982: 117)

Following the publication of the Green Paper, the government met strong opposition from parents and schools, backed down on these early plans to promote Chinese as a teaching medium, and, finally, in the White Paper of 1974, settled for a *laissez-faire* approach, allowing individual school principals to decide the teaching medium in their schools. This aborted policy move by the colonial government was significant in that it occurred at just that point in time when the educational system of modern Hong Kong was being created through the expansion of education. It thus appears that the initial instinct of the colonial government was to opt for Chinese-medium instruction, which, in the vast majority of schools, would have meant Cantonese.

  Ironically, this in turn provides evidence that the promotion of Cantonese was a feature of colonial language policy in the territory, just as the use of regional Chinese dialects in religion and education has been a tenet of missionary language policy throughout the nineteenth century. The promotion of ' mother tongue ' education in contemporary Hong Kong can thus be seen as b o t h missionary a n d colonial; the PRC has never h a d a policy of promoting the ' m o t h e r tongue' as a teaching m e d i u m . In pre-modern China, classical Chinese was used as the language of the educated or 'Mandarin' class; after the foundation of the Chinese Republic in 1911, a new form of standard written Chinese, *baihua,* was adopted. Later, after the communist government came to power in 1949, the standard written language was further amended through the use of simplified characters, and a form of the spoken language, *Putonghua,* was promoted as a national a n d official language, for use in domains such as government and education. Despite this historical irony, many of those involved in the Chinese language from the 1970s have been concerned to promote the use of Chinese for a range of s o u n d educational reasons, including the practical necessity of teaching lower-ability groups for whom English is a major obstacle to learning, as well as the desire for greater social equality (Kwok, 1982: 40-3; Pun, 1997: 9 5 - 6) .

  T h e government's failure to implement a strong policy in favour of *either* Chinese-medium teaching or English-medium instruction in the mid-1970s was perhaps symptomatic of the dilemma that it faced. To follow its instinct a n d i m p l e m e n t Chinese-medium education at that time would have incurred the displeasure of the majority of local parents and schools, but to have adopted a vigorous policy of using English would have m e a n t that the government ran the risk of accusations of linguistic a n d cultural imperialism. By contrast, in Singapore, Lee Kwan Yew, bolstered by the authenticity of his role as the nation's post-colonial leader, had few qualms about the promotion of English as the official language of administration, business, and education. The result of this 'vacillation' in policy led to the continued

increase in the proportion of 'Anglo-Chinese' schools, which were secondary schools that advertised themselves as English-medium institutions. In practice, few of these schools provided a total immersion in the English-based education system, and by the late 1980s and early 1990s, the 'English-medium' system in place could be described as a 'continuum'. At one end of the scale were prestigious secondary schools which prided themselves on teaching all subjects through the medium of English (apart from Chinese studies), while at the other e n d of the scale were the lowest rank of schools that used Cantonese for teaching almost all subjects, even though the majority of textbooks were in English, a n d students took English-medium examinations. In between these two extremes were the majority of schools, which used both spoken Cantonese and English (together with English textbooks) in a 'mixed mode ' practice of teaching. Among other things, this resulted in the extensive use of code-switching and code-mixing in schools a m o n g the younger generations of students who were receiving their education in the system (Johnson, 1994: 187-8).

In the 1980s and 1990s, the government began to encourage Chinese me d i u m education through a number of other measures, including various incentives for secondary school principals to adopt Chinese as a teaching m e d i u m , but, given the strong parental d e m a n d for English-medium schools, these measures h a d little effect. In 1994, for example, the statistics showed that over 90% of all secondary schools were at least nominally English-medium (Johnson, 1994: 186-7). Shortly before the change of sovereignty in 1997, the colonial Hong Kong government in its final months suddenly adopted a coercive strengthening of policy, and, on 22 March 1997, it announced that in future approximately only 100 secondary schools (some 22% of the total of 460) would be allowed to use English as a teaching medium and that punitive measures, e.g. a maximum fine of $25,000 and two years in jail, might be used against school principals who did not follow the instructions of the government on this issue (Kwok, 1997). Later the figure of 100 was amended to 114, after protests from schools and parents, but at present the policy remains one of providing 'firm guidance' for secondary schools, and of encouraging the use of Cantonese as a teaching medium.

Why the colonial government in its last few months should have chosen to break with its *laissez-faire* past so dramatically remains something of a mystery. What seems clear, however, is that the announcement of this policy *was* a decision of the colonial government, *not,* as has been the subsequent perception, the decision of the first Beijing-appointed post-colonial Chief Executive, Mr Tung Chee-hwa, and his advisors. There are a number of possible explanations of the policy change. The government may finally have accepted the arguments of those local educationalists who despaired of the inefficiency and wastage of the previous system, particularly with reference to the education of lower-ability children in what are called the Tower-band' schools in Hong Kong. Alternatively, some in the government may have believed that by promoting an education system based largely on Cantonese that they would also be giving support to a local Cantonese-speaking community faced with a takeover by northern Chinese communists, and that supporting Cantonese would also mean support for a local Hong Kong identity, and the 'high degree of autonomy' promised by the Draft Agreement between Britain and China that had decided Hong Kong's future in 1984.

In the two and a half years since the announcement of this policy, there has been a great deal of government rhetoric in support of its new policy of 'mother tongue' teaching, but it is by no means clear that this policy will continue unaltered into the future. Recent reports in the newspapers suggest that the government itself may be split on the issue of language policy. For example, the Secretary for Education and Manpower was recently quoted as reaffirming his belief in the government's 'mother tongue' policy (Chan, 1999), but a report one week later cited the head of a government-appointed working group on the medium of instruction as stating that senior secondary students 'should have freedom to choose which language to be taught in if the schools believed they have teachers capable of using English to teach' (Cheung, 1999). A newly appointed Director of Education was also reported as calling for a 'radical overhaul' of the education system, adding that the government was 'keeping an open mind' on the teaching medium issue (Moy, 1998). To many in Hong Kong, it seems that the government is again undecided on the issue of a clear language policy for education, all of which moved the *South China Morning Post* to publish a recent editorial on the topic, that noted the apparent confusion in current official thinking:

> Contradictory findings follow one another with bewildering speed ... Even as one government-sponsored working group recommends that secondary schools teaching in Cantonese should be allowed to choose which language to use as a medium of instruction at senior level, fears are being voiced that the government could be planning to make all SAR schools switch to mother tongue teaching ... It will cause great dismay among the public if the remaining 114 schools teaching in English are made to change. An international city with cyber-world aspirations needs schools that teach in the language of business and modern science. *(South China Morning Post,* 22 November 1999)

Whatever happens in the next few years, it would be surprising if Hong Kong jettisoned English entirely as a medium of school instruction. Despite the reassurances of the government, large numbers of parents remain unconvinced that the language can be effectively taught if its status is relegated to that of a 'foreign' language in schools. The government is also under pressure to maintain and improve the 'standard' of English from the business community, anxious that H o n g Kong's economic prosperity, a n d its status as a centre for international business, already dented by the post-1997 Asian economic crisis, might be further eroded in comparison with its regional rival Singapore, or its rapidly developing mainland competitor, Shanghai.

There is also an important social-class dimension to all this, as many Hong Kong parents feel that access to English for their children is being restricted by these new policy measures, and that, as in other societies, 'the requirement for children to have education in the mother tongue can lead to an apartheid situation which may be socially divisive and/or oppressive' (Gupta, 1995). If the new policy continues in its present form, the worry for many parents is that the English-medium schools will become largely the preserve of children of parents from middle-class or upper-middle-class backgrounds, who are most adept at steering their children through a competitive system of kindergarten and primary school before gaining entry to the more prestigious English-medium schools. In addition, many of the high-ranking civil servants and educationalists who are responsible for formulating language policies often send their own children overseas for education, typically to private schools a n d universities in Australia, North America and Britain (Postiglione, 1998: 151). The question of language a n d social class in H o n g Kong is o n e of a number of sociolinguistic issues that have been largely ignored in the past, as Lee (1998) indicates. Other issues include multilingualism and multiculturalisrn, immigrant education, with specific relevance to immigrants from mainland China, and the problem of 'language standards', a discourse applied even-handedly to 'falling' standards of Chinese and English. T h e discussion of such issues has also been influenced greatly by the rapid and dramatic political, economic and social changes that have occurred in the HKSAR over the last few decades. As in many other societies experiencing rapid change, the discussion of language has been accompanied by its own ideologies and myths. Two of the most powerful myths in the sociolinguistic description of the society have been what one might dub the 'monolingualism myth' and the ' invisibility myth'.[1]

Hong Kong and the 'monolingual myth'

The 'myth of monolingualism' is persistent in many communities where the sociolinguist sees diversity, variation and multilingualism. It may be true that 'in England they speak English', but they also speak many other languages as well. A recent survey on the languages of London schools reported that 307 languages were spoken by the city's schoolchildren, with Cantonese listed in eleventh place. The degree of multilingualism in Hong Kong, among bilingual and trilingual Chinese, as well as among various linguistic minority groups may be less dramatic, b u t it does exist. Throughout the 1980s a n d early 1990s, however, many linguists seemed reluctant to recognize the particular forms that multilingualism takes in Hong Kong, choosing instead to emphasize the dominance of Cantonese in the local community.

Thus Fu (1987: 28) comments that 'Ninety-eight percent of the population speaks Chinese at home ' a n d that 'English continues to remain more a foreign language than a second language to most people'; Yu a n d Atkinson (1988: 307) state that ' Hong Kong [is] a British colony where 9 8 % of the population

are Cantonese-speaking Chinese' ; Yau (1989: 179) describes the speech community as 'a virtually monolingual Chinese society'; So (1992: 79) affirms that ' Hong Kong is an essentially Cantonese-speaking community ' ; a n d Yau (1993: 25) claims that ' Hong Kong is basically a monoethnic society'. Few would deny the vitality of Cantonese, but, at the same time, notions of linguistic homogeneity a n d ethnic purity hardly fits the daily experience of life in a community that has so relatively recently morphed from a *wah kiu* refugee community into a vibrant Asian metropolis. Chako (1995) describes the flavour of this in an essay written in the mid-1990s:

> As a child in Hong Kong, I spoke English with a British-Indonesian-Cantonese accent, and never really knew what my 'mother tongue' was. Today, many Hong Kong Chinese children also find themselves in confusion about their native language. They speak fluent English with a Filipino accent, acquired by daily proximity to their maid, or they rattle on in Canadian English, the fallout of their parents' pre-1997 pursuit of a passport. ... My minibus driver in Kowloon Tong exhibits an admirable command of Tagalog, and is besieged by a flock of willing tutor-passengers who want to know when he's moving to Manila. ... Whether we're talking language (who put the 'putong' in putonghua anyway?) culture (Confucius or Cantopop?) or political ideology (hands up, all you capitalist communists), Hong Kong Chinese can hardly claim to have a clear cut 'Chinese' identity.

Recently the view of Hong Kong as a 'monolingual' and 'monoethnic' society has been strongly challenged by a number of Hong Kong sociolinguists, including Afendras (1998), Bacon-Shone and Bolton (1998), and Patri and Pennington (1998). Bacon-Shone and Bolton, working from a variety of census and language survey data, point out that empirical results indicate that knowledge of English in the general population expanded greatly during the 1980s and 1990s. For example, the total number of respondents claiming to speak English 'quite well', 'well', and 'very well' rose from 6.6% in 1983 to 33.7% in 1993; conversely the numbers of those stating that they did not speak 'at all' dropped from 33.1% in 1983 to 17.4% in 1993. These results received a strong measure of support from the official by-census that was carried out in 1996, where 3.1% of the population claimed to speak English as 'a usual language/dialect', but another 34.9% reported speaking English as 'another language/dialect' (giving a total of 38% of all those claiming to know English). The dramatic change in the linguistic profile of the society in this time may be related to a number of factors, but it seems certain that the extension of education through the primary and secondary reforms of the 1970s and the university reforms of the late 1980s and early 1990s has played a major role in the spread of English throughout the community.

At the written level, English also plays an important role in formal communications of all kinds, in government, the legal domain, in university textbooks and teaching materials, and as a professional language of business and technical communications in the territory. In the 1993 survey conducted by Bacon-Shone and Bolton, 54.7% of those that wrote notes, memos, etc. at work normally use English, and 59.2% of those who read written materials at work read materials written in English. The pre-eminent language of newspapers and print media is Chinese, and in the popular dailies, a localized variety of 'written Cantonese' is also used for informal styles of newspaper reporting. The dominance of Chinese in the print media is evidenced by the numbers of Chinese-language newspapers, which total around fifty, compared with two main English-language dailies, the *South China Morning Post,* and the *Hong Kong Standard* (see Chan, Chapter 5 in this book).

While acknowledging the strength of Cantonese in the Hong Kong community, Bacon-Shone and Bolton suggest that at present, 'English and Cantonese have an increasingly complex co-existence in government, law, education, and business'. They further note that 'English has also intruded into the private domain of Hong Kong families in unexpected ways', and cite findings from their 1993 survey which reported that: (1) 56% of the population had an English name, with 43% claiming to use that name 'all of the time', and 30% having an English name on their ID cards; (2) 53% used English to write out the words on a cheque; (3) 57% had close relatives in an English speaking country; (4) 30% either had a close relative who was planning to emigrate to an English-speaking community, or were planning themselves to emigrate; and that (5) the vast majority reported hearing a good deal of codemixing (English words in Cantonese speech) in various domains: at home, 45%; among friends, 75%; at school, 90%; at work, 79%; and in public, 83% (1998: 84—85; see also Li, Chapter 4 in this book). Very recently, there has

been a strong trend among Hong Kong university students, who now all have access to computers either from within their institutions or at home, to use the Internet to 'chat' informally to each other through email and 'ICQ' programmes. In this, they often use a 'mixed' form of written English and Chinese, with Cantonese vocabulary items and conversational particles 'romanized' into a linguistic matrix of written Hong Kong English.

Bacon-Shone and Bolton also note that bilingualism is not confined to Cantonese and English, but that a substantial number of respondents also claim a knowledge of Putonghua (1.1% as a usual language, 25.3% as 'another language' in the 1996 census). From a sociolinguistic perspective, they conclude, the community is far from 'monolingual', and Hong Kong might be more accurately described as 'a multilingual society, where speakers of the majority language, Cantonese, and speakers of minority "dialects" of Chinese also tend to report increasing degrees of fluency in both English and Putonghua (Mandarin)' (1998: 85). In addition, Hong Kong is the adopted home of a number of non-Chinese minorities, who often speak Cantonese and English as well as minority languages. The history of such groups in the society is under-researched, but such communities as the South Asians, Parsees, Portuguese, and Eurasians played a major role in nineteenth-century Hong Kong. Today, significant numbers of Indians, Parsees, and Eurasians still live in the territory, as do Indonesians, Filipinos, Japanese, Malaysians, Nepalis, Pakistanis, and Thais. Of these, by far the largest group is that of Filipinos, predominantly Filipina domestic helpers or 'amahs', whose numbers rose from 72,000 in 1991 to approximately 170,000 in 1999. Not only do such workers make a major contribution to the Hong Kong economy in enabling many middle-class couples with children to both hold full-time employment, but research suggests that they also make a linguistic contribution to the society in providing an opportunity for the children of such families to gain an early facility in spoken English. Afendras notes that 'Hong Kong's "guest" domestic workers may be emerging as the main caregivers and, at the same time, as live-in English tutors for middle-class children', and that 'Filipinas ... may be making a contribution to the ecology of English far greater than has hitherto been recognized' (1998: 136-7).

Hong Kong and the 'invisibility myth'

The apparent reluctance in earlier studies to consider the multilingual character of Hong Kong society has been matched by a similar attitude to the existence of Hong Kong English as an autonomous (or semi-autonomous) variety. For example, Luke and Richards (1982: 55) claim that 'In Hong Kong ... the norm or standard consumed by learners of English is an external one rather than an internal one ...' There is no such thing then as 'Hong Kong English', a judgement echoed by Tay (1991: 327) who asserts that '[t]here is no social motivation for the indigenisation of English in Hong Kong' and that 'English in Hong Kong has been considered either a learner's language, a developmental rather than lectal continuum ... or is described in terms of a cline of bilingualism'. This view is also endorsed by Johnson (1994: 182), who comments that the notion of a Hong Kong variety of English has so far gained 'little support', as ' [t]here is no social or cultural role for English to play among Hong. Kong Chinese; it only has a role in their relations with expatriates and the outside world'. Perhaps it is now time to re-examine such previous judgements, and one obvious reason for so doing is the passing of British colonial rule. Whatever the future of the HKSAR, which came into being in July 1997, it is now simply a historical fact that Hong Kong is no longer a colony of Great Britain. Given the experience of other Asian societies, it is unavoidable that the post-colonial development of society will impact greatly on its sociolinguistic dynamics. A second reason for re-evaluating the role of English would be the argument that the essential conditions necessary for the emergence of such a variety may be already present in the community.

Criteria for world Englishes

Butler (1997: 106) suggests the following characteristics help define a variety of world English: (1) a 'standard and recognizable pattern of pronunciation handed down from one generation to another' (accent); (2) '[p]articular words and phrases which spring up usually to express key features of the

physical and social environment and which are regarded as peculiar to the variety' (vocabulary); (3) '[a] history - a sense that this variety of English is the way it is because of the history of the language community' (a history); (4) ' [a] literature written without apology in that variety of English' (literary creativity); and (5) '[Reference works - dictionaries and style guides – which show that people in that language community look to themselves, not some outside authority, to decide what is right and wrong in terms of how they speak and write their English' (reference works).

The Hong Kong accent
With reference to the first criterion of accent, Bolton and Kwok (1990) provide a description of both segmental and supra-segmental features of the phonology of H o n g Kong English, a n d investigate the reactions of university students to a number of English accents, including RP accents, US accents, and Hong Kong accents through the use of a verbal guise technique. T h e results of this research indicate that 'Hong Kong English speakers typically share a number of localised features of a Hong Kong accent' (1990: 166). Other results suggested that the respondents 'identified' (Le Page a n d Tabouret-Keller, 1985) with local speakers in a number of ways: (1) they could recognize a Hong Kong accent relatively easily; (2) they had difficulty in labelling other accents of English; and (3) a substantial number of respondents (particularly male students) stated a preference for that accent of English associated with 'Hong Kong bilinguals' (p. 170). Further research on this issue is presented by Hung (see Chapter 6).

Hong Kong vocabulary

At the level of vocabulary, a number of studies of a distinct Hong Kong vocabulary have been published in recent years. Such work includes Chan and Kwok (1985), a study of 'lexical borrowing from Chinese into English'; Taylor (1989) on the use of English in H o n g Kong newspapers; Benson (1994) on 'political vocabulary of Hong Kong English'; Carless (1995) on 'politicised expressions' in local newspapers; and work in this area is continuing (Benson, see Chapter 8). As significant, however, are the studies carried out by Susan Butler a n d the Australia-based *Macquarie Dictionary,* who, over the last decade, have compiled wordlists for Asian Englishes including Hong Kong English. Examples of Hong Kong words in the *Macquarie* database may be seen below in the form of dictionary entries for a new dictionary that *Macquarie* is now co-publishing with Grolier Publishers, the *Grolier International Dictionary: World English in an Asian Context,* which highlights the use of distinctly local vocabularies in Asian Englishes. Examples of entries for Hong Kong include the following:

> **ABC** *noun* **1.** an Australian-born Chinese **2.** (especially in Hong Kong) an American-born Chinese
> **Ah** *noun Hong Kong English* an informal term of address: *Ah Sam* I *Ah Chan*
> **almond cream** *noun Hong Kong English* a sweet dessert of crushed almonds in a soup, usually served hot
> **AO** *noun Hong Kong English* a public servant in the most senior career grade in the Hong Kong Civil Service
> **astronaut** *noun* **1.** someone specially trained to travel in a spaceship **2.** *Hong Kong English* a person whose family has emigrated abroad, for example to Australia or Canada, but who remains working in Hong Kong, and then spends a great deal of time flying between his or her family and Hong Kong
> **bak choi** */hhk* 'tjoi/ *noun Hong Kong English* a variety of Chinese green and white cabbage *Other Forms:* Another spelling is **pak choi**
> **banana** *noun* **1**. a long curved fruit with a yellow skin **2**. *Asian English* a westernised Chinese
> **BBC** *noun Hong Kong English Informal* a British-born Chinese
> **beggar's chicken** *noun* in Chinese cuisine, a chicken dish baked in lotus leaves and mud
> **big brother** *noun Asian English* **1**. a Chinese kinship term referring to the eldest male sibling in a family **2.** A recruiter or protector in a Chinese secret society or triad
> **black hand** *noun Hong Kong English a* behind-the-scenes mastermind who plans political or criminal activities
> **black society** *noun Hong Kong English* a Chinese secret society or triad
> **bo lei** /'bou 'lei/ *noun Hong Kong English* a variety of strong dark tea

Buddha's delight *noun* a vegetarian dish of bean curd, nuts, tiger lilies and a hair-like seaweed which is particularly popular at Chinese New Year, as the Cantonese name of the seaweed *(fat choi* or 'hair vegetable') sounds very similar to the New Year greeting wishing prosperity

cage *noun* **1.** an enclosure made of wires or bars, in which animals or birds can be kept **2.** anything that is like a prison **3.** in Hong Kong, a partitioned bedspace in an apartment, rented by the very poor *-verb* 4. To put someone or something in, or as if in, a cage: *The prisoner was caged in his cell.* The occupants of **a cage** (definition 3) are known **as cageman, cagewoman, cage**

dwellers or **cage people** and it is short for cage house, the translation of the term in Chinese.

Canto- a prefix indicating the influence of the Cantonese language or culture, especially in books, film, television, or pop music: *Canto-drama* I *Canto-movie*

Canto-speak *noun Hong Kong English Informal* the Cantonese language

Canto star *noun Hong Kong English* a singer of Cantonese pop songs

n Other Forms: You can also use **Canto-popstar**

char siew /tja 'sju/ *noun* Chinese-style roast pork *Other Forms:* Other spellings, in Hong Kong English, are **char siu** and **cha siu**

char siew bau /tja sju 'bau/ *noun Hong Kong English* a white bun containing spicy pork, a popular Cantonese snack *D Other Forms:* Another spelling is **char siu bau**

cheeky *adjective* **(cheekier, cheekiest) 1.** rude or lacking respect, especially in a playful way: *Her cheeky behaviour annoyed the teacher.* **2.** *Asian English Informal* behaving in a way that is overconfident and lacking respect for the opposite sex *-phrase* 3. **Get cheeky with someone,** *Hong Kong English* to be insolent

towards someone *Word Family:* **cheekily** *adverb* **-cheekiness** *noun*

chicken *noun* **1.** a young hen or rooster **2.** the meat from this bird: *chicken for dinner* **3.** *Informal a* coward: *He's too much of a chicken to climb that tree.* **4**. *Hong Kong English Informal* a prostitute *-adjective Informal* **5.** Cowardly *-phrase* **6. Chicken out,** *Informal* to back out because you are scared

China doll *noun Hong Kong English* a pretty young Chinese woman of submissive demeanour

Chinese banquet *noun* a dinner consisting of approximately a dozen courses, frequently attended by a large number of guests, as at a Chinese wedding banquet

Chinese broccoli /.tjainiz 'brokali/ *noun* → **kai Ian**

Chinese cabbage *noun* **-•** **bak choi**

Chinglish /'tjirjglij/ *noun Informal* 1. any variety of English strongly influenced by Chinese 2. any variety of Chinese featuring a high proportion of English loanwords

chit *noun Asian English* **bill1** (definition 1)

Chiu Chau /'tjju 'tjau/ *adjective Chinese and Hong Kong English* of or relating to people, objects and activities associated with the Chiu Chau dialect areas of Guangdong and Fukien province: *Chiu Chau food* I *Chiu Chau dialect Other Forms:* Other spellings are **Chiu Chow** and **Teo Chew**

choi sum /'tjoi sAm/ *noun Asian English* a green leafy vegetable with tender white fleshy stems and yellow flowers **O Other Forms:** Another spelling is **choy sum**

chop1 *verb* **(chopped, chopping) 1.** to hit with quick, strong blows using an axe or other sharp tool: / *chopped some wood for the fire.* I *They chopped the tree down.* **2.** to cut into smaller pieces: *You'd better chop that meat a bit smaller.* **3.** *Asian English* to hit (someone) with a chopper or knife *Word Family:*

chopper *noun*

chop2 *Asian English -noun* 1. a. a personal seal or stamp, used to approve transactions, show that papers are official, etc. b. a design, corresponding to a brand or trademark, stamped on goods to indicate their special quality *-verb* **(chopped, chopping) 2.** to mark with such a stamp

cocktail /'knkteil/ *noun* **1.** a drink made from a mixture of alcoholic drinks and other ingredients such as fruit juice, cream, crushed ice, soft drink, etc. **2.** *Hong Kong English* a party at which such drinks are served, **[etc.,**

etc.]

(Macquarie 2000)

The historical dimension

T h e third criterion in Butler's taxonomy of essential characteristics is that of 'history'. As this has partly been dealt in an earlier section of this chapter, I shall not discuss this issue further, other than to make two additional points. First, that it is quite evident that H o n g Kong, and indeed China, has a long history of linguistic contact with English that dates back to the seventeenth century, a n d that surprisingly little has been hitherto written on this topic, at least from a 'languages in contact' perspective (Bolton, 2000). Second, o n e needs to reiterate that an account of such a history would also include the period from the late 1960s to the 1990s that saw the recognition of a distinct 'Hong Kong identity', personified a n d gendered as 'Hong Kong Man' who, by the early 1980s, is 'go-getting a n d highly competitive, tough for survival, quick-thinking and flexible', a n d 'speaks English or expects his children to' (Baker, 1983: 478). It might too include discussion of the late colonial period that, almost unexpectedly, saw the transformation of a *colonial* city to a *global* city. As Abbas explains* 'culture in Hong Kong cannot just be related to "colonialism"; it must be related to this changed and changing space, this colonial space of disappearance, which in many respects does not resemble the old colonialisms at all', out of which may emerge a new identification with 'the cosmopolitan' (Abbas, 1997: 3, 13).

Literary creativity

On the fourth issue of literary creativity, past commentaries on the literary history of Hong Kong have focused on the absence of a Hong Kong literary tradition in English. In one essay published in 1994, Chan identifies three possible obstacles to the development of Hong Kong English writing: first, 'the language problem'; and, second, 'the psychological obstacle', and the fact that 'there is no particular general urge to try writing poems, nor any particular prestige attached to the ability to do so'. Third, Chan suggests that there may not only be a lack of creative talent, but also a lack of will to use English as a literary medium, as 'linguistic competence is not necessarily coupled with creative talent', while, additionally, '[e]ven those in whom creativity and linguistic facility meet may have no inclination whatsoever to write in a "borrowed tongue"' (Chan, 1994: 407). Despite Chan's pronounced pessimism,
there have been a significant number of creative works published by local writers in recent years. Examples include the poetry of Ho (1994, 1997), Lam (1997), Leung (1992, 1997), Parkin and Wong (1997), as well as novels and short stories by Xu Xi (Sussy Komala/Chako). Most recently, there have been other initiatives, including the appearance of the literary journal *Dim Sum,* and the expansion of creative writing programmes at City University of Hong Kong and the University of Hong Kong. In addition, there are works of fiction by Hong Kong writers in translation, notably *Hong Kong Collage,* edited by Cheung (1998). All this indicates a literary culture with a much greater vitality than previously existed, or recognized, which has much promise for the future creativity of English locally. The contributions from Ho, Leung, Lam, Vittachi, and Xu Xi in this book present a range of creative voices as well as commentaries on contemporary writing in the HKSAR.

Reference works

On the final criterion of reference works, at present, there are few reference works, e.g. dictionaries and style guides, that acknowledge the existence of a local variety of English. In a number of other 'outer circle' societies, some dictionaries and reference works have been published, but even in India, Singapore, and the Philippines, such works have received a mixed reception. Nevertheless, there are developments underway, and it is possible that the Macquarie Dictionary company will publish a dictionary of Hong Kong English in the near future (Susan Butler, personal communication). Bolton, Hung, and Nelson (forthcoming) are also compiling a database of a r o u n d one million words of English in H o n g Kong as part of the worldwide ICE (International Corpus of English) project. At present, the *South China Morning Post serves* as a *de facto* reference point for local usage, particularly vocabulary. Whether the discussion of 'criteria' set out here is sufficiently persuasive or powerful a signal to render visible a distinct 'variety', is prerhaps less important that the desire to create a new space for discussion and discourse on Hong Kong English. Such a space would encompass n o t only the global and cosmopolitan,

but also the local and ludic, not just one variety of localized English, but a number of different voices. For example, as Hong Kong 'moves forward', to cite a much-used phrase in local political speeches, its government is now promoting the vision of t h e HKSAR as a 'world-class city' and 'cyberport'. Although there is the desire in the business community to improve standards of English in the domains of business and tourism, linguistic creativity also finds expression in other ways. One example of this is explosion in popularity among the territory' s computer-savvy young of Internet communication, particularly the use of so-called I C Q (T seek you') software for online chat. Very often, particularly among university students, the language of I C Q is English, sometimes of a distinctly code-mixed and hybrid variety, as in the example text below, which is an online ICQ conversation between two university students in November 1998. At the time 'Billy' was a twenty-five-year-old postgraduate studying in the Chinese Department of the University of Hong Kong, and 'Amy' was a postgraduate student of around the same age studying linguistics. In the following conversation, Amy is at home using her personal computer, while Billy is working at his part-time job, teaching at a local tutorial centre. Varieties of English, as is often said, are not only created from above, b u t also bubble up from below.

Bubbling up from below

(ICQ conversation between university students, November 1998)
Billy: knock ... knock ... anyone in??
Amy: yup, what's up?
Billy: No arl! Just to make u type some words!! hehe
Amy: u r really 'mo liu'1
Amy: should find a gf quick ma!
Billy: No. So up till now no one suits me. I am too bad and eye corner high2 ar!H
Amy: i don't think u can find them easily, u know, good looking girls are difficult to find nowadays la!
Billy: Haha ... that's true. One day I have to go back to China to find a perfect one ... hehe north mui!!!!3
Amy: but most of the 'dai luk mui'4 are materialistic ah! i don't want u to cry in front of me some day!
Billy: Sometimes I think I am a bad man. I cheat women.
Amy: how?
Billy: By words lor ... I am often mouth flower5 and tell lies to them kar.
Amy: ai ya, how can u say u r a good man then?
Amy: where r u now?
Billy: In my company.
Amy: having lesson now?
Billy: yes
Amy: so when u r teaching the students, how can u play icq ah? they pay money ga, be more responsible la!!!
Amy: u r really very impolite! what's the name of ur tutorial centre? i'll call to 'kam yat tei chun d'6 n 'sing si chun ging'!7
Amy: What presents will you buy for my birthday?
Billy: ok lor. I am your servant for one day. U can order me to do anything foru!!
Amy: no ah! i want presents ah!!!!
Billy: Uh ... five time flower six time change8kar u!!
Amy: ok thks in advance, take care la!
Amy: how's your girlfriend?
Billy: She stays at her out-home9 these nights lar ... I feel pretty comfortable these days
Billy: Hey, what do u ususally do on Sundays ?
Amy: y r u so nosy???

Billy: I am nosy cos I have a nose ...
Amy: ha ha ... very funny ... CRAZY!!!
Billy: Yumcha10lor ...
Amy: ai ... got no breath11 to talk to u la! ;-p
Billy: I am going to sleep lar ... zzzzzzz
Amy: ha ha ... go out to wet12 lor!
Billy: no. I prefer to be dry tonight. ...
Amy: wow, unexpected wor!13

Key:
1. Mo liu - Cantonese *mbuh liuh,* 'nonsense'.2
2. Eye corner high - Cantonese *ngdahn gok gbu* [eye corners high], 'to be very demanding'.
3. North mui - Cantonese *bak mui* [northern sister], 'girl from the PRC.
4. Dai luk mui - Cantonese *daaihluhk mui,* 'girl from the P R C
5. Mouth flower - Cantonese *hdufaafda,* 'sweet talk'.
6. Kam yat tei chun d - Cantonese *gamyaht tdi jandi,* ATV programme, 'Today's investigative reporting'.
7. Sing si chun ging - Cantonese *sihngsih jeui gik,* TVB programme, 'City news latest'.
8. Five time flower six time change - Cantonese *hgh slhfaa luhk sih bin* [You like flowers at 5 o'clock, but you've changed your mind by 6], 'you're always changing your mind'.
9. Out-home - Cantonese *ngoihgda* [out home], 'a married woman's parental home'.
10. Yum cha - Cantonese *ydmchah* [drink tea], Hong Kong English, yum cha, 'go to the restaurant for snacks'.
11. No breath - Cantonese *mouh hei,* 'there's no point in going on'.
12. Go out to wet - Cantonese *hem wet,* 'go out and have fun'.
13. Ah, ar, kar, la, lar, lor, wor - Cantonese particles *aa, aa, gaa, laa, laa, lo, wo,* used for varying degrees of intimacy and expressions of attitude.

Conclusion

The first professor of English in the University of Hong Kong was a Mr Robert K. M. Simpson, whose memory has been somewhat overshadowed by that of his successor, the war poet E d m u n d Blunden (1896-1974), who taught at Hong Kong from 1953 to 1964, and left to take up the Oxford Professorship of Poetry. Simpson served as Professor of English from the late 1920s until the early 1950s, and spent the war years in the Stanley internment camp as a prisoner of the Japanese. In an essay written on 'The difficulty of English' in 1933, Simpson mused on the problems of Chinese students learning the language, noting that: 'For the British peoples, English is a birthright eagerly inherited. But for other nations it is a difficult acquisition. I sometimes wonder why they are anxious to learn it. I once set the question as an examination essay, and from more than one candidate got the answer because "Americans use it"' (Simpson, 1933: 51). Some sixty-six years on, perhaps, the time may have finally arrived when Hong Kong can move on to create a space for its own use, and discourses, of English, with a place for the language as *one* of Hong Kong's languages in a diverse a n d pluralistic society. As Kachru himself notes, ' [i]n culturally, linguistically, and ideologically pluralistic societies, there is a complex hybridity... I believe linguistic and cultural hybridity is our identity', and that ' our major strategy is to acculturate the language in our contexts of use, on our terms, Asian terms' (Kachru, 1997: 22). In Hong Kong, it remains to be seen just what the terms for Hong Kong English will be. T h e Chief Executive of the HKSAR, Tung Chee-hwa, in his October 1999 Policy Address, highlighted the vision of H o n g Kong as a 'world-class city', explaining that ' Hong Kong should not only be a major Chinese city, b u t could become the most cosmopolitan city in Asia, enjoying a status comparable to that of New York in Northh America and London in Europe'. Tung also restated the effectiveness of mother-tongue instruction, and also announced

'a territory wide publicity campaign to promote the use of English' to halt 'a decline in the English standards of our younger generation since the early 1990s'. In the long term, he affirmed, 'we will continue to improve the quality of our English teachers and the method of instruction in schools to ensure that students master basic language skills at an early stage of their education' Hong Kong Government, 1999). In the meantime, Hong Kong's new 'chattering classes' play with two languages.

Notes

1. Cameron (1990) points out that the task of 'demythologizing' sociolinguistic commentaries involves 'making explicit the hidden assumptions which underlie linguists' models, showing that they are historical constructs ... and subjecting them to critical scrutiny' (pp. 79-80). 'Myths' and ideologies about language are of course not unique to linguists, but find expression in a wide range of discourses.
2. The Yale romanization system used here to transcribe Cantonese recognizes six tones: high (**man**), mid-rising (**man**), mid-level (**man**), low-level (**mahn**), low-rising (**mahn**) and low-falling (**mahn**).

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