Language Education in Hong Kong

Seminar on Forschungsthemen der Fachdidaktik Chinesisch at Freie Universität Berlin

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Topic I

"Where speakers value their native language highly, the language will thrive." (Sautman & Xie, 2020)
Is this just a fable-like legend, or does it more or less reflect reality?

Topic II

We see a fairy-tale story like Welsh and Taiwanese being preserved and thriving after a long period of suppression and ignoration; but we also observe languages disappearing in the world every year, and more being suppressed and stigmatised continuously, e.g. Catalan, Kurdish
What is the overview and perspective of Cantonese? On paper, it is a language in a secure position: seemingly institutional and instrumental, with a big enough speaker population. But how about we take a closer look? We may have a clearer picture, and then we can all frame our own opinions on this.

Outline

1. "Chinese"
2. Background information
   - History of Hong Kong
   - Cantonese
3. Language Situation and Policies
   - Language Situation
   - Language policies
   - Reasons and Motivation
4. Outcomes and Influences
5. Future
   - To conclude
6. References



The term "Chinese"

1. A race (biological, genetic)
2. A nationality (country, geography)
3. A language family or a language?
   - Outside Asia, generally understood as the equivalent of Mandarin; regards the other languages as "dialects"
   - Unlike many Indo-European languages, written language and spoken language share the same name, e.g. German, English, Spanish
   - The misunderstanding comes from other reasons: population of speakers, national language of the country, overseas promotions and propaganda
   - Chinese should be understood as
     1. a language family (similar to Romance languages, which consist of Spanish, Italian, French etc.)
     2. a written language without a direct counterpart of spoken language

Brief history of HK I

- Colony of Great Britain from 1841 until 1997
- Has developed separately from a fishing harbour to an industrial city to an international financial city
- After handover, Hong Kong became a Special Administrative Region (SAR), having her own government, currency, economic body, Olympic team etc., except military
- The Chinese central government has promised: "One Country Two Systems" for at least 50 years unchanged (i.e. 1947)

Brief history of HK II

- No fully democratic formation of the legislative council (1200 members), half of the members are appointed by the pro-Beijing stakeholders (Lo, 2017; Jang, 2016; Young & Cullen, 2012)
- The head of the government, the Chief Executive, is nominated by the central government in China and is elected by the legislative council. And the CE must report to the central government regularly
- Political situation: civil disobedience movements in 2014 (Lo, 2017) and 2019 (known as "Umbrella Revolution" and "Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement")

Cantonese

So... how different is Cantonese?



Let's try

咁蹺嘅，你又係嚟溫書？」

其實冇宿嘅人咁夜仲喺圖書館，真係少見。但係我覺得就算唔係巧合，都只不過係佢亦都鍾意喺圖書館讀書嘛解，冇咩特別原因。

佢撥一撥耳邊嘅頭髮，頭側一側，諗一諗，終於又淺淺地笑了。

佢笑起嚟嗰陣亦有個淺淺嘅酒粒，好有自然美feel。

「其實，依家唔嚟溫書，仲可以做啲咩呢？唔好意思我起返身，我只不過係啱啱見到檯邊嘅past paper同notes知道係同系同學，先坐低望咗一陣。」

佢企返起身。但係，並冇即時離開嘅意思。

「估唔到你嘅筆記做得咁詳細。」

「哦，過獎。」

「我唔阻你吖嘛？」

「吓，阻，咩，唔阻，梗係唔阻。」唔知點解，望得佢耐一陣，條腩就自己打咗個結，再打多個結。完全唔聽使。

點解會嘛。點解我嘅表現唔可以瀟灑一啲，而係咁窩囊。

「但係呢……我仔細一睇。」佢纖長嘅手指，拎起一版筆記嚟睇。

Phonological difference

- Mandarin has 4 tones
- Cantonese has 6 tones with 3 contour variations

絲	si˥	'silk'	色	sɪk˥	'colour'	high level
試	si˧	'try'	泄	sit˧	'reveal'	mid level
事	si˨	'matter'	食	sɪk˨	'eat'	low-mid level
時	si˩˨	'time'				low falling (mid-to-low)
史	si˧˥	'history'				high rising (mid-to-high)
市	si˩˧	'city'				low rising (low-to-mid)

Lexical difference I

- Cantonese prefers monosyllabic words:
  - 櫈 'chair' (vs. 椅子)
  - 枱 'table' (vs. 桌子)
- Words of choice:
  - 食 vs. 吃 'to eat'
  - 飲 vs. 喝 'to drink'
  - 嘴 vs. 口 'mouth'

Lexical difference II

- Word creation:

- Leixical item:
  - 細路 細蚊仔 vs. 孩子 'child/ children'
  - 差人 vs. 警察 'police'
  - 朱古力 vs. 巧克力 'chocolate'
  - 士多啤梨 vs. 草莓 'strawberry'
- Functional item:
  - 啲 vs. 些 Plural
  - 咗 vs. 了 Perfective
  - 嘅 vs. 的 Linking element
  - 唔 vs. 不 negation
  - 冇 vs. 沒有 non-existence
- Ideophones:
  - 頭耷耷 'head-down-down'
  - 密質質 'dense'
  - 黑搵搵 'black'

Morphological difference I

- Cantonese can be both left-headed or right-headed:
  - Left-headed:
    - 雞公 'rooster' 雞嫲 'hen'
  - Right-headed:
    - 科學家 'scientist', 豬肉佬 'butcher', 差人 'police'
- Different aspect markers:
  - 咗 perfective marker (vs. 了), e.g. 我睇咗本書 'I have read the book'
  - 緊 progressive marker (vs. 正), e.g. 我食緊飯 'I am eating'
  - 住 progressive marker (vs. 著) e.g. 我深愛住佢 'I am deeply in love with him/her'

Morphological difference II

- Question words:
  - 咩事 vs. 怎麼了 'what'
  - 咩嘢 vs. 什麼 'what'
  - 邊個 vs. 誰 'who'
  - 邊度 vs. 哪裡 'where'
  - 點解 vs. 為什麼 'why'
  - 幾時 vs. 什麼時候 'when'
  - 點樣 vs. 怎樣 'how'
- Plural marker 哋 can be used only with pronouns, but not with other common nouns
  - 我哋 'we/us' *學生哋 'students' vs. 我們, 學生們
- Adverb formation: 好快咁行去 vs. 很快地 走去
- **On and on...**

Syntactic difference I

- Cantonese allows the bare classifier structure for definite reading (L. L.-S. Cheng & Sybesma, 1999; Jenks, 2018; Hall, 2019):
  - 本書 'the book' 枝水 'the bottle of water'
  - vs. in Mandarin using bare noun and demonstratives (Jenks, 2018)
- Different classifier choices
  - 一隻牛 vs. 一頭牛 'a cow'
  - 一個橙 vs. 一顆橘子 'an orange'
- Creative usage of classifiers
  - 一條友 'alone'
  - 我條女 'my girlfriend (colloquial)'

Syntactic difference II

- Cantonese resultatives can only build from a strong action-result relationship, but Mandarin also allows the weak relationship (Lau & Lee, 2015)
  - sleep → wake ⇒ 瞓醒
  - run → win ⇒ 跑贏比賽
  - run ?→ drop ?⇒ * 跑跌車飛
- Cantonese has a larger sentence final particle inventory (Matthews & Yip, 2011)
  - 啵, 吓, 咩, 喎, 啫, 囉 (Matthews & Yip, 2011; Wakefield et al., 2011)
- Existential verb for experience usage: 有食 vs. 吃了

Syntactic difference III

- Potential form: Cantonese expresses potential/ ability to take the action by the suffix *dak* behind the verb
  - 行得㗎啦 'We can go' vs. 可以 走了
- Passive: Cantonese passive must be formed with an explicit agent, even if it is just 'a person'
  - 你俾人呃咗 'You were being deceived' vs. 你被 騙了
- Demonstratives: Cantonese demonstratives cannot be used singly
  - 呢 *(個)太怪啦 'This is strange' vs. 這太奇怪了
- **And many more...**

So why the misunderstanding?

1. The unfamiliarity: Asian languages are less researched/ studied in non-English-speaking countries
2. The intentional promotion: the government's promotion of the national language only
3. The look-alike effect: both languages are written in characters (in "block" instead of linear), and for an outsider, they look quite similar

Where is Cantonese positioning?

During the colonial time I

- The colonial government made English the only official language used in administrative, financial, educational and juridical settings
- imposed English on school education and made it the sole language of university education
- never banned or altered the daily usage and role of Cantonese, which has remained the most dominant language in the region

During the colonial time II

- Change in 1974: "Chinese" is recognised as another official language, after the series of 'Chinese as Official Language Movement' in the 1960s and 1970s and the riot in 1967
- Chinese was commonly understood as Cantonese because it was the dominant language of the society at that time
- Promoting "Mother Tongue Education Policy" since the 1980s: pupils can learn better and have better academic results when they study with their native language (Poon, 2013)
- The colonial government didn't do anything for/ against Cantonese

After handover I

- Cantonese remains the dominant daily language of the society: 88.8% of the population in 2018 (Census & Department, 2019; Poon, 2013)
- Bilingual code-switching between English and Cantonese has dominated the linguistic usage and become a significant identity marker (Chan et al., 2019)
- English is still an official language in Hong Kong and remains the instrumental language. Government, schools and families advocate the education of/in English (Poon, 2013)

After handover II

- "Chinese" has become a problematic term after the handover in 1997 (Clark, 2018): written language? Cantonese? Mandarin?
- This vagueness causes the uncertainty of positioning Cantonese and the potential of linguistic manipulation in Hong Kong (Clark, 2018)
- The central government has been advocating the benefits, the meaning of learning and speaking the national language: economic, cultural, patriotic/ national reasons
- Mandarin has since then entered the picture of the language use in Hong Kong

Cantonese in overseas

- Cantonese is generally known in most English-speaking countries, e.g. the US, the UK, Australia, Canada etc.
  - the biggest Cantonese-speaking communities, and put the biggest effort to save the language and the culture
- But Cantonese visibility is really low in other countries, because of the propaganda-like promotion, the general public normally understands it as just a "dialect"
- Even in the linguistic research domain: much less attention to Cantonese and simply conclude rashly that "Cantonese has a similar picture to Mandarin"

Prestige Planning of Mandarin

- The SAR government emphasises on the usefulness and the critical value of Mandarin (Marten, 2016; Haarmann, 1986)
  - the utility and instrumentality in the economic sector: Hong Kong functions as a bridge of the Western World and China for business (Clark, 2018)
- Cantonese is simply taken for granted, and the significance of knowing and using Cantonese is never mentioned and even depreciated (K. Cheng, n.d.)
  - The Education Bureau posted a statement on its website in 2014, indicating that "Cantonese is a Chinese dialect not considered an official language." (K. Cheng, n.d.)

"Biliteracy and Trilingualism" policy

- promoted in 1997 and further implemented in 2000
- Students should be able to speak in Cantonese, English and Mandarin, as well as to write in Modern Standard traditional Chinese and English
- Original Chinese class has been taught in Cantonese (teaching characters, pronunciation, literature, writing skills)
- Putonghua: one of the compulsory subjects (separated from the Chinese class) from primary school to junior secondary school, for the Putonghua pronunciation and vocabulary (Poon, 2013); free elective in senior secondary school

Mandarin as Medium of Instruction in Chinese Classes I

- Following the suggestion of the Curriculum Development Council in 2000, the Education Bureau started considering the possibility of using Putonghua as the MOI in schools in 2003 (Poon, 2013)
  - a natural environment for students to learn Mandarin
  - aims to improve writing and literacy skills: Mandarin is seen as more similar to written Chinese
- For now, optional but highly recommended: in the academic year 2020/2021, 67% of the primary schools and 28.13% of the secondary schools in Hong Kong adopted Putonghua as the MOI for Chinese classes (港語學, n.d.)

Mandarin as Medium of Instruction in Chinese Classes II

- Neglect of the natural environment of learning Cantonese: the difference between the grammar, the lexicon and other special features between Mandarin and Cantonese (Lee & Leung, 2012)
- Two camps of opinions: helping literacy + writing vs. students not able to fully comprehend the content of the classes (Lee & Leung, 2012; Tam, 2011)

Language Funding: Ignoration of Cantonese

- The Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR): responsible for language promotion in Hong Kong (Lee & Leung, 2012)
  - a Summer-Immersion Programme in Putonghua
  - Putonghua and English Festival
  - HKD 8 million to promote Putonghua
  - only until 2007, co-joining other organisations to promote the correct pronunciation of Cantonese
- Other significant open tasks:
  - standardised and keyboard-friendly romanisation of Cantonese (Sautman & Xie, 2020)
  - introducing the difference between Cantonese and Mandarin
  - Cantonese as a written literacy language etc.

Recent intention of further development

- In June 2021, a direct and explicit signal from China: the Ministry of Education urged that Hong Kong should clarify the official status of simplified Chinese and Mandarin in the Basic Law ((RTHK), n.d.)
- The Education Bureau believes that the knowledge of simplified Chinese and Mandarin is beneficial for students'prospects ((RTHK), n.d.)
- Fear of the sole and obligatory MOI in Chinese classes in schools

Why?

Economic Reason

- As an instrument for opening the market in China: due to the growing Chinese market and the so-called 'new China World order'
  - as the first step for Chinese companies to enter the international market
  - a bridge between Western companies and China
- Hong Kong's position as one of the most important global financial and trading centres is also being challenged (Davison & Lai, 2007)
- On the individual level, knowing Mandarin as a significant asset for career prospects (Li, 2000)

Political Reason

- Hong Kong, as a British Colony, has been developed in its own ways separately for over 150 years
- Hong Kong has different cultures, different identities, embodied by different things, including its own language
  - Majority identified themselves as Hong Kongers or Hong Kong Chinese, which distinguishes them from their mainland counterpart (Li, 2000; Poon, 2013)
- A distinct identity is seen as a deterrence to a sense of belonging to the Chinese as a collective, and may even lead to a separatist movement
- To renationalise, instil patriotism and nationalism in Hong Kong: obligation to learn and speak the national language (Li, 2000; Poon, 2013)

What are the consequences?

Language ability

- The population, which is capable of speaking Putonghua:
  - 16.9% in 1991
  - 39.2% in 2006
  - 67.3% in 2018 (Census & Department, 2019) (even more than 90% of the whole population in scholars'work (Sautman & Xie, 2020))
  - Especially the younger generations

Preservation from bottom-up I

- Cantonese is always considered one of the unique markers of identity of Hong Kongers (Li, 2000; Poon, 2013)
- Due to the political incidents recently
  - Mandarin is perceived as a threat to Cantonese in Hong Kong (Sautman & Xie, 2020)
  - The sense and awareness of protecting Cantonese has risen in recent years
  - The frustration in politics turns attention to preserving culture and language

Preservation from bottom-up II

- The spontaneous and voluntary maintenance in the local community:
  - Family:
    - Fully aware of Cantonese as "cultural heritage and sense of belonging" (Sautman & Xie, 2020)
    - Creating an environment for their children to master Cantonese (Census & Department, 2019)
  - Academic and technical:
    - Linguists at the Education University of Hong Kong have also tried to create a set of standardised written Cantonese, helping learn and promote Cantonese (Bauer, 1988, 2018)
    - Information technicians also use the long-established romanised Cantonese *JyutPing* to create keyboard input methods for computers and smartphones (e.g. https://www.typeduck.hk & https://visual-fonts.com)

Preservation from bottom-up III

- Cultural:
  - The first magazine written and published in written Cantonese *Resonate*
  - Canto pop music: *my little airport*, with Cantonese lyrics and thematised with Hong Kong daily life and political issues
  - Hong Kong movies
  - Children's book written in Cantonese instead of in written Chinese





Preservation from bottom-up IV

邊一個發明了返工
我要給佢米田共 (米田共)
邊一個發明了返工
返到我愈嚟愈窮 (愈嚟愈窮)
為了薪金一萬元
令每天都沒了沒完
一萬元一萬元一萬元
靈魂賣給了大財團

邊一個發明了返工
以為自己好有用 (好有用)
邊一個發明了返工
阻礙我藝術發展重重 (發展重重)
到了薪金兩萬元
我的青春就快用完
兩萬元兩萬元兩萬元
我有更多事沒法做完

我渴望有一個平原
沒有政府沒有治權
這平原這平原這平原
有好多個美女舞蹈團
邊一個發明了返工
唔係八婆就係八公 (就係八公)
邊一個發明了返工
返工喺度玩接龍 (玩接龍)
到了薪金三萬元
我哋都應該唔會有三萬元
三萬元三萬元三萬元
三萬元啲人通常都有啲串

我渴望這一個平原
畢業之後啲同學見唔完
見面唔會講買股票買車
結婚生仔買樓買船

Preservation overseas

- Multiple "Save Cantonese" groups in the US and in Canada
  - Community classes for heritage speakers (2nd generation whose dominant language is English) to learn Cantonese and reconnect with their root culture and family
  - Campaigns and events for knowing more about Cantonese
  - Libraries at Universities preserve the Cantonese books and resources
- Local and international linguists place focus on Cantonese, instead of Mandarin



What is waiting?

"Today Guangzhou Tomorrow Hong Kong" I

- Many fear that what happened in Guangzhou will soon happen in Hong Kong
  - the National Language policy (Gao, 2017), the corresponding education policies and the immigrants from other provinces have changed the linguistic situation in Guangzhou
    - The young generation has to learn Mandarin instead of Cantonese in schools, and communicate in Mandarin
    - The schools also value Mandarin higher than Cantonese
    - Radios and TV channels broadcasting in Cantonese must be shut down
  - The local community has held several protests to protect Cantonese against the decision, but has been unable to change the decision and reverse the depreciation of Cantonese's status in Guangzhou

"Today Guangzhou Tomorrow Hong Kong" II

- The policies already hint at the same direction of Cantonese in Hong Kong
  - China finds that the education in Hong Kong is problematic and claims that there is "the lack of patriotic teaching in schools" (Sautman & Xie, 2020)
  - The gloomy political situation: anticipation that the worst development is yet to come, and is irresistible

Shed a little bit of light I

- Hong Kongers realise how much we love our own language and culture, and we start cherishing it
- The network of protecting Cantonese grows stronger: local + overseas; cultural + language + literature
- Successful examples of language revitalisation in the world:
  - Welsh (a Celtic language spoken in Wales in the UK):
    - being suppressed and stigmatised for a few centuries
    - a bunch of efforts: forming Welsh-MOI school, music, radio station, television, and language classes open for foreigners... plus **United Kingdom government support and recognition**
    - From less than 5% native speakers after WWII to now over 30%

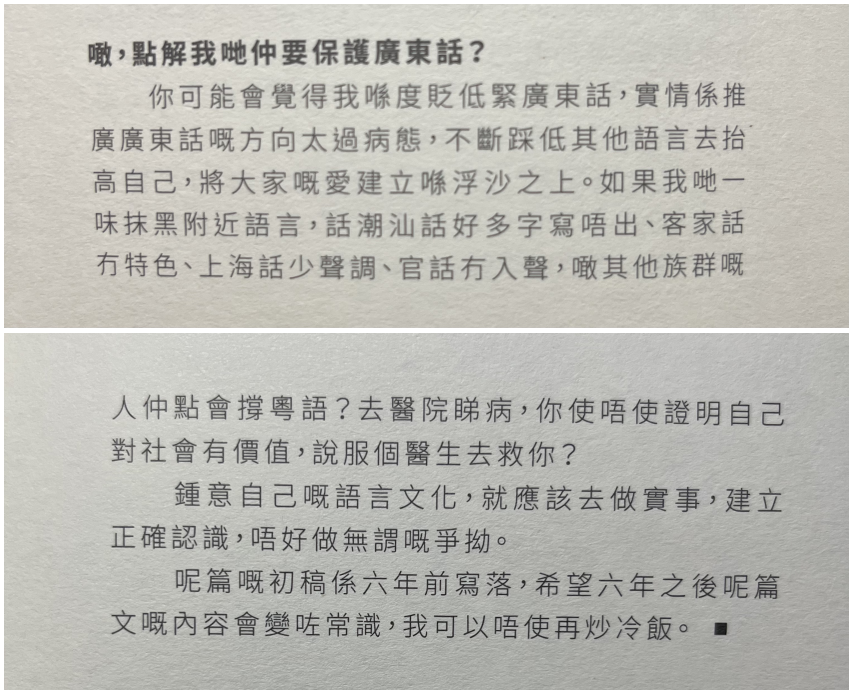
Shed a little bit of light II

- Taiwanese (台語):
  - being suppressed and forbidden during the White Terror period (1949-1991), the Taiwanese language was being marginalised and labelled as merely a "dialect" and "non-patriotic".
  - the native people have saved it through cultural production, offspring inheritance etc.
  - **The country's government has started campaigns to save the language**: making Taiwanese another official language and a compulsory subject.
  - Taiwan treats it as an important historical and cultural heritage in Taiwan, and for the identity of Taiwanese
  - Younger generation is more willing to learn and speak the language, and schools are offering classes

From me to you

- Language is not in a substitute relationship: acquiring one language does not necessarily sacrifice the other
  - I acquired both Cantonese and English simultaneously. Neither of the languages stopped me from learning the other
- The value of language is more than just its use (to earn money)
- A country with multiple languages is a plus, not a minus: more varieties, more aspects to explore, more facets of a place → more things to cherish, admire and love
- Patriotism is never forcible
- And we need you!

Thank you!



嗷，點解我哋仲要保護廣東話？

你可能會覺得我喺度貶低緊廣東話，實情係推廣廣東話嘅方向太過病態，不斷踩低其他語言去抬高自己，將大家嘅愛建立喺浮沙之上。如果我哋一味抹黑附近語言，話潮汕話好多字寫唔出、客家話冇特色、上海話少聲調、官話冇入聲，嗷其他族群嘅人仲點會撐粵語？去醫院睇病，你使唔使證明自己對社會有價值，說服個醫生去救你？

鍾意自己嘅語言文化，就應該去做實事，建立正確認識，唔好做無謂嘅爭拗。

呢篇嘅初稿係六年前寫落，希望六年之後呢篇文嘅內容會變咗常識，我可以唔使再炒冷飯。 ■

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