

# Language Attitudes of Secondary School Students in Guangdong

Qiyun Zhu

**Abstract** Cantonese is a southern Chinese dialect, spoken mainly in Guangdong Province. Cantonese is occasionally viewed as a stronghold against the popularisation of Mandarin Chinese, which has been promoted as the national language. However, the language does not enjoy the same legal status as the languages spoken by ethnic minorities, who are allowed to use their languages as the primary teaching language. Meanwhile, officials in Guangdong Province have strongly supported the learning of English in schools. This chapter reports on a study that examined the attitudes and perceptions of the students who were confronted with such a trilingual environment. This study finds that the secondary school students in Guangzhou had favourable attitudes towards the three languages, with Cantonese rated as their preferred language. English came in second for its instrumental value, while respondents displayed mixed emotions towards Mandarin Chinese.

**Keywords** Trilingualism · Language attitudes · China · Guangdong · Guangzhou · Mandarin · Putonghua · English · Cantonese

## 1 Introduction

Cantonese is a southern Chinese dialect, spoken by 3% of the population in the mainland of China and by 93% of the population in Hong Kong (Erbaugh 1995). Cantonese speakers mainly reside in Guangdong Province, where their numbers reached about 34 million in 2000 (Luo 2006). Cantonese is occasionally viewed as a stronghold against the popularisation of Mandarin Chinese, which has been painstakingly promoted across the country by the government as a means to uphold national unity. However, Cantonese does not enjoy the same legal status as the languages spoken by ethnic minorities, who are allowed to use their languages as the primary teaching language (Feng 2009), since Cantonese speakers do not belong to an officially recognised ethnic minority group. Furthermore, in recent years, Guangdong Province has enthusiastically embraced the national policy of English

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learning. A local English TV channel is available and English education is accessible in primary schools up to universities—selected kindergartens even offer the language, which is taught by qualified teachers (Feng 2009).

How does this context influence the stakeholders, in particular, students who are directly confronted with such a trilingual environment? How do they perceive and respond to this dynamic sociolinguistic situation? To date, there is little research and literature on these specific issues. This chapter will endeavour to bridge the gap by examining the attitudes and perceptions of these learners.

## 2 Cantonese in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province and its Influence

Guangzhou Cantonese is considered to be the most prestigious and standard form of all Cantonese varieties (Asher and Simpson 1994). Traditionally, Cantonese is spoken in all domains by natives of Guangzhou, the capital city of Guangdong Province. The city is located some 2,300 km from Beijing, the conventional political power centre of China. It is adjacent to two other flourishing Cantonese speaking cities, Hong Kong, the formerly colony of Great Britain, and Macao, the formerly colony of Portugal, some 200 and 145 km from Guangzhou respectively. The origin of Cantonese in Guangdong is unclear, but it is generally acknowledged that modern Cantonese on the one hand inherits the characteristics of ancient Chinese and on the other hand, incorporates some features of the languages spoken by aboriginal tribes who were dispersed over the region more than 2000 years ago (Shao and Gan 2007).

Additionally, among all the dialects in China, Cantonese contains the largest number of foreign words (Shao and Gan 2007), including English, as a result of language contact by the inhabitants with foreign language speakers. This is closely linked with the strategic location of Guangdong, especially Guangzhou, the biggest trading port in southern China and the one with the longest history. The Maritime Silk Road, which had its origins during the Eastern Han Dynasty (AD 25-AD 220), extended from Guangzhou to the Southeast Asian countries, and then on to the Persian Gulf and eventually to Roman ports. From the time of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), and especially during the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), Guangzhou (then also known as Canton) was the only port in the country allowed to conduct maritime trade with the outside world. It gradually lost its unique trade position to Shanghai and Hong Kong after the first Opium War (1839–1842) between China and Great Britain. Nevertheless, Guangzhou has revived its foreign trade relations since the implementation of the Open Door policy in 1978. Contemporary Guangzhou boasts of frequent trade ties with the outside world. The biannual China Import and Export Fair held in Guangzhou attracts business people from different parts of the world. Statistics from 2010 confirmed that 98,000 overseas purchasers from 201 countries and regions attended the first 4-day session of the 108th Canton Fair, and the total trade volume reached 21.15 billion dollars (Xinxi Shibao 2010). In 2007, the total import and export volume of Guangdong Province achieved a re-

cord of 630 billion dollars (Nanfang Ribao 2008). In the same year, the total import and export volume of Guangzhou was 73.49 billion dollars (Guangzhou Statistics Bureau 2008).

Despite the fact that within mainland China, the use of Cantonese is limited to Guangdong and a few adjoining southern regions, which partly justifies its status as a dialect, Cantonese has spread far and wide among overseas Chinese communities in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, some European countries, Southeast Asia, Central America, South America, and even Africa. The number of Cantonese-speakers overseas is estimated to be 9 million (Yangcheng Wanbao 2008).

Standard Mandarin Chinese (including the spoken form known as Putonghua) has developed on the basis of a Beijing dialect. Some linguists believe that the difference between Cantonese and Mandarin Chinese is as great as that between two languages in Europe (Pan 2000). In 1955, the Chinese central government launched a language-reform campaign and prioritised the promotion of Putonghua. Since that time, Guangzhou residents, along with the rest of the country, have learnt Putonghua. Nevertheless, for a long time, the learning of Putonghua was hindered by low literacy rates and the fact that Cantonese speakers considered it difficult to learn a language which was so different from their mother tongue (Pan 2000). The situation did not improve significantly until the 1990s, when a booming Guangdong economy quickened the pace of communication with other parts of China, and Putonghua began to serve as the lingua franca. Nowadays, Putonghua is visible in every aspect of life in Guangzhou. Meanwhile, Cantonese appears to be receding, especially in formal situations.

### 3 Literature Review

Language attitude as a psychological construct has attracted the attention of researchers in the field of sociolinguistics and language policy. In social psychology, attitude is defined as ‘a disposition to react favourably or unfavourably to a class of objects’ (Garrett et al. 2003), or, as Baker (1992) puts it, attitude is ‘a hypothetical construct used to explain the direction and persistence of human behaviour’. Language attitude has a pivotal role in the life of a language, the success of a language policy and language learning. Baker (1992) argues attitude appears to be important in language restoration, preservation, decay or death. In other words, a favourable attitude towards a dialect or language may serve to maintain its vitality, just as a positive attitude to healthy eating and exercise may increase life expectancy. A survey of attitudes indicates what current communities think, believe, prefer and desire (Baker 1992), which a language policy cannot afford to ignore. To ensure its success, especially in the system of education, a language policy should take into account the attitudes of those likely to be affected (Lewis 1981).

There are numerous language attitude studies in cross-linguistic settings and these roughly fall into research categories. Linguists in the first category demonstrate a keen interest in immigrants or study-abroad settings. They mainly approach

the perceptions of the language learners in home and host countries through observations, interviews, and discourse analyses (for example, Huguet and Janes 2008; Ibarraran et al. 2008; Lawson and Sachdev 2004; Yu 2010; Zhang and Slaughter-Defoe 2009). Researchers in another category pay close attention to the language learning experiences of ethnic minority groups (for example, Broermann 2007; Echeverria 2005; Lasagabaster 2005). In China, several studies have covered some of its 55 official ethnic minority groups (for example, Gao 2009; Ojijed 2010; Yuan 2007; Zhou 1999).

Though not fitting into the above research categories, Guangzhou has also attracted some attention in this field primarily because of its rich linguistic context. Most studies have focused on Guangzhou, as an example of a monolingual or bilingual context, with the exception of the small-scale study of trilingualism by Gao et al. (1998). Kalmar et al. (1987) elicited judgments from 24 university students in a match-guised experiment. Their findings confirmed the sociolinguistic theory regarding a “high” (Putonghua) and a “low” (Cantonese) variant in a multilingual society.

A supplementary influence of Putonghua is found in later studies. Wang and Ladegaard (2008) reported that Putonghua promotion was beginning to have an effect and acquire importance in Guangzhou. They also emphasised that Guangzhou was a reasonably stable diglossia, where Putonghua and Cantonese served different functions.

This chapter will address the language attitudes of young Cantonese speakers in Guangzhou toward the three languages by conducting a survey, attempting to answer the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of young people in Guangzhou towards Putonghua?
2. What are the perceptions of young people in Guangzhou towards English?
3. What are the perceptions of young people in Guangzhou towards Cantonese?

## 4 Research Methods

Since Guangzhou is similar to Hong Kong with regard to linguistic resources, the author replicated Lai's (2005) study, which was targeted at identifying language attitudes among Hong Kong youth, and then added qualitative data to substantiate the research. Through the questionnaire, Lai explored the students' attitudes vis-à-vis their integrative and instrumental orientation to the three spoken varieties, Cantonese, Putonghua and English. Integrative orientation refers to a positive inclination towards a language, so as to be better integrated into the language community, and instrumental orientation, a favourable inclination to a language for its instrumental values such as securing a job or passing a test (Gardner and Lambert 1972). Moreover, integrative orientation implies a special interest not only in a given language, but also in the cultural group speaking that language. An extreme case of integra-

tive orientation would be emotional identification with the language community (Gardner 2001).

The questionnaire was slightly adapted to suit the context of this study. It consisted of the following parts: Part I, personal information; Part II, seventeen statements devised on a 4-point Likert scale (4=strongly agree to 1=strongly disagree, etc.); Part III, six statements devised on a 4-point Likert scale, requiring respondents to evaluate the three target languages on the same statements. The statements for Parts II and III were devised along the same parameters, but separated into different sections for reasons of format. The questionnaire was designed to explore the subjects' integrative inclination (such as Statement 3.6a, 3.6b, 3.6c) and instrumental inclination (such as Statement 3.2a, 3.2b, 3.2c) towards the three spoken varieties.

In view of the need for triangulation, semi-structured focus-group interviews were devised to collect some qualitative data. The interviews were centred on the questionnaire completed by the participants. They were encouraged to elaborate on the items towards which they had strong feelings and report on their daily use of the three languages, both at home and school.

#### ***4.1 Data Collection Procedures***

Through convenience sampling, three mainstream secondary schools in the urban centre of Guangzhou participated in this study. For the sake of anonymity and convenience, they were labelled School X, Y and Z. Five senior 1 or senior 2 classes (about fifty students in each class, aged between 15 and 17 years) were selected from each school, again through convenience sampling, to complete the questionnaire. A total of 750 questionnaires were distributed to the three schools, that is, 250 copies for each school for each of their five classes. Overall, 695 completed questionnaires were returned.

At a later stage, four to five students from each of the schools were invited to join focus-group interviews. They were offered the chance to choose the language in which they preferred to be interviewed. Except for one interview that was conducted in Putonghua, the other two interviews were carried out in Cantonese. The students were also informed in advance that the interviews would be recorded for the purpose of research.

#### ***4.2 Profiles of Respondents and Interviewees***

Firstly, data cleaning was performed to detect and repair any anomalies in the data. Next, the 551 survey responses were entered into analysis software for subsequent data analysis. The respondents were aged between 15 and 17 years. Except for four cases where the data were missing, the majority of them (N=479, 84.9%) were born in Guangzhou, while 45 were from other parts of Guangdong Province—four did not indicate their birthplace; 21 were born outside of Guangdong Province,

and 2 students were either from Hong Kong or Macao. With regard to their home language, the large majority (N=401) used only Cantonese at home; while the language used by the rest varied greatly. The detailed results are not reported in this chapter due to limitations of space. However, some of the data will be referred to later on in the chapter when necessary. With respect to cultural identity, among those who gave analysable answers, most respondents (N=304) claimed a double identity as Guangzhou-Chinese; 134 claimed a local identity as Guangzhouers; 87 identified themselves as Chinese; 2 of the participants assumed a Chiuchow identity; 1 participant claimed to be a Singaporean.

Fourteen students in total—five males plus nine females—from the three schools participated in the focus-group interviews. Twelve of them reported Cantonese as their home language, one reported using Putonghua, and the last participant used another dialect at home. Each of the participants is referred to by a two-letter code in later sections, for the sake of anonymity. The first letter of the code indicates their school while the second, the sequence in which they were interviewed. For instance, XA refers to the first interviewee from School X. Therefore, XB is the second interviewee from the same school.

### 4.3 *Data Processing*

Prior to the processing of the data, the researcher carried out initial data cleaning. 144 problem questionnaires were discarded, either because the credibility of the responses was dubious (for instance, the same answer to all questions) or the questionnaire was only partially completed. Ultimately, a total of 551 questionnaires were included in the statistical analysis. Data were then reverse-coded using SPSS as some of the scale items were negatively worded (for example, Statement 2.9, 2.10, 2.12, 2.16, 2.17). Thus, value 1 (strongly disagree) for a negatively-worded statement became value 4 (strongly agree) for its corresponding positively-coded statement (Qin 2003). Following the same method, value 2 for negative statements converted to value 3 for positive statements.

Subsequently, an exploratory factor analysis was employed to test the construct validity of the questionnaire. Four components were extracted from the data, whilst two other components were excluded because they contained too few variables (Qin 2003)—the fifth component consisted of two variables and the sixth component, one variable only. To confirm the construct validity of the questionnaire, factor analysis was performed again with the four remaining components, which were labelled attitude to Putonghua (A to P), attitude to English (A to E), attitude to Cantonese (A to C) and integrative orientation to non-mother-tongue (IO to NMT) respectively. The fourth component was branded as IO to NMT, since the questionnaire was based on the study of Lai (2005) in which these items (Item 2.6, 2.7, 2.8) fell into the category of integrative attitude. The eigenvalues of the four factors were all above 1.0, the acceptable value, (see Field 2000, pp. 436–437; Rietveld and Van Hout 1993, pp. 273–274). The cumulative variance reached 56.719%, which ac-

**Table 1** Attitude towards Putonghua ( $\alpha=0.914$ )

No.	Statements	Mean	SD
3.2c	Putonghua will help me much in getting better opportunities for further studies	3.09	0.842
3.1c	I like Putonghua	2.82	0.825
3.6c	I like the speakers of Putonghua	2.97	0.930
3.3c	Putonghua will help me much in getting better career opportunities in the 21st Century	3.16	0.843
3.5c	I wish to master a high proficiency in Putonghua	3.30	0.867
3.4c	Putonghua is highly regarded in Canton society	3.01	0.896
2.16 <sup>a</sup>	Putonghua is NOT an important language in Guangzhou	2.29	0.879
2.4	Putonghua should be more widely used in Guangzhou as Guangzhou is part of the PRC	2.45	0.919
2.15	If Putonghua is widely used in Guangzhou, Guangzhou will become more prosperous	2.24	0.867
2.3	As a Chinese, I should be able to speak fluent Putonghua	3.34	0.677
2.10 <sup>a</sup>	I'm afraid that if I speak fluent Putonghua, others will think I am from inland China	2.40	0.909
Composite mean of Factor 1		2.88	0.925

<sup>a</sup> The means for the negatively-worded Statements 2.16, 2.10 are 2.71 and 2.60 respectively when reversed

counted for the variance of the whole scale (Qin 2003), and the loading of each variable of each factor fell between 0.467 and 0.862, far above the acceptable value of 0.30 (Qin 2003). Thus, the construct validity of the questionnaire was satisfactory. To ensure the internal consistency of the above factors, Cronbach's reliability test was applied. Means and standard deviation (SD) were also calculated on each item in the questionnaire. Any mean greater than 2.5 would suggest a positive inclination, while a large SD would indicate a great difference among the respondents. In addition, composite means were calculated for each factor as a whole.

The recording of each interview was transcribed in the language used. In the following sections, when the data drawn from the interviews are referred to, they are translated into English.

## 5 Results

To answer the research questions set out for this study, exploratory factor analysis was used to assess the quality of individual items and to explore the possible underlying factor structure of variables.

*How do the respondents perceive Putonghua?* As revealed in the composite mean value for Factor 1 in Table 1 (A reversed mean is arrived this way. If the mean for a statement is 2.40, it means that it is 1.40 away from the lowest end of the scale (i.e. 1); when reversed, it should be 1.40 from the highest end of the scale (i.e. 4). Since 4–1.40 equals 2.60, the reversed mean of 2.40 is therefore 2.60.), the secondary

school students showed a positive inclination to Putonghua. Little resistance to Putonghua was displayed, judging from the relatively low mean (2.40) of the reversely-coded Statement 2.10. Moreover, the respondents were in agreement that they were strongly integratively-oriented towards Putonghua, suggested by the high mean of Statement 2.3, and there was little disparity in this regard. Instrumental inclination was supported by the high means of Statement 3.2c, 3.3c, 3.5c too, yet diversity was detected in the responses, as indicated by the relatively large SD values. In fact, except for the low SD values of Statement 2.3, other items related to Putonghua had high SD, which, therefore, implied a great difference among the attitudinal inclinations of the respondents.

The interview data also consistently suggest that Putonghua was well received in Guangzhou. All the interviewees admitted that Putonghua was very dominant in their class hours, with the result that they were accustomed to speaking with ease in both languages, either with teachers or among their peers. One of the interviewees (YG) ridiculed the poor Putonghua of the older generation citing the example of her grandmother, hinting that nowadays, a majority of people in Guangzhou acquired Putonghua.

Sharing the same belief, another student (YI) recounted that her television viewing habits were different from her father's generation, as she had begun to accept watching Putonghua-speaking programmes. Moreover, a boy (YH) acknowledged the significance of Putonghua to Guangzhou and China through the following comment:

(YH) "... not many people understand Cantonese. The command of Putonghua is necessary, an essential skill. A shared language is vital to a nation. Otherwise, it would be too complicated to communicate with each other".

YG also concurred on this subject. On the other hand, some of the interviewees were ambivalent about Putonghua, which was also detected from a large SD in some items of the survey.

*How do the respondents perceive English?* The high means and low SD values in Table 2 suggested that the respondents endorsed that they were instrumentally inclined towards English, with little disparity on this topic among them. They believed that for individuals, some knowledge of English would bring enhanced career and academic opportunities; for the city of Guangzhou, the use of English would increase its competitive edge and thereby, contribute to its prosperity and overall future development. Consequently, all the students displayed a strong motivation to learn English proficiently, as indicated by Statement 3.5a.

A similar mentality was reflected in the interviews. All the students interviewed readily acknowledged that English as an international language played an important role in their future and in Guangzhou's future too. The interviewees from School Y showed consensus in this respect. One interviewee (YH) actually emphasised the fact that an enhanced level of English among citizens would contribute to an improved image of Guangzhou, which in turn would attract more foreign investment.

Moreover, the students from School X expressed similar opinions in their group discussion. Likewise, a girl from School Z held that learning English was a part



**Table 2** Attitude towards English ( $\alpha=0.882$ )

No.	Statements	Mean	SD
3.3a	E will help me much in getting better career opportunities in the 21st Century	3.77	0.548
3.2a	E will help me much in getting better opportunities for further studies	3.70	0.573
3.6a	I like the speakers of E	3.36	0.769
3.5a	I wish to master a high proficiency in E	3.64	0.667
3.1a	I like E	3.10	0.750
3.4a	E is highly regarded in Canton society	3.46	0.692
2.14	To increase the competitiveness of Guangzhou, the E standard of Guangzhou people must be enhanced	3.20	0.647
2.13	The use of E is likely to contribute to the success of Guangzhou's prosperity and development today	3.19	0.718
2.11	E is more important in Guangzhou than it used to be	3.09	0.815
Composite mean of Factor 2		3.39	0.735

of social requirements. She elaborated by pointing out that during the 16th Asian Games, even taxi drivers were trained to learn some English, so that they could better serve foreign visitors coming to Guangzhou for the games. She was convinced that the acquiring of English was an imperative trend for the growth of Guangzhou.

Aware of the value of English to their children's future, some parents with a knowledge of English had begun to coach their children in the language. This was exemplified by the case of Interviewee XE, whose father often practised English dialogues with her. She explained that this was because she had to take English tests at school and also kept in contact with relatives abroad using English. The use of English at home by this girl coincided with that by nine other respondents in the survey, who claimed that they used English in addition to Cantonese and/or Putonghua in a familial context. It was entirely probable that these nine respondents practised their English with family members at home too.

It is also worth noting that all the interviewees from the three schools reported the occasional use of English vocabulary or familiar idioms by their Chemistry, Mathematics or Chinese teachers, who attempted to stimulate their students' attention and create an animated classroom environment through the unexpected use of English. In addition, it was discovered that some of the interviewees subconsciously included English expressions in their speech. A case in point is that during the interview, a male student from School X used an English idiom in his Putonghua speech, whilst a female student from School Z employed an English word in her Cantonese speech. The use of mixed languages appeared to come naturally to the interviewees. The students from School Z reported occasional use of English in their daily communication too. In a way which was similar to their counterparts' way of speaking in Hong Kong, this type of code-switching was also encountered among other age groups in Guangzhou (Xu 2008). This point will be further discussed in the next section.

**How do the respondents perceive Cantonese?** As shown by the high composite mean (3.69) in Table 3, strong integrative inclination to Cantonese is detected in

**Table 3** Attitude towards Cantonese ( $\alpha=0.862$ )

No.	Statements	Mean	SD
3.1b	I like Cantonese	3.74	0.493
3.6b	I like the speakers of C Cantonese	3.75	0.528
2.2	I like Cantonese because it is my mother tongue	3.53	0.718
2.1	As a Guangzhouer, I should be able to speak fluent Cantonese	3.65	0.574
2.5	Cantonese is the language which best represents Guangzhou	3.82	0.419
3.5b	I wish to master a high proficiency in Cantonese	3.78	0.473
2.12 <sup>a</sup>	Cantonese should be replaced by Putonghua since it is only a dialect with little value	1.24	0.540
2.17 <sup>a</sup>	The importance and status of Putonghua will soon be higher than that of Cantonese in Guangzhou	1.64	0.786
3.4b	Cantonese is highly regarded in Canton society	3.79	0.449
Composite mean of Factor 3		3.69	0.583

<sup>a</sup> The means for the negatively-worded Statement 2.12, Statement 2.17 are 3.76 and 3.36 respectively when reversed

Factor 3. The respondents seemed to agree unanimously that “Cantonese is the language which best represents Guangzhou” (high mean and low SD value). In view of this, they disagreed on Cantonese being replaced by Putonghua. Furthermore, they did not accept as true the statement that the importance and status of Putonghua would soon be higher than that of Cantonese in Guangzhou.

The comments by three of the respondents written in the margin of the questionnaire without being invited to do so were very revealing in this context. One of them penned a curse in Cantonese beside Statement 2.12. Another jotted down three exclamation marks to illustrate her strong emotions, alongside the choice of strongly disagree. The translation of the comment reported by the other respondent reads, “Cantonese has been corrupted by Putonghua. It is a sad thing to find the use of Putonghua is compulsory. Look at what is happening in Hong Kong”. Clearly, the writer compared the situation in Guangzhou with that in Hong Kong, where Putonghua has been made another official language in addition to Cantonese and English with the introduction of biliteracy and the trilingualism policy after the handover of Hong Kong to the People’s Republic of China (PRC), and portrayed a rather dismal outlook.

The attitudes towards Cantonese discovered in the survey parallel those in the interviews. According to the interviewees, Cantonese was often spoken, by both teachers and students in their interactions in and out of class, though not as frequently as Putonghua. Three students from School Z related cases of telephone conversations in Cantonese initiated by their teachers, who wanted to converse with them or their parents. A boy from School X, an immigrant from an adjacent province who did not speak Cantonese though he understood it well, was favourably inclined to speaking in Putonghua. This student recounted several interesting occasions of code-switching by the teachers when he was present in school. (XI):

In class, my teacher could not help using Cantonese. Then suddenly he would ... I would remind him to consider my feeling. I was unhappy. He would immediately switch back to Putonghua.

At home, most of the interviewees conversed in Cantonese. From time to time, a family member aspired to conserve their native language, by insisting on using Cantonese. For instance, the father of one girl expressed disapproval when she attempted to speak Putonghua at home. (YI):

... at times I use Putonghua at home when I find it difficult to express something in Cantonese. Then my Dad is upset, scolding me for forgetting Cantonese after a few years of schooling ... he hopes I can speak more Cantonese.

Interestingly, the family of interviewee XJ switched back to using Cantonese as their home language instead of Putonghua, after her grandparents retired from school where they had used Putonghua.

In terms of home language, the family of interviewee XD was an exception. After moving to Guangzhou 10 years previously from a province bordering Guangdong, his parents learnt Cantonese but communicated with him in Putonghua. However, the father endeavoured to persuade his son to learn and speak Cantonese, assuming that learning Cantonese would be a swifter method for his son to better integrate into his school life, in spite of resistance from the son.

Like their fellow students responding to the questionnaire, the majority of the interviewees exhibited identical feelings towards Cantonese. Responding negatively to Item 2.12 suggesting that Cantonese should be replaced by Putonghua, since it was only a dialect with little value, a student (YI) protested by defending the significance of Cantonese and pointing out that it was alleged to have almost been chosen as the national language by Dr. Sun Yatsen in the early twentieth century. Moreover, she affirmed that Cantonese speakers had an edge in learning classical Chinese and foreign languages such as Korean and Japanese. (YI):

Cantonese as a language is part of our southern Cantonese culture. You can't simply replace it like that. Nowadays many dialects are replaced by Putonghua ... However, [Cantonese] is similar to classical Chinese .... Some foreign languages like Korean and Japanese share this characteristic.

Her classmate (YG) was conscious of Cantonese as a linguistic heritage too, as can be seen from the following excerpt. (YG):

The language is our local feature. How could you substitute it like that? ... A Guangzhouer, a native Guangzhouer, won't like using Putonghua, [instead] they are fond of speaking Cantonese.

The pride in Cantonese and the recognition of their linguistic heritage was shared by four native Cantonese speakers from School Z. They argued in unanimity against Item 2.12 too. The pride in Cantonese is likely to be reinforced by the attention Cantonese-speakers perhaps receive when visiting other places in China. The boy mentioned earlier, who refused to speak Cantonese after living in Guangzhou for 10 years, related precisely such an occasion. (XD)

Do you think Cantonese is useless? No, absolutely not! ... when you speak Cantonese in other parts of China, people regard you as someone with higher status, [though] you can't feel that in Guangzhou... Once we travelled to Qinghai [Province]. My Dad was calling back to Guangzhou, talking with his colleague over the phone while we were waiting for a taxi. A passer-by just gazed at my Dad like this [the boy demonstrated a look of admiration].

His opinion was supported by a girl with a similar travel experience. Besides, the interviewees expressed confidence in the future of Cantonese. As two interviewees XD and ZL put it, given the comprehensive spread of Cantonese in Hong Kong, Macao and other places, it would not be overpowered by Putonghua.

On the other hand, a few of the interviewees vented their concerns about Cantonese. (XE):

Look at Hong Kong entertainment circle. The singers often sing in Putonghua nowadays<sup>1</sup>. There are fewer songs in Cantonese. . . . They hope to reach the market of inland China. That is a huge potential market. . . . And Putonghua is promoted in every corner of Guangzhou.

Interviewee ZL actually conveyed her apprehensions about a hypothetical Putonghua-only Guangzhou. Thus, some of the students were strongly convinced that measures to strengthen Cantonese were necessary. Some students suggested that elective Cantonese courses be established in schools, as a technique of preserving tradition and integrating newcomers into life in Guangzhou.

## 6 Discussion

The results denote a generally positive attitude to the three varieties of languages, which is of statistical significance. Surprisingly, Cantonese the low variety, instead of Putonghua the high variety, was rated highest, and opinions towards Putonghua were considerably diversified as indicated by the comparatively large standard deviation of Putonghua (0.925). The questionnaire findings were corroborated by the student interview data. Additionally, the interviewees projected an impression of pride for their mother tongue, Cantonese. However, with respect to the future of Cantonese some apprehension was detected, despite their overall confidence in its future. A few students contended that the establishment of Cantonese courses was essential to conserve the language and culture. With regard to English, the respondents and the interviewees appeared to dismiss the idea of associating English with socio-economic status and intelligence, notwithstanding the overwhelming recognition of the instrumental value of English. To understand the results, the roles of Putonghua, English and Cantonese in the community of Guangzhou are further considered and examined below.

### 6.1 *Putonghua on the Rise*

The results presented in the previous section clearly indicate the success of Putonghua in Guangzhou. A generally positive attitude towards Putonghua is reflected in both the survey and the interviews. Even if the interview data are examined in

<sup>1</sup> In the 1990s, songs by Hong Kong singers in Cantonese became very popular throughout most of China.

isolation, the pervasive influence of Putonghua is easily perceived in modern day Guangzhou. Especially, in recent years, business activities and economic exchanges between Guangdong and other parts of China have gained more momentum, in conjunction with an influx of more migrant workers and highly-skilled labourers into Guangzhou. As a lingua franca, Putonghua has spread pervasively in Guangzhou.

## 6.2 *Pride in Cantonese*

The overwhelming integrative orientation to Cantonese revealed by the respondents was striking. The highest composite mean (3.69) and lowest standard deviation (0.583) of this factor, among all the four factors, suggests almost uniform consensus towards a favourable integrative inclination. A similar attitude was identified in most of the interviewees too. Their response to Item 2.12, which suggested that Cantonese should be replaced by Putonghua since it is only a dialect with little value, was most forceful and convincing. The lowest point scored by this item markedly demonstrated the students' distinct disapproval of the statement. The interviewees too expressed their dismay with this item, as stated earlier.

In reality, the discovery of a preference for Cantonese displayed by local young people was not new. Wang and Ladegaard (2008) reported that their local group of subjects, in contrast with an outside group, opted significantly for Cantonese only, when questioned about their language use with regard to Putonghua and Cantonese. Not only young natives but Cantonese speakers in general take great pride in their first language. There is voluminous research evidence that the prestige of Cantonese in Guangdong (e.g., Zhan 1996; Lin 1998; Zhang 2001), partly contributed to the slow progress of Putonghua in the past.

Cantonese constantly attracts growing numbers of speakers, including newcomers such as Interviewee XJ and XD. The spread of Cantonese in inland China probably reached its peak by the end of the 1980s and early 1990s. Scholars consistently acknowledged the increasing popularity of Cantonese in non-Cantonese-speaking areas within China (e.g., Erbaugh 1995; Zhan 1993; Zhu and Chen 1991). As Cantonese swept through China, some Cantonese lexis was adopted in Putonghua (Qian 1995).

The popularity enjoyed by Cantonese in other parts of China including Beijing and Shanghai, in turn, contributes to the natives' confidence in their language and culture and enhances the awareness of their linguistic heritage by the local people.

## 6.3 *Pride and Prejudice*

On the other hand, this pride may well entail two closely-related mentalities among some native Cantonese speakers, explicitly, a concern for the future of Canton-

ese under the presumed threat of Putonghua and discrimination against Putonghua speakers. Given the status of Putonghua as a national language and the expansion of Putonghua across the country, some local people are justifiably apprehensive about the promotion of Putonghua at the expense of Cantonese.

The interplay of this pride and this concern could result in sensitivity exhibited by the natives to language issues. On the eve of the 16th Asian Games, the natives were provoked into protesting vociferously, when some local members of the political advisory body, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, proposed increasing the length of the Putonghua news broadcast on an existing Cantonese TV channel, in order to cater to the needs of the spectators of the Games. Fearing for the fate of Cantonese, a large group of native Cantonese speakers held a protest demonstration against this proposal. Reflecting on this disturbance, Zhan (2011) sternly criticised the failure of publicity regarding the national language policy. While urging more work was required to eliminate ignorance about the nation's language policy, she insisted that Cantonese could never be erased from existence. In fact, another lesson could be deduced from this incident too. The natives' emotions would have to be prudently tackled when making, adjusting or changing any language policy related to a prestigious language such as Cantonese.

Another mentality associated with pride in their mother tongue is prejudice against Putonghua speakers. This bias was clearly demonstrated by two of the interviewees (YG and YI). Both Erbaugh (1995) and Zhang (2001) acknowledged the discrimination displayed by local people. They also considered that there was indeed a link between the prejudice and the economic boom in Cantonese-speaking areas. Zhang (2001) elaborated on this issue by pointing out that a large number of Putonghua-speaking migrant workers engaged in menial jobs in Guangdong Province served to diminish the reputation of Putonghua. The image of Putonghua and its speakers are further tainted as social problems caused by migration such as theft, robbery and fraud, give rise to hostility on the part of local people. Prior to the early 1990s, those who only spoke Putonghua could easily find themselves discriminated against in public places (Chen 1989).

Nevertheless, the situation has improved considerably with the rise of Putonghua in Guangzhou during the last decade or so, as was discussed in the previous section. In this study, merely two out of the fourteen interviewees specifically commented negatively about Putonghua speakers. Furthermore, no explicit negative sentiment was observed in two of the schools. One reason for the absence of unfavourable sentiments in School X could be attributed to the fact that the Cantonese-speaking students sought to avoid offending the solitary Putonghua-speaking interviewee (XD) present during the interviews. Hence, no overwhelming disapproval was manifest in the interviews. The above may thus imply that discrimination against Putonghua and its speakers is much less and not as apparent as before, in spite of its possible existence among a small number of natives.

The mentalities described above, the pride in Cantonese, the projection of an apparent threat by Putonghua and the bias against Putonghua speakers, might underlie the large SD (0.925) of Putonghua, despite a general positive orientation (with a mean of

2.88 in the first factor) in the survey, as local people are increasingly divided between their recognition of Putonghua and a strong identification with their mother tongue.

#### **6.4 *Towards a Trilingual Guangzhou***

The fact that the informants in this study rated English so highly for its instrumental values mirrors the soaring demand for English among the Guangzhou community. The reported use of English by parents and teachers of subjects other than English in the interviews confirms this trend. Similarly, Gao et al. (1998) established that English was rated highest by the respondents, as regards its status, and Lai (2005) reported that her subjects in Hong Kong exhibited the strongest instrumental orientation toward English as well. This is justified by the status of English as an international language. In the case of Guangzhou, frequent and close contact with the outside world accurately justifies the prominent role played by English in Guangzhou.

Guangzhou is not alone in eagerly embracing English. It reflects the fervour demonstrated by the entire country for English. The role and status of English in China have reached unprecedented heights (Feng 2009). English has spread at an exponential rate especially since the turn of the century, when the central education authorities promulgated a series of documents promoting the language in schools and tertiary institutions (ibid). The fervent pursuit of English is also the voluntary choice of average people.

Vigorous foreign trade activities call for additional use of English, which is recognized as a global language in international trade, education, cultural exchange and so forth. Mass media cater to this need and facilitate the spread of English too. A local English channel, the first of its kind in mainland China has broadcast English programmes, since 2006. Besides, every Guangzhou household has access to two English channels hosted by Hong Kong TV stations. In 2010, as host of the 16th Asian Games, Guangzhou strove to further promote English learning through the mass media. Radios too transmitted programmes teaching listeners simple English for dealings with foreign visitors.

More importantly, in the education sector, emulating many economically developed regions in China, English classes are provided from the third year onwards in primary schools in Guangzhou. A few anxious parents are eager to get their children into an English class as early as kindergarten believing that this will enable their children to have an edge over their peers. Competent parents themselves coach their children in English as observed from the example of the father of interviewee XE. Young people in Guangzhou also occasionally include one or two English words in daily communication with their friends, as demonstrated by the interview data in this study. As Guangdong Province continues to strive for economic advancement, the trend will continue and perhaps even more English words will appear in daily Cantonese communication, especially among the youth.

Another factor which offers a boost to the spread of English and cannot be ignored is emigration. The Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council announced in 2010 that about 45 million overseas Chinese were distributed over

180 countries, and China had become the largest emigration country in the world, ranking first in the world in emigration numbers. Currently, China has become the second largest immigrant source country to the United States after Mexico, with over 80,000 immigrants each year. It was estimated that emigrants of Guangdong origin accounted for 50% of all the emigrants in the country in 2009. Among those moving out of China through investment emigration, residents from Guangzhou accounted for 30% (Xin Kuaibao 2010).

The rise of English and the prominence accorded to the language do not necessarily imply a higher socio-economic status for its speakers, as revealed in both the survey and the interviews. This could conceivably be explained by the accessibility of English education in Guangzhou, exposure to English and a generally affluent Guangzhou community. Feng (2009) recognised that from kindergarten onwards, learners of English in major economic and political powerhouses such as Guangzhou were more likely to enjoy various facilities and resources ranging from qualified teachers to private tuition by native speakers of English, perhaps even study or pleasure tours abroad. Enjoying easy access and an enormous amount of exposure to English, the learners evidently do not realise their advantage over innumerable students in inland China or rural areas, who are unable to afford these luxuries.

## 7 Conclusion

This study established that the youth in secondary schools in Guangzhou had favourable attitudes towards the three languages, which proved statistically significant. Among them, Cantonese, their mother tongue, was rated as their preferred language with the least amount of dispute, and English came second for its instrumental value, which is consistent with similar findings in other research. Putonghua was rated the lowest and the respondents had diverse attitudes towards Putonghua. The results give us a glimpse of the language scenario in modern Guangzhou. Pride in the mother tongue is deeply rooted in the native Cantonese population, who have a strong awareness of linguistic heritage. Out of a deep-rooted concern for the future of Cantonese, local people tend to react strongly when the spread of Putonghua appears threatening. Though prejudice against Putonghua-speakers is rare and unlikely to happen publicly, the bias continues to exist among a limited number of natives. This bias may probably disappear eventually, in view of the enhanced communication between Guangdong and other parts of China through their economic connections. In addition, English has steadily extended through the length and breadth of Guangzhou, as it has in the rest of the country, but with a much more pervasive presence. However, the findings also suggested a weak link between English and higher socio-economic status.

With the rise of Putonghua, Guangzhou has developed into a stable bilingual society. The popularity of Putonghua is unprecedented, with its use by a larger population in an extensive range of areas. The dynamic development of the three languages in Guangzhou can be ascribed to the influential power of economic ad-



vancement, though, understandably, it may not be the sole reason. If the economy of Cantonese-speaking areas maintains its momentum, and the ties between Guangdong and the outside world continue to expand at the current rate, the development and co-existence of the three languages in Guangzhou will endure, as a consequence of the constant movement of all related forces, with each language serving different functions.

Compared with the total number of secondary students in Guangzhou, the sample number in the survey was insignificant. Moreover, since the respondents were mainly descendants of Cantonese-speaking families, it is probable that the findings reflected only the attitudes of Cantonese-speaking natives. Today one third of Guangzhou's entire population is comprised of newcomers. The results would perhaps offer a completely different picture if an investigation was targeted at schools consisting mainly of students from newcomers' families. In conclusion, we may sum up that more research has yet to be undertaken to portray a complete picture of the linguistic scenario in Guangzhou.

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