

Current Attitudes Towards Language and Code-mixing in Hong Kong

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Introduction

Hong Kong exhibits a complex variety of language influences, largely as a result of external or political forces. There are three 'official' languages – Cantonese, English and Putonghua. The indigenous language is Cantonese, a Chinese dialect spoken by some 60 million or so people in Southeast China and the language spoken by the majority of Hongkongers. However, from the early nineteenth century until 1997 Hong Kong was a British colony, and Britain's influence remains evident in a number of domains, including the prominent status of the English language. Since 1997 China has become the controlling political power governing the territory, and this – combined with the geographical proximity of the world's fastest growing major economy, has raised the profile of the third local language of influence – Putonghua – the official spoken language of Beijing and over 600 million Chinese.

For precise detail concerning linguistic influence in the territory, government censuses provide some useful statistics – both as a source of current figures and in revealing past and future trends. According to the 2001 census, 95% of Hong Kong's population claim Chinese ethnicity, and of this percentage 89.2% usually speak Cantonese, 5.5% other Chinese dialects, 0.9% Putonghua. As for the remainder of the population, 3.2% said that they use English as their usual language. In the earlier government census of 1991, these figures were Cantonese 88.7%, other Chinese dialects 7%, Putonghua 1.1% and English 2.2%, indicating that the use of Cantonese and English has increased considerably since then, and the number of actual English users very significantly from 114,000 to 204,000 persons. Looking further back, it is clear that the use of both Cantonese and English has increased over time, though English has gained the more significant increase in percentage terms.

Irrespective of the rise of English, society in Hong Kong is largely monolingual and monocultural, unlike Singapore and India, where there are a number of ethnic groups using English for social or work-based communication. The majority of people do not need English on an everyday or even occasional basis, so there is an understandable lack of motivation to learn it or use it among the general population. However, English retains official status alongside Cantonese and Putonghua and in terms of users remains comfortably in second place, despite the political presence and economic influence of China. A number of factors, including British governance over such a long period of time, the use of English as an auxiliary language among Hong Kong's business and administrative elite, the use of English in education, plus the utility of English as an international language, have all combined to ensure that English has retained a high degree of prominence in Hong Kong's language community.

Pennington and Balla (1998: 244) cite Luke and Richards (1982), who, writing of the early 1980's described Hong Kong as a community in which Cantonese served as an everyday 'low' language and English as an auxiliary 'high' language, with a small number of 'linguistic middlemen' bridging the gap between the Cantonese-speaking and English-speaking sectors of the community. This is portrayed by the authors as a 'diglossic' language community. However, Pennington and Balla go on to suggest that the language situation in Hong Kong has changed considerably since the 1980's and that Cantonese has rapidly gained in status as a language of regional business, popular culture (for example in 'Canto-Pop' songs and 'kung-fu' movies), and in the written media. They also suggest that English has slipped down from its former position as the "largely undisputed 'high' language", and that the linguistic middlemen "may have developed a separate and independent social reality and mode of expression, combining the norms of the Cantonese-speaking and the English speaking communities, as embodied in mixed-code" (p. 244).

While it may be true that English is not quite so elite as it was before Hong Kong's return to China, it undoubtedly remains an elite language within the local community, spoken for the most part only by professionals and the highly educated (see for example Bolton et al, 2002). It is also a fact (according to government census figures) that the overall number of the population claiming to 'know' English rose from 9.7% in 1960 to 38.1% in 1991 and 43% in 2001. This increase has been largely attributed to the educational reforms of 1974 and 1978 which provided for a system of free, compulsory private and secondary education, of which English is a core subject, with many schools even using English as the medium of instruction (Bolton, 2002: 6).

The official line of the Hong Kong government since the 1997 political 'handover' to China has been to pursue a 'trilingual, biliterate' language policy which recognises Cantonese, Putonghua and English as spoken languages, and Chinese and English as written languages. In reality, as has already been touched on, Cantonese has somewhat displaced English at the elite level though English has still increased in numerical terms. Putonghua is certainly encouraged but shows no indication at present of supplanting English as the favoured alternative language of the majority. Within the corpus of the huge government administration and civil service, "English still appears to be firmly entrenched as the written language (....) At the spoken level, a good deal of Cantonese-English code-mixing takes place in many government departments," (Bolton, p9).

Within education there has been a parallel shift towards the mother tongue in recent years, though nearly a quarter of government secondary schools remain English-medium. Only a very small percentage of primary schools, excepting the international schools, use English as a medium of instruction. However, it should be pointed out that in the last year or so there has been a call for more secondary schools to return to English-medium instruction, and a number of schools have indeed changed back to English, or at least teach some subjects in English (see Bolton, 2002: 9-10). Moreover, at the primary level, hundreds of NET's (native English teachers) are now being appointed in a government move mirroring the secondary NET programme, and which is seen as a major effort to boost English learning. In addition to this, in recent years there has been a boom in ELT at kindergarten schools, as indeed has also been the case in many parts of China. At tertiary level the medium of instruction in Hong Kong is officially English, (except at the Chinese

University) though in practice a mixture of Cantonese and English or even pure Cantonese is often used, the ratio depending in large part upon the subject of study (Gibbons, 1987; Bolton, 2002). In other words, for example, arts students are more likely to use and be exposed to a higher degree of English than science students. Most reading matter is in English, as is much of tertiary students' written work. Outside of class, however, as will be the focus of study later in this essay, students generally use Cantonese or a combination of Cantonese with Cantonese-English code-mixing for everyday communication.

In society at large, Bolton (2002:17) writes that "various government-backed English campaigns have begun to raise the standard of English in business and professional sectors...including the Workplace English Campaign, which began in March 2000." The campaign focuses on upgrading the English skills of a broad swathe of Hong Kong society, from junior office staff to taxi drivers and executives, and targets perhaps a third of the workforce. Under the scheme employees' English levels are benchmarked, and they are able to obtain reimbursement of course expenses so long as they pass the benchmarking exams successfully. Recent coverage in the media, including the South China Morning Post, suggests that the government considers the scheme a great success to date.

Attitudes towards English use in Hong Kong

As outlined above, although English is the usual language of only about 2% of Hong Kong's population, it enjoys a high profile from kindergarten through to government and business sectors, and an increasing number of people, currently about 43%, claim an ability to speak English. However, although English is highly regarded for practical and career-oriented reasons, attitudes towards the language and its use are far from universally positive. Speaking at an English competition awards-ceremony in 1989, the then head of English learning at the British Council in Hong Kong, Mr Harley Brookes, summarised the local attitude to English thus:

The Cantonese people are proud of their history, traditions and culture. Like the British they are highly resistant to using foreign tongues (even Putonghua). There is a natural preference for using the mother tongue outside the classroom or job situation and there is nothing unusual or culpable in this attitude – most people all over the world revert to their mother tongue in the home, over meals, with friends at the race-track. To expect anything else would be pipe-dreaming. (1989: 5)

Brookes understandably avoids reference to the colonial or racist treatment of the local language and people in bygone eras, which must surely have had, and perhaps continues to have, a negative impact on the wider social use of English in the language community. Nonetheless, his words constitute an effective common-sense summary of the Cantonese attitude to English, or indeed the attitude of most people towards a second language, and are supported in this light by Li.

"The exact nature and extent of...disapproval against the exclusive use of English among fellow Chinese Hongkongers, especially beyond the education sector, remains largely unexplored, although intuitively it would seem reasonable to interpret this as being due to a perceived violation, or even betrayal, of the Cantonese speaker's ethnolinguistic identity." (Li, 2002: 79)

Undoubtedly there exist strong social norms and peer pressure against using English for intra-ethnic oral communication in Hong Kong (see for example, Gibbons, 1987; Li, 1996, 2002), and as Li mentions, most research to date has focused on the education sector. Li, (1996: 24) cites Kwok and Chan (1972), who established through a questionnaire of university students that most respondents reported never using English at home except to make fun of someone, such as their servants. Li also cites Fu (1987), who noted that English is shunned by students, who "remove themselves at the earliest opportunity from an English-speaking situation if unable to avoid it in the first place." Also that "bilingual speakers will prefer to use English only in situations where they have little other choice" (p36).

Gibbons (1987) states that language attitudes frequently reflect the history and current position of different linguistic groups within a society, and cites Fu (1979) who shows that a succession of colonial governments frequently accorded an inferior role to the Chinese language. Gibbons goes on to say that: "It is only in the post-war era Chinese has come to be treated as a partner with English. Chinese attitudes to the West were similar. The Chinese view of themselves as superior and of outsiders as barbarians is well documented. These historical legacies are likely to influence attitudes to English and Chinese" (p9). As noted above, recent political changes in Hong Kong have seen a shift in use and status towards Cantonese, which may have had the commensurate effect of removing some of the innate negativity towards English, thus assisting the growth of English use in intra-ethnic communication, especially in a mixed-code context.

However, social attitudes to language use are unlikely to change overnight and many of Gibbons' (1987) observations no doubt remain generally true of today's Hong Kong. He points out that English native-speakers mostly comprise an elite group, and tend to be skilled professionals with good incomes. Relations between Chinese and Westerners "generally lack antagonism, but are not particularly warm. Turning to the Chinese population, one should remember that proficiency in English correlates with educational level, prestigious employment, and (not least) with income" (p8).

Also noted by Gibbons (1987) is the possible impact on attitudes of imported popular culture, (much of which derives from the West in general and the USA in particular), especially on younger people. Cantonese radio stations play a significant proportion of English language records, and local fashion and film magazines often refer to western personalities and culture, incorporating fragments of English into their text. Many related media publications and advertisements borrow English lexical terms, which may then be adopted in the speech community, as will be examined later. Chinese traditional dress, hair styles and entertainment have also been diluted or replaced by imported western models, and similar arguments might be extended to architecture, arts, government, education and eating habits. As an interesting aside, it is perhaps relevant to note that the world's two most successful McDonalds restaurants are in Hong Kong, and there is a higher ratio of McDonalds restaurants to population here than in any other country (2002: undated SCMP article). While it is difficult to determine the influence of such factors on language attitudes, it seems logical to suppose that taken as a whole it is hardly surprising that more and more English words and phrases are creeping into Cantonese.

A number of studies have been carried out into the attitudes of Hongkongers to English and Chinese speakers. One such, cited by Gibbons (1983), was a

matched guise study undertaken by Lyczak, Fu and Ho (1976) on the attitudes of bilingual Chinese students. They found that Chinese speakers were considered "more considerate, kind, serious in purpose, honest, trustworthy, friendly and humble than English speakers. The latter were perceived to be more competent, good-looking, well-off and intelligent. Thus, Chinese speakers were rated higher on 'solidarity' traits, while English speakers were rated higher on 'status' traits" (p.131). Fu summarised a similar study as follows:

Students see (1) English as an important and necessary subject, but (2) they do not feel easy about using it in speech. (3) They take pride in their own Chinese civilisation but (4) have generally negative attitudes towards Western civilisation and towards English speaking people. (Fu, 1975:174)

However, Gibbons points out that a more recent questionnaire study by Pierson, Fu and Lee (1980) raises doubts about Fu's point (4): the new study showed conflicting evaluation of English speakers, while supporting the other points. What is apparent is that while attitudes to Chinese are universally positive, those towards English are ambivalent. In summary, Gibbons states that in general "when Chinese speakers use English to one another, they give an impression of status and Westernisation. When they use Cantonese, they give an impression of Chinese humility and solidarity" (1987:119).

Code-mixing in Hong Kong

In the last twenty or so years linguists in Hong Kong have been paying increasing attention to code-mixing, code-use and the attitudes towards it. Precise definitions of code-mixing and code-switching differ, but both refer to the habit of some bilingual speakers of alternating between two languages while speaking or writing. [Bilingual here refers to an ability to speak or communicate in an L2, not necessarily fluency in L2]. The usual pattern is for most of the language to be in the speaker's L1, with elements of his or her L2 supplanted into the dialogue. If the interjected elements of L2 are clause-length or longer, the phenomenon is generally referred to as code-switching, if shorter, code-mixing. Li, who has undertaken considerable study of the genre in Hong Kong claims that code-mixing, rather than code-switching is locally prevalent. He writes: "...research has shown that code-switching in Hong Kong tends to be intrasentential – hence the preference for the term 'code-mixing' – and that switching involving linguistic units above the clause level is rare" (2002: 79). Also that: "Cantonese interspersed with English elements, especially single words, is generally referred to as mixed-code" (p79).

Researchers seem to agree that code-mixing in Hong Kong lacks consistency, and differs according to the domain of use. Gibbons (1983) states that "mixtures of various kinds seem common among Hong Kong bilinguals. The university mixture has characteristics which distinguish it from all other mixtures. It is recognisable as specifically university speech" (p.132). Gibbons refers to this 'university variety' as 'MIX', and claims that "when university students are not externally constrained, they are observed to speak to each other most commonly in MIX, less frequently in Cantonese, and very rarely in English" (p132). Attitudes to mixed-code, or MIX, are deemed broadly compatible with local attitudes to English, and are largely negative or ambivalent. However, despite the well-documented hostility to the use of

English for intraethnic communication among Chinese Hongkongers, mixed-code is undoubtedly widespread. Chan (1998) claims that code-mixers in Hong Kong "include not only students of universities and tertiary institutions...but also adult professionals in the workplace". Also that "Cantonese-English bilinguals are found to code-mix not only in private, casual conversations, but also in more public settings like group discussion, television interviews, and radio interviews as well" (p. 212). All of this notwithstanding, the questions where? and why? code-mixing takes place in a 'hostile' environment need to be addressed.

Gibbons (1983, 1987) and Li (1996, 1998, 2002), writing in the Hong Kong context, and linguists elsewhere (eg. Romaine, 1989), have concluded that domain – as a more psychological than physical concept – is one of the crucial factors behind the bilingual's code-switching behaviour. Li (1996: 46) cites Fishman (1972) when he states that family, school and workplace are among the most prominent domains. In each of these domains code-switching or mixing may be triggered "because of culture-specific or field-specific vocabulary in the guest language" (p. 46). One such example is suggested by Kwok and Chan (1972) who found that university students participating in their survey reported using English when talking about topics such as pop music, fashion and politics, probably on the grounds that the corresponding Chinese vocabulary was not specialised enough. Li (1996) also cites Tse (1992) who found that "code-mixing is restricted to specific domains where factors interact to make it...the most convenient mode of communication between members of a social group" (p. 101).

Gibbons (1983, 1987) highlights the apparent anomaly that while Hong Kong University students claimed to dislike using or hearing MIX, most of them also admitted using it regularly. Of course, this begs the question: if Hong Kong bilinguals don't like mixed code, then why do they use it? Gibbons suggests that while bilinguals "had an overt attitude of hostility towards MIX, they also held covert attitudes towards it" (1983, p131). Thus, it might be concluded that while students feel obliged to disparage the use of English on grounds of ethnic loyalty to Cantonese, the requirement to use some English on 'pragmatic' or 'status' grounds makes MIX unavoidable. Using matched-guise techniques for his research, Gibbons concluded that the use of MIX by university students also represents a strategy of neutrality: "...speakers do not wish to appear totally westernised or uncompromisingly Chinese in orientation. This compromise probably reflects the degree of westernisation of most students, and could therefore be viewed as marking this element of their identity," (p145).

In the later synthesis of his studies (1987), Gibbons summarised the use of MIX in student-language as follows:

Cantonese was found to be more common with non-peers, to discuss non-university activities, while MIX was more common with age peers, to discuss university life, in casual style. (...) When conversing with fellow students, more English was used when discussing academic matters, more MIX words when discussing student life, and more Cantonese when discussing other matters. (1987:126)

Li (2002: 81) summarises Gibbons' findings as follows: (1) Cantonese was perceived as a marker of group and ethnic solidarity, (2) there was strong sanction against using English for intraethnic communication, (3) MIX was preferred in informal settings, and (4) MIX exhibits certain structural features which set it apart from its parent languages – English and Cantonese.

Pennington (1998) supports the argument that mixed-code may be viewed as a linguistic compromise, suggesting that "Hongkong-style mixed-code" may be interpreted as a "middle-way", avoiding the extremes of pure English or Cantonese (p5). However, Pennington also suggests other reasons why local bilinguals may use mixed-code, and which have not yet been fully researched, including linguistic innovation, chaotic language behaviour, 'linguistic entrepreneurship' for expressing 'foreign' things, and also as a sign of the bilingual expressing, and alternating between, metaphorical experiences.

Li (2002: 82) suggests additional reasons – often pragmatic – for the use of mixed-code, including the absence of translation equivalents (lexical gap) or, where dictionary equivalents do exist but there is a semantic discrepancy between the English expression and the Chinese translation. Li (p. 85) gives many examples, such as the common use of the term 'keep fit' among health-conscious Hongkongers. In bilingual dictionaries the Cantonese translation is literally 'stay healthy', (bou2 ci4 gin6 hong1), which, according to Li, makes a less than perfect match. He explains that the Chinese disyllabic word gin6 hong1 depicts a state of being free from illnesses, whereas the English word fit means 'healthy' and 'strong in bodily condition' – hence the English term provides a convenient form for which there is no directly compatible expression in Cantonese. Li goes on to identify four major 'pragmatic' motivations for code-switching, or mixing, in Hong Kong – euphemism, specificity, bilingual punning and the principle of economy.

With regard to euphemism, Li suggests that English words are sometimes chosen by the speaker to avoid the sometimes rather direct or overly literal Chinese equivalents of potentially embarrassing terms. Bra, for example has the direct equivalents breast cover or breast wrap in both Cantonese and Chinese, both of which might be embarrassing in some circumstances owing to the reference to that part of the female anatomy. Consequently, bra is sometimes preferred on euphemistic grounds. Li believes that similar explanations lie behind the common use of words like toilet and washroom in Hong Kong mixed-code (p. 88).

Concerning specificity, Li refers to the choice of an English word or expression because "its meaning is more general or specific compared with its near-synonymous counterparts (p. 88). He gives the example fans (of an idol, pop star, etc), which is commonly used in speech and in the Chinese media. Cantonese requires the use of a premodifier, such as song fan, film fan, football fan and so on, and as many 'entertainers' today have many talents, it might be troublesome to specify the type/s of fan a person is. Thus fans is preferred because of its more general meaning. At the other extreme, the verb to book, as in to book a table in a restaurant is often used because the Cantonese equivalent is ambiguous. Book is preferred as it is more specific.

A third common source of code-mixing, Li writes, is bilingual punning: "One of the most interesting and conspicuous motivations of mixing English into Chinese/Cantonese is the deliberate attempt to create double meaning" (p90). One such example provided by Li, taken from the Cantonese newspaper Apple Daily, is the following headline: 'HIGH TECH haai je5 LOW TECH lou1 je5', which translates as 'high tech brings trouble while low tech is profitable'. The pun concerns the use of disyllabic lexical units, in each case one from English and the other from Cantonese – HIGH and haai1 (get into trouble), LOW and lou1 (reap profit). Li gives many other examples, which

often have their origins in clever media advertising campaigns before finding their way into common spoken discourse and mixed-code conversation.

Finally, Li's principle of economy motive for mixed-code concerns the choice of an English expression because "it is shorter and thus requires less linguistic effort compared with its Cantonese/Chinese equivalent" (p94). He provides the English monosyllabic colloquial adjective or preposition in as one example. It is used with high frequency in Cantonese mixed-code, to mean 'fashionable' and 'trendy'. The nearest synonyms in Cantonese are two and four syllables. Another common borrowing in mixed code is 'check in', which is frequently used in the hotel or airport context to replace the "considerable linguistic effort" of the pure Cantonese version (p94). Li summarises that:

Given the prevailing societal disapproval against Chinese Hongkongers using English exclusively for intraethnic communication, [these] more linguistically oriented motivations...seem to offer more plausible explanations why English words and phrases, typically below the clause level, are used by Hong Kong Chinese to fulfill various communicative purposes in informal settings, resulting in overt code-switching behaviours. (Li, 2002, p 95)

As might be expected, lexical transfer also takes place in the opposite direction, from Cantonese into English, even though the level of Cantonese among the native English-speaking community is generally very poor. The inclusion of Cantonese words or phrases in English is most common where the lexis denotes an item for which there is no appropriate English equivalent. Common examples of this are yam cha, which literally means 'drink tea', but also infers a morning ritual involving tea, dim sum (Chinese breakfast, also commonly used by English speakers) and the morning paper. 'Let's go for yam cha' is a fairly common expression among Hong Kong expatriates, but which would be unintelligible to most native English speakers. Another Cantonese word commonly interjected into native English-speaker dialogue is momentai, which translates as the useful term 'no problem', but which is a more fun way of saying it, especially to another English speaker. Other examples abound, but clearly the degree of 'borrowing' of English words and phrases is much higher in Cantonese than vice-versa, owing to the much greater use of English as a second language in the Hong Kong Chinese community.

The future of code-mixing in Hong Kong

Some Hong Kong academics view code-mixing as polluting the integrity of the Cantonese language. Similar outcries can be heard around the world, as English words and phrases intrude into other languages, like French and German. Li (1998) relates an amusing example of the increasing pervasiveness of mixed-code when he relates the goings-on at a symposium entitled 'The Future Development of Higher Education in Hong Kong,' organised by The Society of Hong Kong Scholars in 1994. One of the topics on the agenda was 'Language Issue'. During the ensuing forum discussion many scholars spoke up very critically of mixed-code behaviour, calling for ways in which it might be stopped or discouraged. However, the irony was that the speakers making this appeal could not help mixing English words into their otherwise Cantonese speech, causing much amusement among the audience (p.184).

Indeed, many linguists view mixed-code as an inevitable by-product of language contact and evolution. Li (1998) calls it a "natural consequence of languages in contact" (p.185). Chan concurs, and also claims that little or no conscious learning of code-mixing takes place. Citing other linguists (Myers-Scotton, 1993; Romaine, 1989) as supporting this viewpoint, he writes:

Code-mixing is a kind of spontaneous behaviour of bilinguals, and it is doubtful whether a bilingual consciously makes a choice before he or she code-mixes. For those who have been criticising the Cantonese-English code-mixers for polluting their mother tongue...they should perhaps take into account the fact that code-mixing, like borrowing, is one of the natural results of language contact. (1998: 212)

Some researchers suggest that code-mixing or switching is becoming more widespread in Hong Kong. A survey undertaken by Pennington and Balla (1998), which supports the findings of previous research on dual language use by Hong Kong Chinese bilinguals, confirms the "strong presence of mixed modes of communication in domains once reserved for either English as 'high' language or Cantonese as 'low' language" (p. 259). The authors suggest that these findings confirm the demise of the long-standing 'diglossic' system, which hitherto had maintained English and Cantonese as relatively distinct entities in the Hong Kong speech community. They claim that "in place of this community profile of diglossic bilingualism, the Hong Kong speech community appears to be developing according to a rapidly changing and more complex system of code choices" (p.259). Thus, they see a variety of code-mixing or code-switching models increasingly occupying linguistic territory once occupied by either 'pure' Cantonese or English, which they also describe as a 'middle way' or compromise. While conceding that these new codes are both 'complex' and 'rapidly changing', Pennington and Balla identify two broad areas of dual-language communication in Hong Kong's developing speech community, "one centring on the use of the second language for purposes of expediency or necessity and the other on its use for purposes of social orientation or identity" (p. 259). The authors relate these two broad areas of usage to, on the one hand, the "hierarchical academic domain" and on the other the "peer domain of friendship" – areas which are compatible with the 'pragmatic' code-mixing domains outlined (although by no means exclusively) by Li, and also the various 'academic' code-mixing domains identified by Gibbons.

Pennington and Balla's (1998) survey also found that Hong Kong's upcoming generation of English teachers (ie. undergraduate trainees) were much more inclined to use mixed-code than the older, postgraduate generation of English teachers. They conclude that this is particularly important, given that the former group will be passing English on to coming generations, and that "teachers of the present generation are likely to have a greater influence in reinforcing mixed language use than in passing English on to the next generation" (p. 260).

Conclusion

To summarise, code-mixing is an entirely predictable outcome when two languages come into contact over a protracted period of time. Furthermore, the level of mixed-code use by Cantonese speakers can only be enhanced when English also plays such a prominent role in so many areas of Hong Kong

society. Despite the political 'handover' China, English remains the principal second language, taught from an early age in most schools, and treated as an elite language by the upper levels of society, including the universities, government, the media, and used as the international lingua franca of the business community.

While Chinese Hongkongers undoubtedly possess an overtly negative attitude towards the use of English or mixed-code, many of them still use the latter across a range of domains and for a variety of purposes. Thus, code-mixing is used by apparently increasing numbers of bilingual Hongkongers, principally in the physical domains of academia, business and the workplace, for reasons of pragmatic utility, status, convenience, and social orientation or identity among peers. It might also be surmised that 'mixed-code' is deemed more acceptable than using 'pure' English among Cantonese speakers and that, given the wide variety of purposes and domains of usage, and the continuing rise of English as an international language, mixed-code is bound to become increasingly widespread in future. Some may even argue that mixed-code represents a kind of interlanguage on the road to a new variety of English in Hong Kong. This may be valid, but given the still largely monolingual nature of Hong Kong society, a Hong Kong variety of English remains either unlikely or at the very least, not something for the foreseeable future.

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