Chapter 9
Issues in Language Policy and Planning: Summary and Recommendations

9.1 Introduction

In Chap. 1, we set out to calibrate the effectiveness of the biliteracy and trilingualism language-in-education policy[1] by critically examining the relevant factors from multiple perspectives: linguistic, sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, neuroscience, and pedagogic (including curricular). Our discussion in Chap. 2 shows that, as a result of prolonged and intensive language contact, what is conventionally referred to as code-switching (CS) or code-mixing (CM), involving Cantonese/Chinese and English, in speech as well as in writing, is indeed a commonplace social practice in informal communication among Cantonese-L1 Hongkongers. It reflects an age-old plurilingual practice of heteroglossia, in Hong Kong and elsewhere in other multilingual societies, whereby plurilinguals routinely deploy all linguistic resources from conventionally discrete languages or language varieties, speech styles, genres or registers to make meaning – so long as no overriding monolingual norm prevails in context. Recent research in plurilingual interaction has shown that CS and CM are ill-conceived metaphors that fail to do justice to plurilinguals' intricate and creative 'spur-of-the-moment' translanguaging (W. Li 2011; W. Li and Zhu 2013), the latter being increasingly accepted as a more appropriate term. One important reason why translanguaging between Cantonese/Chinese and English is so irresistible is English-medium instruction, or the medium-of-learning effect (MOLE). All this helps explain the ubiquity of translingual practice in multilingual Hong Kong (Canagarajah 2013a, b).

Our deliberation and illustrations in Chap. 3 have confirmed that neither Standard Written Chinese (SWC) nor Putonghua is learner-friendly. For 'dialect' speakers like native speakers of Cantonese, the task of developing basic literacy in SWC is riddled with two main problems: (i) a non-alphabetic, orthographically deep writing

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[1] 兩文三語 (*loeng*[35]*man*[21]*saam*[55]*jyu*[23]/*liǎng wén sān yǔ*): two written languages, three spoken languages.

system, and (ii) considerable lexical (to a lesser extent, grammatical) discrepancy between SWC literacy norms and the majority of Hongkongers' vernacular, Cantonese. These two factors help explain why for Cantonese-L1 learners, Chinese literacy acquisition and development as well as cognitive development through reading takes considerably more time compared with their age-relevant peers learning an alphabetic language with a relatively shallow orthography (e.g., Finnish, Italian, or German, McBride 2016, p. 15). Phonologically, Putonghua diverges from Cantonese considerably, making it difficult for Cantonese-L1 learners to master despite the benefit of a shared lingua-cultural heritage and writing system. While there is some truth in the claim, that for Cantonese-L1 learners Putonghua is half way between a first and a second language (i.e., L1.5) from the linguistic point of view (Lai-Au Yeung 1997), the fact remains that many interlanguage features characterized by cross-linguistic influence or transference from Cantonese must be overcome before Putonghua could serve productively as a medium of instruction (MoI) for teaching and learning the Chinese Language subject (i.e., teaching Chinese in Putonghua, or TCP in short).

As we saw in Chap. 4, owing to tremendous typological differences, an L1 variety like British English presents a great deal of acquisitional problems to Cantonese-L1 Hongkongers, both in speaking (RP being the dominant pedagogic model for English pronunciation) and writing (lexico-grammatically and orthographically). In the process of learning English, EFL learners' knowledge of Cantonese/Chinese has hardly any reference value. On linguistic grounds alone, the contrastive differences in Chap. 4 help explain why for the majority of Cantonese-L1 EFL learners, native-like, idiomatic-sounding English, as measured against the norms of EAP, is so difficult to attain.

Such a linguistic challenge is further compounded by the sociolinguistic patterns of language use beyond school premises. As shown in our discussion in Chap. 6, largely for demographic reasons, the ethnolinguistic identity of Cantonese-L1 speakers, who make up about 90% of the local population, is closely bound up with Cantonese (So 1998). One consequence is that, in general, initiating and/or maintaining an English-only conversation in English for intra-ethnic communication is marked (more so in speech than in electronic communication). What this means is that opportunities for oral practice using English or Putonghua beyond the classroom are rare. How likely is it for EFL learners to reach native-like competence in a language, one that is largely restricted to and has little reality outside the classroom? Having to master one such language is no simple feat, what about the sociopolitically conditioned imperative of having to master two? There is thus a huge gap between the SAR government's biliteracy and trilingualism language-in-education policy goal and the actual patterns of language use in society: with the superimposed standard language varieties, English (spoken and written) and Chinese (SWC and Putonghua), it is as if the SAR government had set a lofty if not impossible goalpost for the majority of its citizenry, a recipe for mass failure so to speak. In sum, the sociolinguistic environment governing the use of English and Putonghua in multilingual Hong Kong are such that Cantonese-L1 learners' repertoires in these target languages tend to be truncated and belong to a lower order of indexicality

(Blommaert 2010) compared with the expected levels of repertoires set for NS-based Standard English, SWC and Putonghua. As shown in Chap. 5 and Chap. 6, much of the linguistic predicament was played out in the social tensions and competing interests among various groups of stakeholders in the MoI policy debate since the 1970s, which culminated in the first SAR government's official language-in-education policy of biliteracy and trilingualism shortly after the renationalization of Hong Kong on 1 July 1997.

Between English and Putonghua, there is no question that in general, the craving for 'good' English proficiency far exceeds that for native-like Putonghua in Hong Kong. In Chap. 6, we saw that there is as yet no consensus among scholars concerning the status of English as a second (ESL) or foreign language (EFL). A similar indeterminacy has been raised with regard to the status of Putonghua in Hong Kong (L1.5, L2 or FL, see Chaps. 3 and 7). Part of that indeterminacy may be accounted for in socioeconomic terms. The question, whether English or Putonghua in Hong Kong functions more like a second or foreign language, depends crucially on the quality and amount of support that (especially young) learners get in the home domain, and so indirectly on their social milieu or socioeconomic well-being (cf. Lin 1997). In general, with ample home support for the more prestigious languages English and Putonghua, students from well-off households tend to learn either or both of these languages under L2 conditions – when their use with intimate others is perceived as unmarked or natural. By contrast, for those students whose families cannot afford such home support for additional resources and exposure to these languages, the linguistic capital they represent will be less accessible, and so from both the points of view of learning and use, they will be more like foreign languages.[2] Such a local ESL/EFL divide, while far from being watertight, generally coincides with the amount of disposable income in the household. Those students who grow up in families broadly categorized as middle class or above tend to learn English under ESL conditions and have a higher level of attainment in English proficiency than their working class peers, who tend to learn English under EFL conditions. As one would expect, regarding the degree of relative acquisitional ease, compared with their ESL peers, EFL learners tend to find it more difficult to come to grips with idiomatic-sounding English in accordance with the norms in Standard English or EAP.

The first social selection in that ESL/EFL divide coincides with the streaming of primary school-leavers to CMI and EMI schools. It is from this point that social inequality is perpetuated or reproduced by the education system: by virtue of their higher English proficiency, Primary 6 students from socioeconomically better-off families tend to have a greater chance to be placed in an English-medium school, which is by definition a prestigious Band 1 school.[3] While their CMI peers may

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[2] Owing to the tremendous typological distance between Chinese and English (Chap. 4), in general the goal of mastering English would seem to be a greater challenge compared with that for Putonghua (Chap. 3).

[3] Following the expansion of free compulsory education from 6 years (1971, Grades 1–6) to 9 years (1978, Grades 1–9), under the Secondary School Placement Allocation (SSPA) system, primary

have the 'luxury' of learning through their mother tongue from S1 to S3, typically in a Band 2 or Band 3 school, beyond S3 their prospects of gaining access to university education are significantly curtailed by a lack of sensitivity to idiomatic-sounding Standard English or EAP, as epitomized by their inadequate knowledge of field-specific English terminologies, both being crucial for success in virtually all content disciplines except Chinese Language and Chinese History. What to do to help CMI students bridge that language and knowledge gap in disciplines-specific English jargon and EAP lexico-grammar from S4 to S6, is a tough challenge, often an uphill battle, that preoccupies most if not all CMI teachers and school principals. The social selection process via education is complete, at the end of the six-year secondary curriculum, when offers are made by local universities to successful HKDSE candidates. Here too, there is no surprise: those with better English – typically from better-off families – tend to be more successful as they outnumber their working class peers who are struggling to stay afloat by meeting the minimum entrance requirement for English (and Chinese, SCMP editorial 2013). Undergraduate programs that would naturally be linked to 'the professions' upon graduation – medicine, law, actuarial studies, accountancy, architecture, among others – all demand a firm grasp of Standard English or EAP. An EMI education may or may not be enough to meet that stringent demand for English. This is why, 'far-sighted' parents who can afford it would send their children to study in a secondary school in a traditional English-speaking country like the UK, Australia, Canada or USA, in effect combining (upper) secondary education with immersion in English. According to news reports, such an option attracts several thousand Hong Kong students per year, in addition to many secondary-school leavers who would target a prestigious university in an English-speaking country for their undergraduate education (see, e.g., Wen Wei Po 2014). For obvious reasons, such 'immersion' options are open only to students growing up in households with the means and requisite resources, where the students are more likely to learn English under ESL rather than EFL conditions.

In sum, linguistically, the learning curve for Cantonese-L1 Hongkongers to become biliterate in Standard English (or EAP) and SWC, and (balanced) bilinguals in spoken English and Putonghua in addition to Cantonese, is unusually steep. This is especially true of students from socioeconomically modest families. Likewise, the sociolinguistic environment governing the normative patterns of their use in society is hardly conducive to effective language learning. If the acquisitional problems and learning difficulties have been shown to be located at the linguistic and sociolinguistic levels, what can we do to raise the odds of the biliteracy and trilingualism policy agenda, such that more Hongkongers will come closer to or reach

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school-leavers were categorized into five Bands, with Band 1 students having the highest priority, and Band 5 the lowest, in being allocated to their first choice of school. In 2001, in an attempt to mitigate the labeling effect, the then Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) reduced the bandings from five to three (see Ho and Man 2007, pp. 8–13). In 2012, free compulsory education was further extended to 12 years (Grades 1–12), and the three-tier banding system continues to prevail.

that goalpost via education? In Chap. 7, we examined a body of psycholinguistic and neuroscience research for inspiration, in the hope that empirical insights there may enlighten us on desirable strategic change to the existing policy provisions. That review indicated some exciting breakthroughs which, in the main, point toward a "time-delimited window in early life" (Mayberry and Lock 2003, p. 382). When it comes to plurilingual language development in multilingual societies, therefore, the maxim 'the earlier the better' appears to have been scientifically vindicated and empirically supported. On this basis, specific recommendations intended to capitalize on this age-sensitive golden window, roughly age 4–8, are put forward to enhance the learning outcomes of Putonghua learning, including teaching Chinese in Putonghua (TCP) from P1 to P3. Interestingly, in our study of the language learning experiences and outcomes of 15 plurilingual English majors of South Asian descent in Chap. 8, the maxim 'the earlier the better' is also attested, in that three Pakistani participants attributed strong and useful support for their Chinese literacy development in primary school to Cantonese immersion in a local kindergarten.

Based on the summary of the key issues in the foregoing chapters, let us now take stock of the linguistic and sociolinguistic challenges for Hongkongers to develop biliterate and trilingual skills as envisaged by the education authorities.

1. *The use and vitality of Cantonese*. An overwhelming majority of people in Hong Kong have Cantonese as their usual language (93.6%, 2011 Census), which makes Cantonese the unmarked lingua franca in the SAR. It is widely used in the domains of home, school, broadcast media and government, including debates in the Legislative Council since July 1997, and it is also the language of a wide range of creative works and cultural consumables ranging from Canto-pop songs to TV dramas, from Cantonese opera to films and stand-up comedy. Cantonese is used as a medium of teaching and learning in Hong Kong schools, but not taught as a subject,[4] partly because it is officially positioned as a 'dialect' which is deemed unsuitable for writing. Quite the contrary, one of the goals of literacy training in Chinese lessons at primary level is to eradicate colloquial or L (low, as opposed to H, or high) Cantonese elements in students' writing. Even though written Cantonese is not part of school literacy, it has found social space to thrive and grow in the 'soft' sections of local media not only in print, but also in emails, blogs, SMS, MSN, Whatsapp, and various social media mediated by the internet such as Facebook and Twitter.

2. *English is more like a foreign than a second language*. The relative homogeneity of Cantonese-L1 speakers in the SAR makes the use of English-only communication highly marked among them – unlike Chinese Singaporeans in this regard. For this reason, among local Chinese there is strong peer pressure against initiating a conversation entirely in English (inserting English words in the middle of Cantonese, however, is very common, resulting in 'mixed code' or translanguaging, see Chap. 2). For the majority of Chinese Hongkongers, especially those

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[4] In Hong Kong, the Chinese Language subject (中文科, *zung*[55]*man*[21]*fo*[55]/*zhōngwén kē*) is Cantonese-medium, but there is no separate school subject called 'Cantonese'.

from socioeconomically modest families, English has relatively little relevance to their lifeworld; for instance, few would choose, out of their own volition, to listen to songs, watch TV programs or read English newspapers or magazines for leisure.[5] To these Cantonese-dominant Hongkongers, schooling is almost the only site or domain in which they are engaged in learning English. Their exposure to and input in English is almost exclusively classroom-based. Despite the fact that English is highly visible in society, therefore, it is more like a foreign than a second language (cf. the ESL/EFL divide discussed above; see also Chap. 6).

3. *Hong Kong Written Chinese is influenced by Cantonese and English*. Standard Written Chinese is lexico-grammatically more closely aligned with Putonghua, the national spoken language. The written Chinese used in Hong Kong, however, has been significantly influenced by Cantonese and English, hence Hong Kong Written Chinese (HKWC, Shi 2006; Shi et al. 2014). The natural tendency to write the way one speaks results in Cantoneisms in writing, which are systematically banned and cleansed through Chinese literacy training in school.

4. *More time-consuming to learn and develop literacy in logographic Chinese characters*. Written Chinese is non-alphabetic and logographic, which takes more time to learn and is easy to forget (unlike alphabetic languages with a shallow orthography such as Finnish and Italian); for children and adults alike, regular practice of character writing is required for effective retention. The global shift from pen-and-paper-based communication to electronic modes of 'writing' practices (more precisely, character inputting in Chinese text composition) makes it more and more difficult to write characters accurately by hand (e.g., in public examinations). This is true not only of 'dialect' speakers in southern China, but Putonghua-L1 speakers in Mandarin-speaking areas as well.

5. *Marked linguistic distance between Chinese and English, spoken and written*. In terms of how similar the two languages are linguistically, Chinese and English belong to very different language families – almost like the opposite poles on a continuum. They have very little in common in terms of the key linguistic subsystems needed for meaning-making (i.e., phonology, lexis and grammar). Syntactically, English has some characteristics of an agglutinating language. Grammatical meanings are marked typically by suffixing morphemes to word stems, a practice that is unknown in Chinese, an isolating language. Written English is orthographically deep, in that the spelling-pronunciation relationship is inconsistent and not so learner-friendly for this reason. One implication for Cantonese-L1 students' learning of English is that little of what they know about their own mother tongue Cantonese, including age-relevant knowledge of Chinese literacy, has any reference value, spoken or written (Chap. 3). This helps explain why Cantonese-L1 students of English are prone to making a large number of non-native pronunciation and non-standard lexico-grammatical errors in

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[5] Except for international school students who have ample opportunities to use English naturally with their teachers and peers.

their 'learner language' (Chap. 4) as they strive to move up the proficiency scale, many of which would persist into their adult lives.

6. *Putonghua is more like a second language*. Standard Written Chinese is lexico-grammatically much more closely aligned with Putonghua than Cantonese, which is why in principle, there is some advantage for using Putonghua as the MoI for teaching and learning written Chinese. However, it has a fairly complex phonology, including pronunciation rules that are more efficiently learned through early exposure than late explicit teaching (Chap. 3). In mainland China, the standardized, alphabetically based pinyin system has been shown to work well as an aid to help students from Mandarin-L1 or 'dialect' backgrounds to master Putonghua pronunciation and to facilitate literacy acquisition from Primary 1 (Grade 1). In Hong Kong, however, while guidelines exist for teaching pinyin to primary pupils, individual schools may choose to make their best judgment and school-based curricular support for Putonghua.

In response to the above linguistic challenges, the current language-in-education policy is guided by a number of premises, some of which are likely to be changed or changing following more recent development:

1. *12-year compulsory education*. Government-sponsored compulsory education, extended from 9 years (1978) to 12 years (2012), covers the whole of primary and secondary education, from Primary 1 (Grade 1, age 6) to Secondary 6 (Grade 12, age 18). Preschool education, K1–K3 (age 4–6), is left entirely to the private sector. There is general consensus among preschool educators that kindergarten education should be government-funded and regulated more rigorously, including the qualifications of preschool teachers and their conditions of employment. There are signs that change in these directions is in the pipeline.

2. *Literacy training in Chinese*. The primary school curriculum (Chinese Language subject), P1–P6 (age 6–11), is looked upon as the life stage and educational space for helping students to attain the Chinese literacy threshold of 3000+ characters required for meeting students' needs for written Chinese in their adult lives (e.g., reading Chinese newspapers; understanding miscellaneous information from various sources, including the government). Same as the other SAR, Macao, but unlike the rest of China, students are taught to pronounce Chinese characters in Cantonese and write them in the considerably more complex traditional script.

3. *Identifying primary school-leavers with the aptitude to learn through English*. Within the free compulsory education system, English is taught from Primary 1. In practice, virtually all preschoolers start learning their ABC from kindergarten. Following the pedagogic principles of task-based learning (TBL), teachers of English are encouraged to provide students with opportunities to practice using English to make meaning and to interact with others, individually or in groups. Vocabulary and grammar are infused into TBL activities (Curriculum Development Council 2002). Based on past experience, not all students have the aptitude to learn content subjects through English at secondary level. Primary school-leavers (age 12) are therefore streamed into Chinese-medium and

English-medium schools as they progress to secondary school. The unwanted but unavoidable labeling effect has been a major problem and target of social critique, which was explicitly acknowledged by the education authorities. In 2009, to mitigate stigmatization, the EDB allowed CMI schools greater flexibility in varying the medium of instruction at lower secondary level, a corrective that came to be known as the 'fine-tuning' of the dual MoI streaming policy (Poon 2013; see Chap. 5).

4. *Supporting the teaching of Putonghua in primary and secondary schools.* In 1999, 'teaching Chinese in Putonghua' (TCP) was set as a long-term goal. Putonghua was made a compulsory subject from Primary 1 and an elective subject in secondary school. Students also have the option of taking the Putonghua exam in the HKCEE (replaced with HKDSE from September 2012). Since 1999, the education authorities have been providing different forms of support to individual schools to enhance the quality of teaching of Putonghua as a separate subject, with or without experimenting with TCP in addition (Chan and Zhu 2010, 2015; Ho et al. 2005). Owing to various constraints, notably a lack of qualified and proficient Putonghua-speaking teachers of Chinese, schools are given the autonomy to make their own decision regarding the timing, extent and scale of teaching Chinese in Putonghua. As of mid-2016, about 70% of the 400+ primary schools have experimented with teaching Chinese in Putonghua in one way or another (i-Cable report 2016).

On account of the above stock-taking of the key issues and the relatively low effectiveness of existing policy measures and coping strategies, I will now venture to make a number of recommendations below for wider deliberation. It is my wish that they will be probed into methodically, with a view to garnering empirical, evidence-based support to inform a revised, improved language-in-education policy agenda. The recommendations cover both language policy and language planning issues, as follows:

Language policy issues

  (i) De-stigmatizing CMI students and schools
 (ii) Rethinking late EMI immersion and the 'maximum exposure, no mixing' guideline
(iii) Strengthening exposure to English and Putonghua in preschool (K1–K3) and early primary (P1–P3)
(iv) Using audio-visually enriched materials for teaching English and Putonghua
 (v) Teaching pinyin systematically in Primary 1 as Putonghua learning aid
(vi) Meeting non-Chinese, especially South(east) Asian students' needs for Cantonese and Standard Written Chinese (SWC)

Language planning issues

  (i) Status planning: English and Putonghua
 (ii) Attracting linguistically gifted and academically talented students to join the teaching profession

9.2   Language Policy Issues

9.2.1   De-stigmatizing CMI Students and Schools

In 2009, the education authorities undertook to fine-tune the mother tongue education or dual MoI streaming policy whereby, among other things, the stigmatization of CMI students and its damaging labeling effect have been openly acknowledged (Education Bureau Press Release, 2009). The fine-tuning policy allows CMI schools more flexibility in providing EMI classes by subjects within the same Form, provided the conditions for running EMI classes are met (cf. Poon 2013). In effect, this move amounts to the blurring of the dividing line between CMI and EMI schools, a welcome move in the right direction in my view. To further facilitate the development of literacy in English for Academic Purposes (EAP), and to enable CMI students to access English terminologies of a wide range of content subjects in preparation for English-medium tertiary education, it may be wise for us to rethink the 'maximum exposure, no mixing' guideline for (especially EMI) teachers, and to promote research in as well as the sharing of good practices in bilingual teaching strategies. This in turn would require a fundamental change in our attitude toward translanguaging and translingual practice (Canagarajah 2013a, b; Cummins 2008, in press; García and Lin in press), which is traditionally labeled as 'code-mixing'. Rather than linguistic segregation through the dual MoI streaming policy, secondary schools will have a better chance of approximating the biliteracy and trilingualism[6] goalpost by fostering a multilingual environment within its school premises, including in the classroom, as noted by So (1998) and Tung (1998):

> [M]onolingual English-medium and Chinese-medium schools are not consistent with our aspiration to achieve *liǎngwén-sānyǔ* bilingualism on a large scale in Hong Kong, especially given its current sociolinguistic conditions. It is hard to conceive how *liǎngwén-sānyǔ* bilingualism in our society could be engendered if schools are precluded from engendering an environment of *liǎngwén-sānyǔ* on their campuses. (So 1998, p. 170)

> Available evidence indicates that students prefer to study initially in the mother tongue, but wish to be able to study in English as soon as they can manage it. (...) Given the diversity of the learning contexts in Hong Kong schools, it may not be in the interest of providing quality education to our students to impose a uniform medium of instruction on our schools. (...) it could be advantageous for students in some students to study in the English medium, and for students in other schools to study *mainly* through the medium of Chinese. (Tung 1998, pp. 125, 127, emphasis added)

In addition, all language varieties and vernacular literacy skills that students brought with them to the classroom should be recognized as linguistic resources, to be exploited pedagogically rather than to be seen as a nuisance or impediment to be suppressed and eradicated (see below).

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[6] 兩文三語 (*loeng*[23]*man*[21]*saam*[55]*jyu*[23]/*liǎngwén-sānyǔ*), 'biliteracy and trilingualism'.

9.2.2 Rethinking Late EMI Immersion and the 'Maximum Exposure, No Mixing' Guideline

The rationale behind the mother tongue education or dual MoI streaming policy since 1998 is largely driven by the SAR's woman- and man-power needs for some proficient English speakers/writers in a knowledge-based economy and job market. The transition, at Secondary 1 (Grade 7), coincides with a selection process based on standardized assessment of primary school-leavers' English-language performance. Under largely EFL teaching and learning conditions, however, such a 'late immersion' model clearly has its limits (Johnson 1997). Learning through the medium of English, although perceived as prestigious community-wide especially by parents, impacts negatively on many students' quality of learning in their content subjects. This is especially true of such language-loaded subjects as Biology, Economics, Geography, and History. Those students who can cope tend to have home support to engage a private tutor or attend a group tutorial after school – support measures which make English more like a second language (ESL) to them. From the education authorities' point of view, to compensate for the lack of natural opportunities for students to practice using English outside the classroom, class input is viewed as absolutely crucial for ensuring that students have maximum exposure to English. The argument, taken largely at face value, is grounded in what may be termed a zero-sum logic, in that EMI class time used to explain or exchange ideas in Cantonese is held to be time lost relative to the higher-order objective of maximizing students' exposure to English. This is essentially the rationale behind the recommendation, made in successive Education Commission reports since the 1990s, that teachers' use of Cantonese-English 'mixed code' led to students' poor English and therefore should not be tolerated (cf. Poon 2010, 2013; Chap. 5), even though to my knowledge such a socially constructed causal relationship has never been subjected to rigorous empirical investigation, let alone proved (Low and Lu 2006). In addition, it is questionable whether 'code-mixing' could be construed as a symptom indicative of poor English, given that proficient plurilingual users of English tend to be among the most copious 'code-mixers'. At the same time, there is plenty of evidence showing that using students' L1 is often pedagogically conducive, and sometimes necessary, with regard to achieving the immediate teaching and learning goal at hand, be it content-related, or out of a situated concern for rapport-building or maintaining class discipline (Chan 2015; Lin 2015a; Lin and Wu 2015; Lo 2015; Lo and Lin 2015; Tavares 2015; cf. Cenoz 2015; Li 2015). All this leads to an unfortunate policy-versus-practice dilemma: the MoI 'guideline' stipulates that EMI teachers should not 'code-mix'; if 'caught' code-mixing in class, by inspectors on surprise visits or the school principal, teachers are accountable for their 'misdeeds' and liable to punitive measures, with shaming in front of their students being the extreme.

While teaching a course on Hong Kong language education attended by in-service EMI teachers, I came across an anecdote how an EMI teacher was instructed by her principal to re-teach the 'code-mixed' content to the class in 'pure' English

in his presence. If that was what really happened, I would query that principal's professionalism and deplore his on-the-spot decision, for nothing could be more damaging to the teacher's self-esteem than shaming her in front of her students. On the other hand, given the many circumstances under which using the students' L1 is so natural and sometimes irresistible, that 'no mixing' guideline tends to make teachers feel guilty, teachers who could not help or resist translanguaging at times. Such a sense of guilt is pedagogically not at all conducive to ensuring the quality of teaching and learning, not to mention being constantly on guard against unwanted surveillance can be very tiring, physically as much as emotionally. The apprehension of guilt and shame is by no means an isolated phenomenon among EMI teachers. Quite the contrary, it is sufficiently widespread for Swain et al. (2011) to write a booklet, entitled *How to have a guilt-free life using Cantonese in the English class: A handbook for the English language teacher in Hong Kong*, to explain why and under what circumstances EMI teachers of content subjects should have the peace of mind and not hesitate to use or translanguage to their students' L1.

Judging from the way the 'maximum exposure, no mixing' guideline has been enforced, it is imposed top-down like a dogma, with no room for bargaining or negotiation, even though there has been plenty of classroom research evidence internationally showing how, if used judiciously and strategically, the use of the students' L1 through translanguaging can be pedagogically sound (students learn faster) and affectively emancipating (the teacher is one of us / cares about us) (see, e.g., Cummins 2008, in press; García and Lin in press; see also Weber's 2014 review of various modes of 'flexible multilingual education' across a wide range of multilingual school settings). Where students are entirely capable of learning through the medium of English, as in top-tier Band 1 schools, there is of course no compelling need for EMI teachers to use the students' L1 (Lo 2015). On the other hand, for students who are visibly struggling and who have demonstrated a gap in their learning, it would be improper, to say the least, to deprive bilingual teachers of the option to help those students fill a learning gap quickly or getting assurance from peers through their L1 (e.g., the teacher dropping a hint about a low-frequency word using the Chinese translation; students being allowed to discuss the answer in their L1 before responding in L2; see Lin 2015a; Lin and Wu 2015 for instructive examples).

From the point of view of teaching and learning effectiveness, and taking into account a cline of EMI student proficiencies and abilities to learn through the medium of English, there is no reason to prevent bilingual teachers from exercising their professional judgment to translanguage or switch to their students' L1 in order to meet the situated need for quick clarification or to allow students to elaborate an idea confidently before expressing that idea in English. In short, what is needed is empirical evidence of pedagogically sound and strategically productive classroom translanguaging practices, and let such research-based good practices trickle down to the community of EMI teachers through sharing (e.g., seminars and workshops) and teacher training (e.g., pre-service or in-service award-bearing teacher education programs). This is also in line with the premises of 'flexible multilingual education' advocated by Weber (2014), among others, where all the language varieties brought

by students to the classroom – standard or non-standard, vernaculars supported by literacy or otherwise – should be de-stigmatized and recognized as legitimate learning resources toward the goal of acquiring the target language (e.g., English).

9.2.3   Strengthening Exposure to English and Putonghua in Preschool (K1–K3) and Early Primary (P1–P3)

The current policy in support of English proficiency development may be characterized as late immersion (Johnson 1997), whereby primary school-leavers (age 12) identified as meeting the threshold requirement for learning through the medium of English are assigned to EMI schools, whereas those who fall short of this threshold level are assigned to CMI schools. As for Putonghua development, it is a compulsory subject from Primary 1 (age 6), with or without Putonghua being used as the MoI for teaching the Chinese Language subject.[7] Even if Putonghua is used for teaching Chinese, there should be flexibility for PMI teachers to decide whether a given genre is not as appropriate and therefore had better be taught in Cantonese. This happens when the speech-writing alignment is not as apparent in classical Chinese texts. As Leung and Fan (2010) among others have pointed out, if a written text conforms to the syntax and lexico-grammar of Standard Written Chinese, especially if it contains elements of conversational interaction, teaching it in Putonghua is perfectly appropriate. On the other hand, if a written text contains plenty of *wenyan* or Classical Chinese elements, it would make better sense to teach that text in Cantonese. Thus, apart from developing their professional judgment through teacher training, PMI teachers should have the discretion to decide, based on a careful examination of the genre of a text in question, whether it is more productively taught in Putonghua or Cantonese.

At present, before the 12-year free compulsory education starts at age 6, the amount of exposure to and quality of input in English and Putonghua are left more or less to the odds, subject to the choice of the nursery or kindergarten selected by the parents. English is usually introduced to preschoolers from ABC along with simple vocabulary. Putonghua, on the other hand, may or may not be included in the curriculum; the amount of input varies from zero attention to Putonghua, to a Putonghua-focused curriculum (possibly with a twin-focus on both English and Putonghua). As So (1998) has observed:

> *Liǎngwén-sānyǔ* [biliteracy and trilingualism] is quite a sophisticated form of individual bilingualism. (...) it is obvious that most of the young people of Hong Kong will not acquire it as infants; they will have to achieve it in school. (...) it is only through a twist in history and by design that a degree of individual bilingualism is in evidence in our society. Hitherto, the schools have been a principal part of this design (…) and remain the major vehicle for spreading individual bilingualism in Hong Kong. (So 1998, p. 168; cf. So 1992)

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[7] That is, 普教中 (*pou*[35]*gaau*[33]*zung*[55]/*pǔ jiào zhōng*).

In light of the empirical findings in psycholinguistic and neuroscience studies reviewed and discussed in Chap. 7, there is clearly room for rethinking the SAR's language-in-education policy provisions, especially the Putonghua curriculum. Language learning effectiveness being highly age-sensitive, subject to the "time-delimited window in early life" (Mayberry and Lock 2003, p. 382), any language input during a child's preschool years (K1–K3, age 4–6) and early primary (P1–P3, age 6–8), be it a first, second or foreign language, stands a much better chance of being absorbed and incorporated into the child's expanding plurilingual repertoire. Much of the conundrum surrounding the SAR's biliteracy and trilingualism policy is arguably due to the scientifically ill-advised order of priorities, in that the bulk of funding support for boosting our students' plurilingual development is deployed from 'Key Stage 1' (P1–P3, age 6–8) to tertiary level (age 18–) (CDC 2002; CDC and HKEAA 2007/2015), with preschool education falling outside of the education authorities' funding formula. In terms of teaching and learning effectiveness, such a policy may be characterized in Chinese as 事倍功半 ('getting half the result with twice the effort').[8] For instance, back in 1998, the then Principal Education Officer of the Education Department reminded us that:

> Since 1993, an intensive English language programme has been run to help Secondary 6 and Secondary 7 Chinese-medium students to achieve the standard of English required for entry to tertiary institutions. (Lee 1998, p. 114)

Based on the learning outcomes of local university graduates in the past years, one wonders how effective such language enhancement measures have been. In light of neurobiological insights obtained in the past decades (Chap. 7), it is hardly surprising that Cantonese-dominant young adults tend to find it difficult to make progress in their English learning just before or during their undergraduate studies. The opportunity cost of missing the golden window – to provide schoolchildren with requisite exposure to and input in Putonghua and English beyond this life stage – is huge. To revert this trend, rather than late immersion (from Secondary 1, age 12), it would seem necessary to revamp the existing policy by capitalizing on the age-sensitive golden window for language learning and development (age 4–8). Preschool (K1–K3) and early primary (P1–P3) correspond with a person's life stage in which efforts expended towards language learning and development have been shown to be more productive, or 事半功倍 ('yielding twice the result with half the effort')[9] – the exact opposite of the above-mentioned quadri-syllabic Chinese idiom. Put differently, schoolchildren's exposure to quality language input from age 4–8 is much more likely to be fruitful compared with similar input beyond that age range. I believe this is one promising area where more empirical research on effective measures toward promoting additive bilingualism is worth supporting.

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[8] 事倍功半 (*si²² pui²³ gung⁵⁵ bun³³/shì bèi gōng bàn*).

[9] 事半功倍 (*si²² bun³³ gung⁵⁵ pui²³/shì bàn gōng bèi*).

9.2.4   Using Audio-visually Enriched Materials to Teach English and Putonghua

Research shows that preschoolers have sharp sensitivity to distinctive speech sounds, which makes them very good language learners, including under second or foreign language learning conditions (Chap. 7). The amount and quality of input is the key. In Chap. 8, we saw that the three Pakistani students whose parents consciously placed them in Cantonese kindergartens all attributed their native-like pronunciation of Cantonese (and, to a lesser extent, their knowledge of Chinese characters) to their preschool experiences. Apart from learning everyday vocabulary and age-relevant colloquialisms like other Cantonese-L1 peers, distinctive tone levels, a major stumbling block for older learners of Cantonese, were acquired more or less subconsciously. Equally helpful was the fact that they had ample opportunities to make meaning by interacting with their Cantonese-L1 peers and, in the process, developed a network of Chinese friends who provided useful and often timely feedback and assistance, for example, when literacy-focused questions arose while learning to pronounce or write specific Chinese characters (Li and Chuk 2015).

Being logographic, Chinese characters take time to learn. According to Prof. S.-K. Tse, an expert in Chinese literacy acquisition, it is important to guide children to learn the words encountered or needed in their everyday lives (see, e.g., Tse 2014a). For instance, children living in $tin^{55}seoi^{35}wai^{21}$ (天水圍) or $tung^{21}lo^{21}waan^{55}$ (銅鑼灣) have a natural need to know the characters required for writing the name of their neighborhood. This will give them the incentive to learn to recognize and write those characters. Other natural opportunities include learning to recognize the names of dishes and dim sum when frequenting a Chinese restaurant, or names of stations along the Mass Transit Railway (MTR) (cf. Fung 2015). To parents who are eager to push their children to learn Chinese characters through dictation, Tse advises against that practice, especially characters whose meanings are unrelated to their children's everyday lives or studies. Chinese literacy skill areas are threefold in essence: character recognition, production, and use (Tse 2014b; cf. Fung 2015).[10] Recognition naturally comes before production and use. So long as children are guided to recognize a large number of characters, this may nurture them to become avid readers. Cultivating an interest in reading is very important. At different life stages, when learners feel the need or urge for creative writing, prior exposure to a large amount of reading will provide inspirations (ideas) and the necessary resources (language expressions) to help them excel in writing. As for fostering children's literacy in Chinese characters, Tse et al. (2014) recommend that parents cultivate their children's interest early, best before primary school. To this end, nursery rhymes characterized by a lot of repetition such as the following are particularly helpful (Tse 2006, pp. 5–6):[11]

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[10]學習中文的三個層次是「認字、寫字、用字」(Fung 2015).

[11]Schoolchildren from Hong Kong homes will most likely learn this text in Cantonese. Pinyin is provided; the text may also be read in Putonghua.

xiǎo míng xiǎo míng xiǎo xiǎo míng
小　明　小　明　小　小　明,
shàng shàng xià xià zuǒ zuǒ yòu yòu
上　上　下　下, 左　左　右　右,
qián qián hòu hòu huǒ chē chuān shān dòng
前　前　後　後, 火　車　穿　山　洞。

Once children have internalized this nursery rhyme and the meanings of its constituent vocabulary (cf. 'mental lexicon', Aitchison 2003), learning to write the characters needed for expressing those meanings will be relatively straightforward, for example, the name 小明 (*siu³⁵ming²¹*), the bisyllabic word 火車 (*fo³⁵ce⁵⁵*) for 'train', characters expressing spatial relations such as 上 (*soeng²²*, 'up', 'above'), 下 (*haa²²*, 'down', 'below') 左 (*zo³⁵*, 'left'), 右 (*jau²²*, 'right'), 前 (*cin²¹*, 'front'), and 後 (*hau²²*, 'back').

Melodious songs with interesting lyrics comprehensible to learners are also highly conducive to proficiency and literacy development. Humming to the familiar tune of a song that one likes (Fre: *chantonner*, 'humming along'), be it modern or traditional, contemporary or classic, targeting adults or children (e.g., theme songs of cartoons), is probably a universal human trait. The songs may have been encountered recently, or learned as a child repeatedly. This is corroborated by my own experience learning Mandarin, French and German. For instance, I can still improvise verbatim an excerpt from an opera 碧玉簪 (*bik⁵⁵juk²²zaam⁵⁵*, 'jade hair pin') sung in the Ningbo dialect (越劇, *jyut²²kek²²*), an album which was played at home frequently when I was a child. I can still sing the Mandarin song 雪人不見了 (*Xuě rén bù jiàn liǎo*, 'The snowman has disappeared'), which was taught and learned in Mandarin lessons when I was a primary pupil (aged around 11); several decades have elapsed, and I can still sing this song effortlessly by heart with the lyrics intact. Similarly, while studying in France (aged 25–27), I became fond of the songs by the late Georges Moustaki (Greek artist with a predilection for French), many of which I can improvise, in part or in full. One of my favorites is *Le facteur* ('The postman'), which begins melancholically with:

Le jeune facteur est mort,	('The young postman is dead,
Il n'avait que dix-sept ans…	he was only seventeen…
L'amour ne peut plus voyager,	Love can no longer travel,
Il a perdu son messager…	It has lost its messenger…)

I found the guitar accompaniment in this song mesmerizing and the lyrics aesthetic. Three years later, while pursuing doctoral studies in Germany, I came across the song *Die Gedanken sind frei* ('[My] thoughts are free') introduced in an intensive German course (aged 30); over two decades later, I can still recall the melody and lyrics at will:[12]

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[12] The song *Die Gedanken sind frei*, '[My] thoughts are free', was introduced in an intensive German class (intermediate level). Students were told that it was one of several songs specially composed for teaching German as a Foreign Language (*Deutsch als Fremdsprache*), hence not commercially available. There is however another song with the same title by Peter Seeger (searchable online, including YouTube).

German song 'Die Gedanken sind frei'	Approximate translation
Die Gedanken sind frei,	[My] thoughts are free,
Wer kann sie erraten?	Who can tell what they are?
Sie fliehen vorbei,	They fly by,
Wie nächtliche Schatten.	Like dark shadows.
Kein Mensch kann sie wissen,	No one has any clue about them,
Kein Jäger erschiessen.	No hunter can shoot them down.
Es bleibet dabei,	It remains true,
Die Gedanken sind frei.	[My] thoughts are free.

Under similar circumstances I learned to sing the first stanza of the German *Nationalhymne* 'the National Hymn' (aged 31), and have no problem improvising it at will now. Personal experiences such as these suggest to me that nursery rhymes, songs with lyrics at a suitable level, and multi-media cartoons of interest to children would make inspiring and effective language learning materials, even though they may not work equally well with every learner given their individual differences. If a song, nursery rhyme or cartoon is modeled on Putonghua-based SWC or English, including it in the curriculum or setting it as extra-curricular activity has good potential for facilitating the learning of Putonghua or English. The language input embedded in such partly poetic or musical genres, which children are familiar with, may also serve as excellent supplementary material for vocabulary or grammar teaching. This is one area where colleagues engaged in early childhood education curriculum development might want to further explore.

9.2.5   Teaching Pinyin Systematically in Primary 1 as Putonghua Learning Aid

Research has shown clearly that reading is necessarily mediated by speech. Since English adopts an alphabetic writing system, using phonics has good potential to speed up learners' grasp of the more or less regular spelling-pronunciation relationships in English, even though such relationships are not always consistent (i.e., orthographically deep). Accordingly, awareness of the spelling of English words may be enhanced by drawing attention to the regularities pertaining to words that rhyme (e.g., *bake, cake, lake, make, take, wake*; compare: *fake, naked, rake, sake*). The use of phonics for facilitating students' mastery of the spelling-pronunciation relationships in English is more or less a standard component of English language teaching methodologies today. This is also widely used by Hong Kong teachers at pre-primary and primary levels.

What about the teaching and learning of Putonghua? Since the 1980s, research in Mainland China has demonstrated that pinyin – the standard romanization system of Putonghua – facilitates the learning of Chinese literacy development effectively regardless of the learners' first-language backgrounds. Learners whose L1 is a 'dia-

lect' may take longer to become completely familiar with the pinyin system (ranging from 6–12 weeks), which is usually taught at the beginning of Primary 1 (Grade 1). The advantage of teaching pinyin as a learning aid or tool is that it enhances learners' phonological (including tonemic) awareness significantly. More importantly, it can be relied upon to support independent learning, such as looking up the written forms of unfamiliar morpho-syllables through their (sometimes approximate) pronunciation in dictionaries or online resources. There is some consensus among scholars who have expressed concerns about the teaching of pinyin that the pace is too slow (extending from Primary 1 to Primary 4); there is room for considering speeding up and completing the teaching of the entire pinyin system at Primary 1 (on recommended pinyin instructional procedure, see Cheng 2005, p. 114; Cheung and Lo 2006).

As of 2016, there are as yet no standard guidelines provided by the SAR education authorities for teaching pinyin in Hong Kong schools. Instead, individual primary schools are free to decide when and how to teach pinyin to students. Some scholars have pointed out the drawback of late introduction of pinyin (e.g., Primary 4, Grade 4). One of the most frequently cited concerns is possible confusion with English at early primary level. Pinyin is indeed based on the Roman alphabet. The sound values of individual letters may differ (compare, e.g., Putonghua: *diàn* as in *diànhuà*, 電話 'telephone', and English: *Indian*). While I am not aware of any empirical studies of learners being confused as a result of being taught pinyin in early primary, available research findings in psycholinguistics and bilingual acquisition suggest that young learners exposed to different languages simultaneously are able to keep them apart, including matching languages with their speakers (Yip and Matthews 2007). Any possible risk of confusion is more than outweighed by prospects of the learner being able to use that important tool to harness the pronunciation of logographic Chinese characters. Another important argument in support of earlier introduction of pinyin is that most young learners at early primary level are digital natives. Given convenient and easy access to a large number of Putonghua learning resources and authentic materials, including dictionaries with a clickable demo pronunciation function online, delaying the systematic introduction of pinyin is clearly not in young learners' best interests.

9.2.6 Meeting Non-Chinese, Especially South(east) Asian Students' Needs for Cantonese and Standard Written Chinese (SWC)

As there is virtually no home support for Cantonese and Standard Written Chinese (SWC), and given that reading and literacy development in a written language are mediated by speech, Hong Kong students of South(east) Asian descent tend to experience greater difficulties when learning SWC. The successful Cantonese- and SWC-learning experiences of the three Pakistani students reported in Li and Chuk's

(2015) study suggest that where possible, South(east) Asian parents should be encouraged to send their children to Cantonese-speaking kindergartens (Chap. 8). Getting started early would give them a better chance of mastering Cantonese and SWC, with the help of their age-relevant peers and neighbors. At the same time, there should be a separate goalpost for these non-Chinese students, which should have a strong focus on the development of Chinese literacy for work-related purposes in a Chinese as a Second Language (CSL) curriculum, where *wenyan* or classical Chinese texts are deemphasized and minimized. It is encouraging that some of these suggestions have been taken on board by the education authorities, and so some university scholars in relevant Chinese departments have been called upon to design a blueprint of a CSL curriculum. In longer terms, when linguistically gifted South(east) Asian students showing promising results in the study of Chinese have been identified, it is worth considering grooming them to become teachers of Chinese and prepare them for a career teaching Chinese to South(east) Asian students, for example, by awarding them a scholarship to study toward a Minor or even Major in Teaching Chinese as a Second Language.

9.3   Language Planning Issues

With regard to language policy, Poon (2010, pp. 26–28) observes that:

> Hong Kong's language policy both prior to and after the handover is basically language-in-education policy (a type of language policy in the realm of education), among which the most prominent sub-types are medium-of-instruction policy (with a focus on content-based learning) and language enhancement policy (with a focus on Chinese and English). (Poon 2010, p. 28)

As for language planning, there was virtually none until SCOLAR's 'Action Plan' (2003) with regard to corpus planning (e.g., standardizing the Chinese translation of names and places used in the media), but status planning of the target languages, English and Putonghua, is still neglected (Poon 2010, p. 58).

9.3.1   Status Planning: English and Putonghua

Hongkongers, of Chinese ethnicity or otherwise, hardly need to be told, let alone convinced, that English is a valuable language which has been functioning as an international lingua franca. This is clearly reflected in various stakeholders' concerns toward the controversial dual MoI streaming policy (Chap. 6). English is widely recognized as a form of linguistic capital, an indispensable asset for upward and outward mobility. Since English has been functioning as an official language in Hong Kong in the past 150 years, it would be fairly convenient for the government to make explicit the status of English in the SAR as a second language. Once the

second language status has been made clear, however, it ought to be matched with appropriate policy measures. For instance, in a multilingual workplace such as the civil service or a higher-education institution (e.g., in meetings within the civil service or with education service providers), it would be useful to encourage action that would help break a tacit assumption or inhibition, widely shared among local Chinese-English bilinguals, that in the absence of non-Cantonese speakers, Cantonese is the unmarked, most appropriate language choice. Over the years, in my position as an academic staff at two tertiary institutions, I have observed time and again at various meetings how, as soon as the only non-Cantonese-speaking colleague has left or before such a colleague arrives, Cantonese is felt to be the norm, even though it is interspersed with plenty of technical terms and institutional jargon in English – 'mixed code' so to speak. This is typically flagged by someone, often blithely accompanied by a comment, that there is no more reason why English must be used. While there is nothing wrong using 'mixed code', if the government would take the lead to encourage a 'speak-English-where-we-can' language choice pattern in the workplace, especially in the education sector (e.g., among teachers), over time there may be more social space for English to be used more naturally within the local Chinese community. Notice that far from enforcing language choice top-down through punitive measures, which would be counter-productive, what is recommended here is to encourage language choice bottom-up by example. To those who are concerned or even alarmed about Cantonese being under threat when more local bilinguals opt for English as the matrix language, it should be emphasized that using English in the multilingual workplace – if it becomes widely accepted – should not and will not take place at the expense of Cantonese. What is gained would be a changed perception and attitude toward English as an equally appropriate language choice among plurilingual Hongkongers, which, short of institutional support and concerted action of like-minded plurilinguals, simply has no chance of success, despite lamentation and plea by business leaders.[13]

Linguistic inhibition, or refusal to switch over to other languages at the inter-sentential level, is largely a collective psyche, a conditioned response to the social taboo of violating the shared ethnolinguistic identity of one's conversation partner(s). As a social consequence, unless there is some natural explanation (e.g., a non-Cantonese speaker joining in), any switch away from Cantonese as the shared, unmarked language is generally perceived as alien, hence the psychological discomfort associated with such a move. For such a shift in unmarked language choice in plurilingual encounters to succeed, therefore, nothing short of a re-engineering of the mindset on a society-wide scale is needed. To persuade Cantonese-L1 speakers to relinquish linguistic purism or essentialism and to embrace plurilingualism instead, it is crucial and necessary for such an initiative to stand on solid ethical grounds, with egalitarian multilingualism being the social ethos and ultimate goal

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[13] As an example, see legislative councilor, business leader and former chairperson of the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR) Michael Tien's plea, expressed at a public forum organized by the *South China Morning Post* in September 2015, for stronger government support measures to cope with Hong Kong students' worrying English standards (Yau 2015).

(Lin 2015b). Where meaning-making is the focus of interaction, plurilinguals ought to find themselves in a social milieu – a linguistic comfort zone so to speak – where there is a place for English among other conventionally discrete languages, and where 'languaging' or 'trans-semiotizing' (Lin 2015b) involving other linguistic, stylistic or rhetorical resources is widely felt to be perfectly natural. Individual repertoires are necessarily 'truncated' – no one knows all the languages, including so-called native speakers (Blommaert 2010). Whatever their labels, all languages are equal, and no speakers should suffer from any form of linguistic prejudice or discrimination (Kirkpatrick 2007). Through education and media publicity, it should be made absolutely clear that no one need to worry about being denigrated as a result of their language choice. Given this brief, the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) would seem to be a suitable institution and key player to be engaged in promoting the merits of egalitarian multilingualism.

What is said above with regard to the status planning of English may also apply to that of Putonghua. To my mind, there is not much to be gained by characterizing Putonghua in Hong Kong as an L1.5 (i.e., between L1 and L2, Lai-Au Yeung 1997; see Chaps. 3 and 7). In view of the marked phonological differences between Cantonese and Putonghua and the learning difficulties arising, it would be more reasonable to state unambiguously that Putonghua is a second language in the SAR. Once this has been made clear, similar strategies are needed to create a Putonghua-speaking environment within school premises (e.g., making an institutional initiative to encourage staff and students to 'speak Putonghua where we can'). Since July 1997, cross-border communication has increased considerably, plus rising numbers of Putonghua-speaking visitors, tourists, scholars and students staying in Hong Kong on short or longer term, there are increasingly more or less natural opportunities for Cantonese-L1 students to practice using Putonghua. If the institution takes the lead in promoting the use of Putonghua in the workplace, including among Cantonese-L1 speakers, those who can may find it easier to initiate a conversation in Putonghua, without feeling strange or being obliged to explain his or her language choice. Here again, individual initiatives (e.g., organizing Putonghua lunch once per week) have their limits for as long as 'Cantonese by default' is deep in Cantonese-L1 speakers' collective psyche.[14]

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[14] In principle, in the interest of promoting additive bilingualism, there is nothing wrong for 'Speak Putonghua where we can' to be made an SAR government initiative. In the wake of protests culminating in the 79-day Occupy Central protests in 2014, however, such a move may be politically sensitive, and may need more careful deliberation and planning before being floated to the general public via the media for society-wide consultation.

9.3.2   *Attracting Linguistically Gifted and Academically Talented Students to Join the Teaching Profession*

A shortage of qualified teachers of English and Putonghua has been a perennial concern of the education authorities and a priority area for action.[15] In terms of attracting linguistically gifted and academically talented students to join the teaching profession, however, the current policy seems to be counter-productive. As is well-known, through the JUPAS system, HKDSE (previously, HKALE) students choose their preferred undergraduate programs offered by the eight UGC-funded universities. Statistics in the past have shown that relatively few academically outstanding and linguistically gifted students would choose a Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree program among their top-tier choices. What this means is that the education sector is unable to recruit the best talents to join the teaching profession. For BEd language majors (Chinese or English) in particular, it is crucial that their sensitivity to and proficiency in the target language(s) be of a high standard. Otherwise, their teaching performance, classroom language use included, is unlikely to make them good role models for their students when they become front-line language teachers.

The Hong Kong SAR government has the enviable privilege of having huge reserves at its disposal to support various educational initiatives. One example of an eye-catching attempt by the SAR government to attract talents consists of injecting HK$480 million (ca. US$61.6 million) into the Government Scholarship Fund to support 20-odd outstanding students to pursue teacher-training programs in renowned universities overseas, their only obligation being to return to Hong Kong and teach for at least two years, according to the Financial Secretary John Tsang's budget address in February, 2013. Such a policy was lambasted by Legislative Councilor Regina Ip as an illustration of "bureaucratic myopia and confusion of policy objectives". In her view, that money was not well spent at all. Instead, she made a plea for recruiting local talents with passion and training them up as capable preschool teachers:

> To provide free, quality pre-school education, the government needs to do a lot more than provide 20-odd scholarships for overseas studies. To avoid repeating its past mistakes in education reform, the government must ensure that suitably trained individuals with a true passion for pre-school teaching are employed, or public funds would be wasted. (Regina Ip, 2013)

Regina Ip's emphasis on the urgency for sensible support measures to enhance the quality of preschool teacher education is insightful and entirely worth supporting. To be fair, this problem – difficulty attracting bright students to the field of education – is not unique to Hong Kong. Everywhere in the world, linguistically gifted and academically outstanding students simply have more lucrative under-

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[15] For example, through benchmarking measures to ensure that language teachers' proficiency in the target language is up to par: LPATE (Language Proficiency Attainment Test for English) and LPATP (Language Proficiency Attainment Test for Putonghua).

graduate program choices and envisaged career paths at their disposal. To counteract this problem, maybe the SAR government could think along the lines of 'prestige planning'. A good starting salary for new graduate teachers – among the highest of fresh university graduates in the SAR at present – is not enough; what is needed is for (student) teachers to have a true sense of pride and to command respect in society. There is plenty of room for thought and imagination in this area I think. Finally, to take advantage of a golden window or critical period (age 4–8) when kindergarteners are particularly adept at language learning, it would seem to be wise for the education authorities to strengthen language-focused teacher training for English and Putonghua at pre-primary and primary levels. As Gopnik et al. (2000) observe in the Preface of their (2000) monograph, *The scientist in the crib*: *What early learning tells us about the mind*:

> The new research shows that babies and young children know and learn more about the world than we could ever have imagined. They think, draw conclusions, make predictions, look for explanations, and even do experiments. Scientists and children belong together because they are the best learners in the universe. And that means that ordinary adults also have more powerful learning abilities than we might have thought. Grown-ups, after all, are all ex-children and potential scientists. (Gopnik et al. 2000, p. i; see also http://ilabs.washington.edu/scientist-crib-preface)

In light of the tremendous learning capabilities of preschoolers, and students at early primary level, it would appear that the current priorities of investment in and funding support for language education of the SAR are lopsided. It is therefore worth re-thinking the policy provisions and measures to help Hongkongers reach the biliteracy and trilingualism goalpost. In particular, it is worth encouraging research into the question, whether resources for language learning support in the education domain are more productively directed at a life stage of language learners, from K1 to P3 (age 4–8), where their language learning sensitivity and chance of success appear to be at their highest.

9.4   Epilogue

We live in a multilingual world. Whatever our first language(s), additional language learning is a crucial and arguably indispensable part of life-long learning. Unlike the learning of content subjects or discipline-specific knowledge, however, language acquisition or learning as an inborn human faculty has been shown to be most effective and productive from infancy to just before the onset of puberty (around age 10–11). Some 50 years after Lenneberg's landmark (1967) publication on the biological foundations of language (Critical Period Hypothesis, or 'CPH'), plenty of empirical insights from the related fields of brain science and neurocognitive research in the last two decades point towards a 'golden window', whereby human sensitivity to language acquisition is at its prime roughly between the age of 4 and 8, which in the Hong Kong education hierarchy corresponds with the key stages preschool (K1–K3) and early primary (P1–P3). While searching for alternative

language-in-education policy provisions to help Hong Kong students regardless of ethnicity to gain the greatest mileage towards the goal of becoming biliterate and trilingual, such an insight gives us much food for thought and imagination. It is my wish that between its covers, this book will have some reference value for language policy-makers and other stakeholders when pondering more productive ways to deploy precious language enhancement resources in the SAR, and rethinking our language-in-education support measures.

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