Chapter 6
Towards 'Biliteracy and Trilingualism' in Hong Kong (SAR): Problems, Dilemmas, and Stakeholders' Views

6.1 Hong Kong SAR's Language-in-Education Policy: Biliteracy and Trilingualism

Like many other parts of the world, Hong Kong's woman- and man-power needs have been largely conditioned by its principal economic realities. From the period between the two World Wars to about the end of the 1950s, Hong Kong prospered essentially through bustling entrepôt trade. In the next three decades until around the mid-1980s, manufacturing became the mainstay of economic activities, with "Made in Hong Kong" being the hallmark of this former British colony, which came to be known as "The Pearl of the Orient". Throughout this period, the needs for English in society were by and large limited to the upper echelons of government officials and business people, as well as senior administrators in the domains of education and law. This was reflected in the relatively restricted numbers of and societal needs for university graduates with a high level of English proficiency. Up until the early 1980s, the competition for a place in one of the two local universities – especially the English-medium University of Hong Kong – was very keen, with a success rate of barely 2.4% of all secondary school-leavers (Secondary 7 or Grade 13, aged around 18) per year (Poon 2010, p. 36; cf. Choi 1998, p. 187).

From the mid-1980s onwards, the manufacturing sector gradually gave way to several other sectors which are more characteristic of a knowledge-based economy. Of these, the most vibrant are banking, investment and finance, imports/exports, tele-communications, transport and logistics, tourism, hotels, restaurants, insurance, wholesale/retail trade, and real estate services. The 1980s also witnessed the gradual transformation of mainland China from a self-secluded communist state to an increasingly export-oriented economy after the open-door policy was enthusiastically embraced and actively implemented by the Beijing government under the

leadership of the helmsman Deng Xiaoping, who championed the pragmatic socio-political party line of 'socialism with Chinese characteristics'. China's gradual integration into the global economy culminated in her successful accession to WTO in 2001. In August 2010, China overtook Japan as the world's second-largest economy and, by 2014, surpassed the USA in terms of the largest trading nation. All this has tremendous implications for the human resource planning and needs of the SAR, which is geopolitically located at the doorstep of China and which, until the late 1970s, served as China's sole gateway to the outside world. To the extent that business opportunities and transactions with non-Cantonese-speaking mainlanders take place increasingly in Putonghua, pragmatically minded Hongkongers have little choice but to expand their linguistic repertoire to include at least some Putonghua. In April 2009, the government-initiated Task Force on Economic Challenges (TFEC) identified six potential industries for future development: testing and certification, medical services, innovation and technology, cultural and creative industries, environmental industries, and (international) educational services (GovHK 2009). It can be seen that all of these niche industries, which are seen by the government as crucial for the SAR's sustained vitality and future development, require a high level of proficiency in English and Chinese (i.e., Cantonese, Putonghua, and Standard Written Chinese).[1]

Above is thus the background to the SAR government's needs-driven language-in-education policy 'biliteracy and trilingualism' (see Chap. 5), which was first proposed in the Education Commission Report No. 6 (Education Commission 1996) and officially announced in the first Policy Address delivered by Tung Chee Hwa, the first Chief Executive of the SAR government in October 1997 (Poon 2010, p. 43). It aims at graduating students with a reasonably high level of ability to speak Cantonese, English and Putonghua, and to read and write Chinese and English. The increasing need for a biliterate and trilingual workforce is also reflected in the percentage of students gaining access to postsecondary education: from a mere 2.4% of the relevant age group in the early 1980s to 18% in the mid-1990s (Poon 2010, p. 33; see also Lin and Man 2009). According to Poon (2010, pp. 43–46), since 2000, after active consultation with corporate leaders who were willing to play an active role towards improving the English proficiency of the local workforce, the policy of biliteracy and trilingualism has been gradually extended from direct funding in the education domain to other support measures for working adults in the business sector. For instance, the Workplace English Campaign (WEC) was launched in conjunction with the business sector (a total of 242 'corporate supporters' were listed) to encourage employees in various job positions to brush up their English by subsidizing their after-work studies in various continuing education programmes (Workplace English Campaign 2015). All employees who routinely need English at work are eligible for WEC subsidies.

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[1] For an overview of the emergence of Hong Kong from a back-water fishing village in 1842 to an international financial center in the 1990s on par with New York and London (cf. 'NyLonKong'), and how historical, sociopolitical and economic developments have impacted on the SAR's language situation and language-in-education policy since the colonial era, see Poon (2010).

Apart from motivating employees to improve their English through sponsored course work, WEC also promotes the 'Hong Kong Workplace English Benchmarks' (HKWEB), and adopts a 4-point scale (i.e., Levels 1–4) to set realistic benchmarks for six job types, the purpose being to provide employers with reliable reference points in recruitment or staff development exercises: (i) clerks, (ii) executives/administrators/associate professionals, (iii) frontline service personnel, (iv) low proficiency job types, (v) receptionists/telephone operators, and (vi) secretaries (Workplace English Campaign 2015).

6.2 Learning English and Putonghua: Two Unfavourable Acquisitional Factors

6.2.1 English in Hong Kong (SAR): Second Language or Foreign Language?

As the majority of Chinese Hongkongers (over 90%) is Cantonese-speaking, Cantonese has always been the dominant vernacular cum regional lingua franca in the Pearl River Delta. This fact has important implications for the ease – or rather a lack of it – with which English and Putonghua are acquired. Since the non-Chinese population has until recently rarely exceeded 5%,[2] the English-speaking people, including the British during colonial times, have always been minority groups. This demographic detail helps explain why, despite the conspicuous presence of English in society – from shop names and street signs to menus and textbooks; from newspapers and magazines to public announcements and broadcast media – English is seldom used by (Chinese) Hongkongers for intraethnic communication among themselves (except in Cantonese-English code-switching or translanguaging, which takes place more often at the intra- than inter-sentential level, Li and Tse 2002; see Chap. 2). Indeed, in the absence of non-Cantonese speakers, the choice of English as the medium of communication is widely perceived as highly marked, probably out of concern for the co-speakers' ethnolinguistic identity (So 1998). One consequence of such a concern is that whoever initiates or persists in maintaining an English-only conversation with no non-Cantonese speakers around is expected to come up with some justification about that unusual language choice. This is what sets Chinese Hongkongers and, say, Chinese Singaporeans apart. In terms of opportunities for language practice or authentic use, what this means is that for the majority of Hongkongers, English has very little reality outside school premises or in their lifeworld. As C.-C. Choi (1998) observes:

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[2] So (1998, p. 161) notes that "After 1842, a largely English-speaking expatriate community was also gradually formed in the territory, although various records indicate that the size of this community has never exceeded four percent of the total population."

> Hong Kong has never been able to provide conditions where the majority of its students can master English. There are many reasons for this, but the prime one has to be the lack of a language environment requiring the use of English. That is why it is unfair to compare English standards in Hong Kong and Singapore. Most Hong Kong students need not use English outside the classroom [and they] study English merely because it is a school subject and they are required to pass the examination. (C.-C. Choi 1998, p. 189)

In this regard, sociolinguists would say that Hong Kong lacks a conducive environment relative to the important goal of learning English effectively. No wonder many 'errors' or accuracy problems at the lexico-grammatical level are found at various stages of the learning process (see Chap. 4), thereby fueling criticisms in public discourse mediated by both the print and broadcast media. Setter et al. (2010) regard Hong Kong English (HKE) as an emergent variety, whose speakers vary greatly in their ability to use HKE across a wide spectrum from basilectal to acrolectal features (cf. Bolton 2000). In his book-length treatise on 'Chinese Englishes', including 'Hong Kong English', Bolton (2003) points out that for a long time, there has been a widely shared perception in Hong Kong society that the standards of English are declining. In this connection, he speaks of a 'complaint tradition' (cf. Milroy and Milroy 1985). At the policy level, before the handover, declining language standards was one of two main 'language problems' that the British colonial government was trying to resolve through effective language-in-education policy measures (the other being the use of 'mixed code' in class, Li 2008b; Lin 1997c, 2000; Poon 2010, 2013; see Chap. 5). However, those who complain fail to realize that following the gradual shift from elite education to mass education, the percentage of young people receiving higher education, especially at the university level, has increased considerably, leading to a general decline in average academic performance, including English. As noted by C.-C. Choi (1998), former Secretary of the Hong Kong Examinations Authority:

> Most people have formed their perception that the language standards have been falling through anecdotal evidence. (...) It is easy to forget that in those days, only about 3% of the relevant age group were able to go to university whereas now 18% are able to do so. (C.-C. Choi 1998, p. 187)

Above all, what is often ignored in such complaints and criticisms is the absence of a conducive environment for Hongkongers to practise using English beyond English lessons. Owing to Chinese Hongkongers' inhibition against initiating an English-only conversation among themselves, it is not obvious how the learners' classroom inputs may get consolidated through active meaning-making in natural communication with others. Regarding such a "sociolinguistic ecology", So (1998) comments that:

> the sociolinguistic ecology in Hong Kong is not conducive to the development of individual bilingualism, let alone bilingualism in the mode of *liǎng wén sān yǔ* [biliteracy and trilingualism]. In fact, we are looking at a sociolinguistic ecology wherein one will find it quite difficult to promote the social spread of Putonghua, and quite easy to lose the present degree of spread of English. (So 1998, p. 166)

Table 6.1 Number of respondents indicating 'few opportunities of use after school' was the main learning difficulty

Target language	Respondents (Primary 5)	Respondents (Secondary 1)	Respondents (Secondary 5)
English	573 (57.4%)	761 (70.8%)	979 (91.1%)
Putonghua	340 (70.3%)	303 (76.0%)	115 (53.9%)

Language Proficiency Survey conducted in 1994, So 1998, Table 5, p. 167

So's (1998) argument was borne out by the results of a survey he conducted with hundreds of students at Primary 5, Secondary 1 and Secondary 5 levels. When asked to pick from a list of factors that would make it difficult for them to learn English and/or Putonghua, most respondents selected 'few opportunities of use after school' (see Table 6.1).

This brings us to one interesting issue related to the functions and status of English in Hong Kong: is it more like a second language or a foreign language? As mentioned, English is seldom used by Chinese Hongkongers for intraethnic communication among themselves. This makes English more like a foreign than a second language (Li 1999/2008). At the same time, to the extent that English is one of the official languages (alongside Chinese) which is commonly and actively used, more in print than in speech, in the key domains of government, education, law and business, it functions more like a second language. Such characteristics make English in Hong Kong an untypical second or foreign language. This is probably why in the literature on 'Hong Kong English', different analyses and conclusions are arrived at depending on the World Englishes scholar. Braj Kachru (2005, p. 90) categorizes English in Hong Kong, along with that in China, as a foreign language, albeit a "fast-expanding" one. Falvey (1998) similarly considers it a "myth" to categorize English in Hong Kong as a second language (p. 76); instead, he believes its status is more like a foreign language (EFL) on the grounds that it "is learned primarily in the classroom with little assistance from the language environment" (p. 75). McArthur (2001, pp. 8–9), on the other hand, places Hong Kong along with Bangladesh, Brunei, Ghana, India, Malaysia, Nigeria, and Singapore as one of "the ESL territories". Bolton (2003) likewise places it in the Outer Circle. The placement of Hong Kong in the Outer Circle or the Expanding Circle has theoretical implications in Kachru's three-concentric-circle model (1985, 1992) of World Englishes, namely 'norm-developing' (Outer Circle) vs. 'norm-dependent' (Expanding Circle). The above analysis suggests that a model featuring three concentric circles based essentially on nation-states in abstraction of tremendous variation within them is not as useful for characterizing the status and functions of English in a place like Hong Kong, where percentage-wise only a minority speaks English as a quasi-L1, while the majority of Chinese-English bilinguals fall within a cline of proficiency levels with 'proficient' at one end and 'barely intelligible' at the other. As Lin (1997a, c) argues, between these two poles lies a social divide along the lines of social class, such that for children who are born to middle class or well-to-do families who have the means and material support for English in the home domain, it functions more like a second than a foreign language to them. Conversely, for

children born to working class parents with little or no support for English, it is more like a foreign language. Social class is thus an important intervening factor. Thus, in regard to the status of English as a second or foreign language in Hong Kong, any hard-and-fast generalization will not do justice to a segment of the population in the SAR. This is why English in Hong Kong is an untypical second or foreign language, which defies any attempt to have it placed in one Kachruvian circle or the other in a cut-and-dry manner.[3]

6.2.2   Typological Distance Between Chinese and English, and Linguistic Differences Between Cantonese and Putonghua

In addition to the absence of a conducive social environment for using and practising English, another major problem is linguistic, which is rooted in the fact that English and Chinese are typologically very dissimilar languages. English is an Indo-European language whereas Chinese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family (Comrie 2009, p. 12; Lewis et al. 2016; Matthews and Yip 2011). As we saw in Chap. 4, phonologically many of the English pronunciation features (RP) are alien to Chinese ears, including the dental fricatives, stress-timed rhythm (as opposed to syllable-timed rhythm in Chinese), and consonant clusters, the latter being uncommon or not found in Chinese varieties (Hung 2000, 2002; cf. Deterding et al. 2008). Still other pronunciation difficulties are due to the Chinese learner's ignorance of phonotactic constraints regarding which English consonants may occur in the syllable- or word-final position. This is a major source of difficulty for Chinese learners of English in general, which often combines with the problems created by consonant clusters (Bob Bauer, personal communication).

Grammatically, most of the subsystems in English such as tenses and articles are non-existent in Chinese. In terms of lexis, apart from a small subset of loanwords borrowed from English (e.g., Cantonese words for *taxi* and *bus*, *strawberry* and *counter* [of a bank/hospital]), the number of cognates in English is negligible. As for the way the two languages are written, English is alphabetic while Chinese is logographic (Chap. 3). As a result of salient typological differences, therefore, very little of Chinese learners' knowledge of their mother tongue is of any use in the process of learning English – unlike learners from other cognate language pairs such as English and German (Germanic), or Spanish and Italian (Romance). Tremendous typological distance between Chinese (spoken Cantonese and written Chinese) and English thus helps explain why, for the majority of Cantonese-dominant Hongkongers, English is so difficult to learn, let alone to master (see Chap. 4 for more details).

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[3] For a discussion of the extent to which English in Hong Kong may be characterized as a 'new variety' with regard to Susan Butler's (1997) five criteria, see Li (2008a, 2010).

What about Mandarin or Putonghua? Do Cantonese-speaking Hongkongers find it easy to acquire this national lingua franca of Greater China? As shown in Chap. 3, the answer is a qualified "yes". Since SWC is essentially based on Putonghua, learning to read logographic Chinese texts means that one naturally becomes more or less familiar with a large number of vocabulary words in the national language, albeit pronounced in their vernacular, Cantonese. This is the background against which Cantonese and Putonghua have evolved many cognates (Luke 2005). Thanks to the policy of mother tongue education (i.e., vernacular instruction in Cantonese) in the SAR, while knowledge of Putonghua is not a prerequisite for Chinese literacy development (H.-M Lee 2004, pp. 121–123; S.-L. Tang 2003; Tse 2001, 2014), there exists a diglossic gap between Mandarin- or Putonghua-based SWC and formal, (H) Cantonese at the lexico-grammatical and stylistic levels (cf. Snow 2004, 2008, 2010, 2013). In other words, many Putonghua expressions are pronounceable in Cantonese because, through vernacular instruction, learners in Hong Kong are taught to pronounce them in Cantonese rather than in Putonghua, as is different from mainland Chinese schools. As S.-K. Tse and his colleagues have argued (see, e.g., Lee et al. 2011; Tse 2001, 2014; Tse et al. 2007), however, precisely because SWC texts are taught and learned in Cantonese, Cantonese-dominant students' level of Chinese literacy attainment is in principle independent of their knowledge or grasp of Putonghua. This point is made even more clearly by Tang (2003), who states that:

> On the learning of written Chinese, the distinction between L1 and L2 is a non-issue. For Hong Kong students, Standard Written Chinese is the target language. This is not unlike [their peers in] the whole of Mainland China and Taiwan. (Tang 2003, p. 49, my translation)[4]

In terms of the actual give-and-take in a Chinese Language class, Poon (2010) gives a succinct description of a typical Chinese Language lesson before the curriculum reform was implemented in 2001:

> The teacher read out a text written in classical Chinese (if the text was written in Modern Standard Chinese [i.e., baihua or vernacular-based Chinese], the teacher would ask students to read once on their own), and then explain to students the meaning of words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs and the whole text, followed by asking students to do some exercises. (...) The only way to learn to write and pronounce Chinese characters is through rote learning; therefore, dictation of Chinese words and phrases is a compulsory component in Chinese language learning. (Poon 2010, p. 29)

Accordingly, students were expected to master the Chinese texts – forms and meanings – through rote-learning, a learning mode which has been deemphasized after the Chinese Language curriculum reform in 2001 (for typical pedagogic problems associated with the teaching of English, see Poon 2010 for details).

As far as writing Standard Chinese is concerned, in accordance with the Hong Kong (SAR) Basic Law, Chinese characters in Hong Kong SAR continue to be written in traditional forms, as opposed to simplified forms in mainland China (Snow

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4「書面語的學習,根本不存在第一語言、第二語言的問題。香港學生學習書面語,完全以現代漢語爲目的語。這跟整個大陸以至台灣沒有兩樣。」(Tang 2003, p. 49)

2004, 2008; cf. see Li 2006, 2015a). In addition to the linguistic challenges arising from contrastive differences between the phonological systems in Cantonese and Putonghua (Chap. 3), learners' exposure to Putonghua tends to be restricted to the language classroom, for, like in English, there are not many natural opportunities for meaningful practice beyond school premises (except for transactional communication purposes such as responding to Putonghua-speaking tourists' questions in the street or traveling in non-Cantonese-speaking parts of China).

6.3   Toward Biliteracy and Trilingualism: Challenges and Dilemmas in the MoI Debate

The language-in-education policy in Hong Kong has been a source of tremendous social tension in the last two decades (Lin and Man 2009; Poon 2010; see Chap. 5). Few would dispute the usefulness of English in the white-collar workplace. Given that English is seldom used for intraethnic communication, however, for the majority of Hongkongers school is almost the only domain in which they get exposure in English, which is taught and learned from kindergarten to tertiary level. Until the end of primary education (Primary 6/Grade 6, age 11–12), with few exceptions the teaching medium is mainly Cantonese. At the onset of secondary education (roughly Grade 7), however, since September 1998 the 'mother tongue education' policy stipulates that schools must teach in Chinese (spoken Cantonese, and traditional as opposed to simplified Chinese characters), unless they can demonstrate that a critical mass of no less than 85% of the students in the Secondary One intake have the ability to learn through the medium of English effectively (Education Department, April 1997, Annexes I & II, pp. 8–9). As a rule, more stringent threshold standards and qualifications were set for in-service and pre-service teachers of English in EMI schools. As of 2000, there were about 30% of over 400 secondary schools which met this EMI requirement.

A review of the compulsory Chinese medium-of-instruction policy was conducted in 2005. In the Report on *Review of Medium of Instruction for Secondary Schools and Secondary School Places Allocation* published in December 2005 (Education Commission 2005), such requirements continued to be upheld. The rationale for these requirements is to ensure that students opting for EMI must have the aptitude and ability to study through the medium of English, as determined by the Medium-of-Instruction Grouping Assessment (MIGA) results. Bowing to severe criticisms and societal pressure amplified by mass media, in 2005 the Education Bureau undertook to introduce a mechanism whereby existing CMI schools could become EMI, while EMI schools would be obliged to switch (back) to CMI if the stringent requirements were not met. Such a mechanism came to be known as the 'Changing Train' policy, which however had to be shelved after the resignation of the EDB Director in June 2007 due to a prolonged and widely publicized scandal involving allegations of interference of academic freedom (see Poon 2010, pp. 41–42

for details). In place of the 'Changing Train' policy, a fine-tuning policy was announced in May 2009 under Secretary for Education Michael Suen, and subsequently implemented from September 2010 (Education Bureau 2009, 2010, 2012a, b; cf. Poon et al. 2013).

In sum, the language situation became more complicated after the sovereignty of Hong Kong was returned to China in July 1997. Being the national language taught and learned by practically all Chinese nationals across mainland China, Putonghua is an important symbol of national unity, and so there seems no reason why Hong Kong Chinese should be exempted from learning to understand and speak Putonghua. English has evolved into an international or global lingua franca (Jenkins 2003; Seidlhofer 2004; Kirkpatrick 2007). While Putonghua is as yet nowhere near being a contender for that position, it is fast becoming a regional lingua franca in Greater China among ethnic Chinese, witness the growing number of Confucius Institutes worldwide. In their mission and objectives, Confucius Institutes are comparable to other more established national counterparts like British Council (English), Alliance Française (French), Goethe Institut (German) and Instituto Cervantes (Spanish). The increasing demand for the Chinese language worldwide is indicative of China's expanding political and economic influence internationally, suggesting that in the not-too-distant future a knowledge of Putonghua and Chinese literacy has great potential for making the bilingual speaker more competitive in the global job market. In short, being able to speak English *and* Putonghua fluently will be an important asset for anyone preparing for a professional career in the multilingual workplace. This is one major reason why English and Putonghua figure so prominently in the SAR's language-in-education policy of 'biliteracy and trilingualism'.

The rationale behind the needs-driven 'biliteracy and trilingualism' policy is hardly disputable. What remains controversial is the right and reasonable target level of attainment. To my knowledge, no attempt has been made to define exactly what level of 'biliteracy and trilingualism' is intended. For example, is it '*balanced* biliteracy and trilingualism' or '*functional* biliteracy and trilingualism'? And, once the goalpost is agreed, how do we get from where we are to where we want to be? Informed by fine-grained analysis of Hong Kong's language problems from multiple angles, notably historical, sociopolitical and economic, Poon (2010, 2013) makes a cogent argument that, from the colonial to the postcolonial era, successive Hong Kong governments' lack-luster performance in harnessing the city's language problems is due largely to the absence of language planning (especially status planning) that guides the implementation of an ad hoc language-in-education policy. Regarding the choice between balanced vs. functional biliteracy and trilingualism, given "the domain-specific distribution of languages in the communicative environment of multilinguals, preferred [language] choice, ease of access, etc.," balanced bilingualism is unlikely to be a realistic goalpost (Meisel 2004, p. 94). As Meisel further observes after reviewing research on linguistic development in a multilingual setting for 25 years:

> The question of whether a bilingual person can achieve (...) 'balanced bilingualism' has led to controversy, and it has, indeed, been argued repeatedly that such balanced bilingualism might not be possible. (...) [balanced bilingualism] clearly refers to language proficiency

and to performance in both languages. (…) Mainly because most bilinguals do not use both languages equally frequently in all domains, they tend not to be 'balanced' in their proficiency for each of the languages. (Meisel 2004, p. 94)

In the public discourse of the SAR in the past 20 years, however, the language-in-education policy of biliteracy and trilingualism is implicitly understood as native-speaker-based standards in terms of the four skills (hence 'balanced' rather than 'functional'), as evidenced in the 'complaint tradition' and frequent reference to Cantonese-L1 learners/users' 'common errors' in English (and in Putonghua occasionally). It should be clear that *functional* biliteracy and trilingualism, understood as Cantonese-L1 learners/users' ability to use the two written and three spoken languages to varying degrees of proficiency and for different purposes, is a more realistic goalpost (cf. 'truncated repertoire', Blommaert 2010).

Since explicit instruction through classroom teaching tends to be the only means by which the majority of Hongkongers can gain access to English and Putonghua, for nearly two decades there has been an ongoing debate regarding the most productive way(s) of teaching these two important languages (for English, see e.g., Chan 2015; Johnson 1997; Johnson and Swain 1997; Lin 1996, 1997a, b, 1999, 2015a, b; Lin and Wu 2015; Lo 2015; Lo and Lin 2015; Tavares 2015; for Putonghua, see Tong and Mok 2000; Tong et al. 2000, 2006).

Lin and Man (2009) offer a timely, detailed account of the key issues involved in the medium-of-instruction debate. Various bilingual education models and experiences which have been implemented in other countries like Canada, Singapore and Malaysia are discussed and their relevance to Hong Kong carefully analyzed. The 'mother tongue education' policy, introduced in September 1998, consists of streaming primary school leavers to English-medium (EMI) and Chinese-medium (CMI) Secondary schools depending on their relative academic performance in Chinese and English as shown in their MIGA results. This 'late immersion' policy, effective for three years till the end of Junior High School (Secondary 3, Grade 9, aged around 15) under the 9-year compulsory education arrangement, is premised on the theoretical assumption that teachers and learners ought to stick to the same language of classroom interaction, be it English or Cantonese. Any form of 'code-mixing' is seen as undesirable and detrimental to the development of the target language (Chap. 5). At the same time, 'code-mixing', especially in the EMI classroom, is often viewed as a result of students' low proficiency in English (Poon 2010), even though the factors leading to 'code-mixing' in society or in the education sector are considerably more complex. For instance, there is empirical evidence of 'code-mixing' among Cantonese-L1 students being triggered by a 'medium-of-learning effect', that is, English-L2 learners' psycholinguistic dependence on English terminologies as a direct result of studying through the medium of English (Li 2011; see Chap. 2).

After being implemented for over a decade, the late immersion policy did not seem to be as effective as hoped, as shown in the English language attainment of

students' public examination results across the board.[5] What is even more disappointing are the empirical findings of three longitudinal studies (Tsang 2002, 2006, 2008), showing CMI students' early advantage in academic performance over their EMI peers from Secondary 1 (Grade 7) being gradually narrowed, while their chances for entering university were only half compared with those who had studied through the medium of English from lower secondary onwards. All this has sparked criticisms and triggered debates regarding alternative modes of bilingual education. One alternative mode was mixed-mode teaching, whereby less language-dependent subjects such as Music, Art and Mathematics are taught in English, while more language-dependent subjects such as History and Geography are taught in the students' mother tongue (see Lin and Man 2009 for more details). There is increasing consensus that, far from being a symptom of unsuccessful or low-quality learning, classroom code-switching (at the inter-sentential level) or 'code-mixing' (at the intra-sentential level), if done judiciously, has good potential for enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in content subject classes.

Towards the beginning of the second decade of the new millennium, in recognition of the pedagogic value and facilitative role of students' first language(s) in the process of acquiring a second or foreign language like English, more and more critical applied linguists and experts in bilingual education prefer more neutral terms such as 'translanguaging' (García 2009; García and Li 2014), 'translingual practice' (Canagarajah 2013a, b), and 'flexible education' (Weber 2014). First used by Welsh researchers to refer to the pedagogic practice where the input (reading and listening) is in language A and the output in language B (speaking and writing, Williams 1996), the term translanguaging has been extended to refer to all situations involving social interactions between bilinguals, in the classroom and beyond (Lewis et al. 2012a, b; García and Lin in press). With regard to the relationship between classroom language choice and learning outcomes in content subjects, what is needed is methodologically well-conceived empirical studies of translanguaging, showing how learning with a content subject focus is facilitated and made more effective through the deployment of pedagogically productive translanguaging strategies and practices along the lines of empirical studies conducted by Angel Lin and her research team in the Special Issue on 'Designing multilingual and multimodal CLIL frameworks for EFL students', *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* (Chan 2015; Lin and Wu 2015; Lo 2015; Lo and Lin 2015; Tavares 2015; see also Cenoz 2015; Li 2015b).

The MoI debate is further compounded by the introduction of Putonghua as a compulsory core subject in primary school from 1998 (and as an elective subject in secondary schools). Putonghua has also been used as the medium of instruction (PMI) for teaching the Chinese Language subject (普教中, *pou³⁵gaau³³zung⁵⁵* in common parlance) in some schools under the aegis of the SAR government (for details, see Chap. 7). The government has made it clear that teaching Chinese in

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[5] Before September 2012: Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) and Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE); after September 2012: Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE).

Putonghua is a long-term goal. Opponents are concerned about the continued vitality of the community's (now) dominant vernacular – once school children are no longer taught to pronounce Chinese characters in Cantonese (see, e.g., Bauer 2000). And, in terms of facilitating learning and teaching, there is no doubt that using the students' (and teachers') most familiar vernacular – Cantonese for the majority – as the medium of instruction will remove unwanted language barriers in the give-and-take between teachers and students. One way out of the quagmire, according to some advocates of a radical position, is to implement real 'mother-tongue education' by officially declaring Cantonese to be the primary (i.e., unmarked) language of instruction in secondary education across the board (e.g., Bauer 2000). It remains unclear, however, how such a position would be received by stakeholders – notably the government, parents and educationalists – and whether the outcome of English-learning would be compromised.

In the rest of this chapter, I will briefly outline the main concerns of the SAR government and various groups of stakeholders vis-à-vis the vicissitudes or "frequent governmental policy changes" with regard to English as the medium of instruction (Poon 2013, p. 35): employers, parents, school principals, teachers and educationalists, and students. The purpose is to help disentangle the complexity of the picture viewed from their respective vantage points (cf. Tung et al. 1997).

6.4   The MoI Debate: Key Stakeholders' Concerns

Hong Kong (SAR) Government   It is almost a cliché today to say that Hong Kong is the meeting place between East and West. Her success story, one that features a remarkable transformation from a sleepy fishing village in the 1840s to an international metropolis cum global financial center rivaling New York, London and Tokyo in the twenty-first century, is arguably *sui generis*. For all this to happen, it can hardly be denied that English has played an instrumental role, albeit with the key players being members of the English-educated elite. Like the central government in Beijing, the SAR government is acutely aware of the significance of English to the continued well-being of Hong Kong, and so English figures prominently in the curricula of the local education system. Every year, a significant percentage of the SAR's GDP amounting to billions of (HK) dollars is budgeted for education-related expenses, with a view to improving the quality of English language teaching and learning (Miller and Li 2008), but the overall returns are disproportionate and disappointing by any standards. The two main factors discussed above – a lack of a conducive English-learning and English-using environment on one hand, and tremendous typological differences between the two languages Chinese and English on the other – represent two main obstacles which militate against the government's efforts to upgrade Hongkongers' general proficiency and standards of English. The promotion of Putonghua through classroom teaching is no easy task either. Apart from considerable phonological differences between Cantonese and Putonghua, a lack of opportunities for meaningful practice outside the classroom is another real

obstacle. A further thorny issue is the limited number of qualified teachers of Putonghua, who are needed in the thousands given the size of the schooling population at primary level (over 50,000 at Primary 1) each year. These obstacles notwithstanding, there are two recent trends which seem to provide some room for optimism. First, in the 'fine-tuning policy' the government seems to have adopted a more tolerant stance toward the 'mixing' of languages in the school curriculum which, as Lin and Man (2009) have observed, could be an effective bilingual education strategy if done properly (cf. Lin 1996, 1999). This is especially welcome because, regardless of students' English proficiency, classroom code-switching cannot be entirely avoided (Lo 2015). Second, as a correlate of the last point, if classroom code-switching ceases to be a taboo, bilingual teachers may use it as a possible situated response to low-proficiency students' problems in their EMI learning of content subjects (e.g., Biology, Geography and History) where appropriate. Legitimating the use of students' L1 in EMI lessons, however, is not to encourage an 'anything goes' teaching philosophy, but to acknowledge that its judicious use should be recognized as an important and integral part of the teacher's bilingual instruction skills set (Lo 2015). Once the 'no mixed code allowed' shackles are lifted, bilingual teachers may focus on pedagogically sound alternatives to classroom code-switching to students' L1, as the resourceful teachers' teaching strategies in Lo's (2015) study have demonstrated. Lo's (2015) alternative teaching strategies are summarized by Li (2015b, p. 338) as follows:

(a) recasting or paraphrasing the student's Cantonese response in English with a view to providing the English expression needed for that meaning;
(b) using the strategy of think-pair-share to encourage peer learning and boost students' confidence before asking them to respond to teacher-led questions;
(c) Socratic questioning to provide clues and modify questions to scaffold and facilitate students' uptake of the target L2 expressions; and
(d) consolidating students' understanding by reiterating or illustrating the key concepts in English.

   Such exemplary teaching strategies, which are in line with the premises of content-and-language integrated learning (CLIL), are promising, in that they point to pedagogically sound bilingual instruction practices that have been shown to be conducive to students' learning in the target language (Lin 2015a, b).

Employers Opening the job advertisement pages of any local newspapers on any day, including e-dailies, one will notice that virtually all of the job adverts – from managers to messengers – require applicants to have at least some knowledge of English, in addition to Cantonese. Where interaction with non-Cantonese-speaking business representatives in mainland China is an important part of the job specification, an additional working knowledge of Putonghua is a must. Today, the business environment in Hong Kong, like elsewhere in Greater China, clearly favors plurilingual workers. Those who are conversant in more than one Chinese 'dialect' (e.g., Shanghainese or Chiu Chow, the latter being the home dialect of Mr. Li Ka-Shing, a well-known philanthropist and the richest person in Hong Kong) will have an

advantage – if their wider linguistic repertoire could be put to meaningful use on the job. Indeed, plurilingualism is increasingly valued by multinational consortiums as an important asset and a key to business success (Li 2007). No wonder employers from the business sector are among the most vocal critics, whose voices deploring Hong Kong students' 'declining English proficiency' are often amplified in mass media, print and electronic (cf. the 'complaint tradition', Bolton 2003; see also Chap. 4). While similar criticisms have not yet been extended to Hongkongers' non-standard Putonghua, such criticisms are conceivable the more widespread Putonghua becomes in the local business sector. It is therefore understandable why some business enterprises are among the staunchest supporters of various language enhancement schemes (e.g., HSBC's support for workplace English), typically in addition to boosting their staff's language skills through in-house, on-the-job corporate training, which tends to include some elements of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) and, increasingly, Putonghua as well.

Parents Where possible, most Hong Kong parents would opt for English-medium education for their children (So 1992). To those who can afford it, apart from the obvious choice of hiring an English-speaking domestic helper, typically from the Philippines, to create opportunities for using English at home, resources are set aside to provide their children with additional exposure to and support for their English proficiency development. Common practices include: cultivating children's sensitivity to and interest in English through all kinds of language games (e.g., Disney English); engaging an English-L1 private tutor after school; sending children to playgroups or classes where interaction with native English-speaking instructors is a selling point; attending English immersion programs overseas in summer, and the like. Cantonese-L1 parents who are fluent in English are often seen teaching or testing English to their children, a social practice that is commonly observed in public spaces such as Mass Transit Railway (MTR) compartments, play areas in the park, and elevators. In some cases, the quality of Cantonese-L1 parents' spoken English makes one wonder whether the child would get enlightened or end up being more confused. And, to outsmart the school allocation system whereby primary school-leavers are assigned to CMI and EMI secondary schools, some parents would reportedly move into neighborhoods with a heavier concentration of English-medium schools, so as to maximize the chance of their children being allocated to one of those Band 1 schools. Resources permitting, Cantonese-L1 parents would do any or all of the above, just to ensure that their children would 'not lose out at the starting line'[6] when it comes to beating that long, highly competitive selection process up the education hierarchy from preschool to tertiary, where one's life chances are bound up with how much progress in English they have made at every stage along the way. In terms of learning outcomes, the means tends to justify the end, for those children who get extra home support for English often outperform those whose exposure is limited within school premises (Lin 1997a).

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[6] Popular saying in Chinese: 不要輸在起跑線上 (*bú yào shū zài qǐpǎoxiàn shàng/bat*[55] *jiu*[33] *syu*[55] *zoi*[22] *hei*[35]*paau*[35]*sin*[33] *soeng*[22]).

Such a parental craving for English has been variously analyzed as a form of passive, uncritical submission to the global hegemony of English ('English linguistic imperialism' being a form of 'linguicism', Phillipson 1992), as opposed to an active, conscious wish to embrace and partake of the linguistic capital of the de facto global language (Li 2002; cf. So 1992). In any case, it cannot be denied that many Hong Kong parents tend to be unaware of the kinds of support or preconditions needed – if the placement of their child in an EMI school is to be an educationally sound decision. Crucial to this decision are two key factors: the amount of home support for English (e.g., one or more English-speaking parent, access to a private tutor, availability of learning resources such as language games, etc.), and their child's aptitude to learn through the medium of English. Research in SLA has shown that some children/learners are more gifted at foreign language learning than others (see, e.g., Skehan 1989; Dörnyei 2005). In the absence of either condition – or worse, both conditions – then requiring non-English-speaking children to learn content subjects through English is not at all a wise decision. Indeed, in whichever direction the MoI policy may be further developing, there is clearly a need for the government to step up the efforts to 'educate' parents in order to bring home this important message. This could be done, for example, by producing publicity materials and pointing the way to useful resources, including those on the Internet, so that parents could be alerted to various factors which are conducive to effective language learning. This type of information may be useful for helping at least some parents to arrive at their own informed decisions.

School Principals   School principals have the responsibility of ensuring the survival of their school, which hinges on how successful it is in attracting academically high-performing students. Given Hong Kong parents' preference for English-medium education, being able to claim 'EMI status' would naturally work to the advantage of the school. The government is clearly aware of this, and so a lot of efforts have been made to monitor the qualifications and actual EMI-teaching capabilities of the teaching staff in self-proclaimed EMI schools. One critical issue arising from the mother tongue education policy is stigmatization: other things being equal, a CMI school/student is generally perceived as lower in standard compared with an EMI school/student. This has been a major point of contention between supporters and opponents of this policy; it is also ostensibly the main reason for the 'fine-tuning' initiative introduced in 2009 (Poon 2013), which according to government officials is intended to deliberately blur the distinction between CMI and EMI schools as part of an attempt to counteract social stigmas engendered by the labeling effect of the dual MoI streaming policy (Chap. 5).

Teachers and Educationalists   Stigmatization as a direct consequence of the dual MoI streaming policy is one of the most serious concerns among conscientious teachers and educationalists. Another main concern of frontline teachers is the government's stance toward (Cantonese-English) 'code-mixing', which is commonplace in those EMI lessons (including English lessons in CMI schools) where keeping to English often makes it difficult for students to follow. As we saw earlier,

until recently the government was rather intolerant of 'code-mixing', largely out of a concern that 'mixing' the languages would deprive students of precious exposure to good English (Chap. 5). This concern is well taken; yet one lingering problem remains: by sticking to a language which is less familiar to some students and unfamiliar to others, the immediate and arguably higher-order objective of learning and critical thinking is being sacrificed (P.-K. Choi 2003; W.-Y. Tang 2004). In this regard, Angel Lin and her colleagues have identified a variety of pedagogical concerns leading EMI teachers of various content-subjects (e.g., Geography, History, Science and Mathematics) to switch to their students' L1, Cantonese (Chan 2015; Lin and Wu 2015; Lo 2015; Lo and Lin 2015; Tavares 2015; see also Cenoz 2015 and Li 2015b). For Cantonese-dominant students whose English proficiency prevents them from coping with the learning of EMI subjects effectively, translanguaging to their L1 should clearly be an option in the bilingual teacher's inventory of teaching strategies, provided this is done judiciously.

Students Hong Kong students are clearly aware of the linguistic capital associated with the successful acquisition of English and, to a lesser extent, Putonghua. Owing to the above-mentioned obstacles, however, the majority tend to find it a very difficult if not an impossible task to master both languages effectively (see Chaps. 3 and 4). For primary students, as a selection process the dual MoI streaming policy is a source of anxiety. Once the results are announced, both EMI and CMI students have their respective worries. EMI students would worry about, among other things, having to learn – typically by rote – a seemingly endless list of English vocabulary words in the textbook of practically every school subject (except Chinese Language and Chinese History). The teachers' input is often difficult to follow if not downright incomprehensible. Whether the EMI student is able to cope depends to a large extent on the availability of home support and/or access to additional private tuition. CMI students, on the other hand, may have the 'luxury' of learning through their mother tongue, but they will have to put up with a lingering concern that in the long run, they may be worse off as they do not have a body of English vocabulary for academic purposes, especially field-specific terminologies, which is crucial for gaining access to higher education, in particular securing a place in a local university. In the past decade, there is ample evidence, including longitudinal research and news reports, showing how CMI Secondary school leavers are disadvantaged by a lack of EAP (English for Academic Purposes) knowledge in high-stake public exams such as HKCEE and HKALE (e.g., research conducted by Tsang Wing Kwong and associates, CUHK 2008; see also Clem 2008) and/or after they have successfully entered an EMI university. The research question – when is the most opportune time for effecting a transition from CMI to EMI education (i.e., Secondary 4, 5 or 6) – remains a tricky one. Finally, it should be remembered that CMI students, who make up the majority (ca. 70%) of all secondary school-leavers, are the most vulnerable of various stakeholder groups, for they are the ones who bear the brunt of stigmatization. Many have to cope really hard to overcome the psychological barrier of being socially labeled 'second rate'.

6.5 Conclusion

There is no doubt that Hong Kong SAR, the most cosmopolitan and internationalized of all Chinese metropolises, has evolved into and depends for its survival on how well it fares as a knowledge-based economy. Most of the economic activities require a workforce with a reasonably high level of proficiency in English and Putonghua. Given the significance of these two languages to Hong Kong's socio-economic vitality, continued prosperity and sustainable development, it comes as no surprise that English and Putonghua should figure so prominently in the Hong Kong SAR government's language-in-education policy. In terms of teaching and learning effectiveness, Poon (2010, p. 47) laments that "[w]hile billions of dollars have been invested to promote biliteracy and trilingualism since the handover in 1997, ironically, language standards of students in Hong Kong – particularly those of students of English – have declined still further".

There are two rather serious problems as the government and citizens of "Asia's World City" alike grapple with the task of becoming biliterate in Chinese and English, and trilingual in Cantonese, English and Putonghua. The first problem is concerned with a lack of a conducive language environment for using and practising English and Putonghua in authentic situations. Another way of putting it would be to say that being more like foreign languages, English and Putonghua are hardly used for authentic meaning-making purposes among Cantonese-speaking Hongkongers. The use of only English or Putonghua when conversing with fellow (Cantonese-speaking) Chinese Hongkongers is so highly marked that one is burdened with some sort of justification if one initiates, and seeks to maintain, an English-only or Putonghua-only conversation. Conversely, one could say that the widely perceived unmarked language choice for intraethnic communication is Cantonese, a fact that may be explained by the demographic or ethnolinguistic pattern of Hong Kong, which for a long time has been a predominantly Cantonese-speaking Chinese society (So 1992). Indeed, as Bolton (2003) has observed, in earlier sociolinguistic research on Hongkongers' language use patterns, it was not uncommon to find commentaries that Hong Kong was ethnically a (relatively) homogenous society.

Another major problem concerns the high degree of linguistic dissimilarity between Cantonese, Standard Chinese, and English (Chaps. 3 and 4). Typologically, Chinese and English belong to different language families with diverse linguistic characteristics from phonology to lexico-grammar, from varying information sequencing norms to learner-unfriendly orthographies. In terms of the relative (un) ease of acquisition, one consequence for Hong Kong Chinese learners of English – more like a foreign than a second language – is that linguistically very little of what they know about their mother tongue (Cantonese) has any reference value in the strenuous process of learning English. While the same cannot be said of the learning of Putonghua, which shares many cognates with Cantonese lexico-grammatically and which adopts the same orthography, it is no easy task for Cantonese-speaking

Hongkongers to master the pronunciation system in Putonghua.[7] The considerable discrepancy between the vernacular and SWC suggests that the term 'mother tongue education' is in one sense a misnomer, for Hong Kong Chinese school children do not write the way they speak (Li 2000, 2006, 2015a; cf. Snow 2004, 2008, 2010, 2013).

In short, for Chinese Hongkongers the road toward biliteracy and trilingualism is a bumpy one and those on board are riddled with plenty of dilemmas. Everyone knows that the continued well-being of Hong Kong SAR depends crucially on a biliterate and trilingual workforce. However, the collective ethnolinguistic identity of Chinese Hongkongers is so strong that initiating or maintaining a conversation in a language other than Cantonese is generally perceived as highly marked and in need of some sort of justification (sometimes implicitly, e.g., to avoid excluding a non-Cantonese-speaker in social interaction). This results in an odd situation commonly found in foreign language learning settings: many eager learners of English are ready to pay an exorbitant fee to some tutorial center, typically charged by the hour, just to be given the opportunity to practice using the target language with other like-minded learners, often under the guidance of a native English-speaking tutor. This consumer demand is probably what the writer of the following advertising slogan for a learning center had in mind (english town, May, 2009): "It is wrong to study English!",[8] with a subtext in Chinese that may be glossed as 'you can't master English by studying it, for practice is the key, which is our teaching philosophy'. The same may be said of the learning of Putonghua: many are aware that a high level of proficiency in the national language is a key that helps open more doors in the workplace, and yet outside the classroom it is very difficult to find natural opportunities for meaningful practice.

In short, the learning of English and Putonghua is very much confined to classroom teaching as a school subject. The limitations of this teaching and learning approach are well known, and so for nearly two decades, the Hong Kong (SAR) government has sought to enhance teaching and learning effectiveness by providing EMI education to those students who have demonstrated a certain level of ability to learn through English. In particular, before 2010/11, students were selected through a scoring mechanism known as MIGA, or Medium of Instruction Grouping Assessment (Poon 2010, p. 33; see also Lin and Man 2009). From September 2010 onwards, MIGA was replaced with a new version of the Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) mechanism for streaming all primary-school leavers to CMI/EMI schools. Nearly two decades after the 'mother tongue education' policy has been implemented, the language learning outcomes leave much to be desired. Worse, as briefly discussed above, the policy has also antagonized various groups of

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[7] Similar learning difficulties may be expected of those learning Cantonese as an additional language, but research has shown that speakers of English can get by with little or no knowledge of Cantonese (Tinker Sachs and Li 2007; Li et al. 2016), while the Putonghua speakers often assume that Hongkongers will make an effort to speak to them in Putonghua (e.g., mainland tourists shopping in Hong Kong).

[8] 「學英語是錯的!」 (hok²²jing⁵⁵jyu²³si²²co³³dik⁵⁵/xué yīngyǔ shì cuò de).

stakeholders, who are displeased with that policy in one way or another. Some of their more salient concerns are summarized as follows:

- Employers find it difficult to recruit employees with a high-enough level of English and Putonghua skills needed for the workplace;
- Parents resent dwindling opportunities for their children to gain access to English-medium education;
- Principals of CMI schools are weary of adverse consequences brought about by the public's perception that their teachers and students "lack the competence" to teach and learn in English; falling student numbers would pose a threat to the school's survival;
- Teachers – of CMI and EMI schools alike – find it difficult to abide by an EDB guideline against any form of classroom code-switching (CCS) or translanguaging; and
- Students of CMI students have to put up with being stigmatized and socially labeled as 'second rate', while many EMI students have to cope with varying degrees of cognitive problems in the process of learning through a language that they are unfamiliar or less familiar with.

The rationale behind the 'biliteracy and trilingualism' policy is beyond dispute, which to a large extent may be regarded as a linguistic reality thrust upon Hongkongers as the former British colony gradually evolved into a knowledge-based economy toward the end of the last century. In the absence of a conducive language-learning environment, and given the considerable linguistic differences between Cantonese/Chinese and English on one hand, and Cantonese and Putonghua on the other, it does not seem obvious how the many dilemmas of various stakeholder groups outlined above may be resolved. The 'fine-tuning policy', implemented since September 2010, has given schools more flexibility in terms of language choice for a particular class or subject (subject to specific EDB guidelines). Insofar as it aims to minimize social divisiveness by blurring the CMI/EMI divide, it is worthy of support. Learning through an unfamiliar language, like fighting an uphill battle, can be very tiring and frustrating. To inform ongoing policy adjustments, what is needed is sound empirical research in locally based bilingual teaching strategies, as well as methodologically well-conceived experimentation with different modes of immersion and models of bilingual education along the pedagogic principle of Content-and-language integrated learning (CLIL), as Angel Lin and her research team have been exploring (Chan 2015; Lin 2015a; Lin and Wu 2015; Lo 2015; Lo and Lin 2015; Tavares 2015; cf. Cenoz 2015; Li 2015b).

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