



Spring 2007

Medium of Instruction in Secondary Education in Post-Colonial Hong Kong: Why Chinese? Why English?

Wei Zeng
University of Pennsylvania

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.upenn.edu/wpel>

 Part of the [Education Commons](#), and the [Linguistics Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Zeng, W. (2007). Medium of Instruction in Secondary Education in Post-Colonial Hong Kong: Why Chinese? Why English?. 22 (1), Retrieved from <https://repository.upenn.edu/wpel/vol22/iss1/3>

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. <https://repository.upenn.edu/wpel/vol22/iss1/3>
For more information, please contact repository@pobox.upenn.edu.

Medium of Instruction in Secondary Education in Post-Colonial Hong Kong: Why Chinese? Why English?

Medium of Instruction in Secondary Education in Post-Colonial Hong Kong: Why Chinese? Why English?

Wei Zeng

University of Pennsylvania

In 1997, the majority of secondary schools in Hong Kong changed their medium of instruction from English to Chinese (Cantonese) due to a mandatory policy of the government. This paper reports on a case study on this change of medium of instruction policy by synthesizing related studies and reports. The analysis intends to explain why English is preferred as the medium of instruction for secondary schools, why and how the Hong Kong government implemented the policy while the dominant role of English as an international language becomes stronger and stronger, and what the interrelationship is between the policy and Hong Kong people's preference for English as the medium of instruction.

Introduction

In July 1997, Hong Kong's return to the People's Republic of China marked the end of its one-hundred-and-fifty-year history as a British colony. This meant a significant transition for its society. In the same year, the Department of Education issued two documents to all secondary schools regarding their medium of instruction (hereafter MOI): a consultation document in April entitled "Arrangements for Firm Guidance on Secondary Schools' Medium of Instruction" and its revision in September entitled "the Medium of Instruction Guidance for Secondary Schools" (Poon 1999). These two documents spelled out the Hong Kong government's mother-tongue education policy regarding its post-colonial "biliterate (in Chinese and English) and trilingual (in Cantonese, Mandarin and English)" language education policy. They also emphasized that all secondary schools should adopt Chinese as the MOI by default from the beginning of the academic year 1998-99 for all subjects other than English language and English literature, unless they could prove that their teaching staff and students were capable of teaching and learning through English (Lai 1999a). As a result of this mandatory change of MOI, three hundred and seven schools, or 70% of government and government-subsidized secondary schools at the time of

initial implementation, were converted from English-medium to Chinese-medium.

The rationale behind this government policy was mainly drawn from 1) internationally acknowledged benefits of mother-tongue education, and 2) educational research and Education Commission research reports. The research found that instruction delivered in English or a mixed code of English and Cantonese was unrealistic and ineffective and negatively influenced students' learning. For instance, the 1982 Llewellyn Report (in Tsui et al. 1999) described the secondary-school classrooms as follows:

Many Chinese speakers find it almost impossible to master English at the level of proficiency required for intricate thinking, and yet pupils from non-English speaking Chinese families have to express themselves in English at school. Under these conditions, more emphasis tends to be placed upon rote learning. If a pupil is expected to reformulate that which he or she has learned in English but has few words at his or her command to express these thoughts, what can be done except to regurgitate verbatim either notes taken during lessons or slabs from textbooks?...Many of the problems associated with schooling in Hong Kong – excessive hours of homework, quiescent pupils – are magnified, even if not caused, by the attempt to use English as a teaching medium for students (203).

Nevertheless, the mandatory implementation of this policy aroused strong and unprecedented reactions from the public, as a local English newspaper *South China Morning Post* reported on September 17, 1997: "Widespread fear and confusion about mother-tongue education have been revealed, just days before its compulsory introduction is to be formally announced" (cited in Poon 1999: 139). Schools saw the policy as socially divisive, taking away their autonomy, and among the schools that changed their MOI from English to Chinese, 66% of the principals thought their schools had been turned second-class because of this change (Tsui, Shum, Wong, Tse & Ki. 1999). Moreover, the policy was met with extensive resistance and resentment from parents, who worried that their children, after receiving schooling in Chinese, would not achieve a high-enough English proficiency level to be competitive in the labor market for a promising job. A fear permeated different social sectors, particularly in business, that the decrease of exposure to English would lead to a further decline in Hong Kong students' average English language proficiency and thus compromise the city's competitiveness and status as an international city (Lai & Byram 2003).

All these anxieties show that language in education policy is not only a school, but also a social issue. Parents' concern and public fear reveal the strong cause-and-effect relationship between education and economy in the educational philosophy of the given socio-cultural context, which is also reflected in the government's point of view regarding this issue.

For example, the Secretary for Education and Manpower, Professor Arthur K. C. Li commented on April 18, 2006 after his visit to Ireland and Switzerland that:

The success of an economy hinges on solid investment and extensive collaboration in the pursuit of quality education...there were a lot of similarities between Switzerland and Hong Kong. We are both economies supported by a strong financial services sector, and we rely very much on technology and tourism...Switzerland's education and manpower development strategies are therefore very relevant to us (Education and Manpower Bureau 2006c).

In addition, no huge disagreements in principle have been found between the government and the people, regarding the qualities and benefits of mother-tongue education (Kwok 1998). However, regardless of common ground in their educational philosophies and understandings of mother-tongue education, there has emerged a discrepancy between the government's rationale for its language in education policy and Hong Kong people's reactions towards the consequences of the policy. This discrepancy has resulted from differing assumptions about the cause-and-effect relationships between exposure to English and successful learning of the language and between one's English proficiency and a promising career.

The following analysis seeks to understand this discrepancy and its persistence in Hong Kong society from its implementation to the present. In doing so it addresses three principal questions: (1) Why is English the preferred MOI? (2) Why and how did the Hong Kong government implement the mandatory policy while the dominant role of English as an international language becomes stronger and stronger? (3) What is the interrelationship between the policy and Hong Kong people's preference for English as the MOI from the perspectives of parents, teachers and students? In his review of language planning and policy research, Ricento (2000) points out that "the key variable which separates the older, positivistic/technicist approaches from the newer critical/postmodern ones is agency, that is, *the role(s) of individuals and collectivities in the processes of language use, attitudes and ultimately policies*" [italics added], and thus proposes an important but as yet unanswered question to future LPP research, namely:

Why do individuals opt to use (or cease to use) particular languages and varieties for specified functions in different domains, and how do those choices influence – and how are they influenced by – institutional language policy decision-making (local to national and supranational)? (208).

Situated in the specific historical and socio-cultural context of Hong

Kong, this paper pays special attention to the roles of different collectivities, such as the government, parents, students and teachers, in order to capture the dynamic relationships among them in the policy making and implementation.

Why is English the Preferred Medium of Instruction?

This section explores why Hong Kong society prefers English, rather than the local language Cantonese, as the MOI in secondary schools. The discussion will be carried out under two themes: (1) the historical and present status of English in Hong Kong and (2) the history of English as the MOI in educational institutions.

History of English in Hong Kong

The English language enjoys a long history in association with Hong Kong. English arrived in southern China in 1637 with British trading ships. Alongside the development of trade and the increasing communication between local Chinese and foreign traders, an English variety, Chinese pidgin English, came into being and spread out in that area, including in Hong Kong, which was situated in the southern coast of China (Bolton 2002b). As a result of China's defeat in the Opium War in 1840, Hong Kong was ceded to Britain. From that time, English was the only official language of Hong Kong until 1974 when Chinese was given the status of co-official language. Yet English remained as the major language in the domains of government, law, education and business throughout the colonial history (Bolton 2002b). Furthermore, the colonial government made mastery of English as the prerequisite for access to civil service, higher education and British-based professional-qualification examinations, such as accountancy, medicine and engineering (Lin 1996). Consequently, English became a major criterion for the selection of local Chinese into the elite group.

The colonial history of Hong Kong came to an end with its handover to China in July 1997. Between the decolonization of this area and its internationalization, the use of Cantonese has increased by a large margin in the domains of government and law. Nevertheless, English has continued to spread in business, mass media, and personal domains, which corresponds to the English "fever" in East Asia as well as the rest of the world (Bolton 2000a). Fishman (1996) states that "the world of large scale of commerce, industry, technology and banking, like the world of certain human sciences and professions, is an international world and it is linguistically dominated by English almost everywhere, regardless of how well-established, well-protected local languages, cultures and identities may otherwise be" (628). Indeed, Hong Kong—the former British "crown jewel colony", named the "Oriental Pearl" by the Chinese for its dramatic economic development and financial prosperity since the

1960s—exemplifies the situation pointed out by Fishman. As the world's eleventh largest trading economy, sixth largest foreign exchange market, thirteenth largest banking center, tenth largest exporter of services and Asia's second biggest stock market, Hong Kong hosts the regional headquarters or offices of more than 3,800 international corporations (HKSAR government 2006). In mid-2004, its population was about 6.88 million, of which the foreign (i.e. non-Chinese) population reached 524,200 with the three largest groups coming from the Philippines, Indonesia, and the United States (Hong Kong SAR government 2006). All of these factors contribute to the continued prestige status of English in Hong Kong society and illustrate an interesting scenario that, "the end of a colonial era has not brought about a feeling of 'linguistic liberation' among Hongkongers; nor is there a popular outcry for the 'dehegemonization of English', as in many former British colonies" (Li 1999: 81). The common belief among Hong Kong people that high English proficiency results in better prospects in higher education and career advancement is still solidly maintained.

The historical and present status of English in Hong Kong reviewed above appears to illustrate Bourdieu's (1991) sociological vision of language as a form of cultural or symbolic capital, that is, available to be exchanged in the 'marketplace' of social interaction, and displays that English "was, is and will be a valuable cultural capital of elite social groups that parents want to transmit to their children through schooling because English will give them more symbolic capital and more economic, social, and political advantages, and power in the society" (Lai & Byram 2003). Yet, while there exist various ways of learning a second/foreign language, why do Hong Kong people, especially the parents, insist on schooling in English? Examining the history of English as the MOI in educational institutions may help in answering this question.

History of English as Medium of Instruction in Hong Kong Schools

For more than 200 years, English was embraced as the MOI in the schools of Hong Kong, although how it was used in what kinds of schools varied at different periods of time. After Hong Kong was ceded to Britain, many mission schools were established and later developed into Anglo-Chinese schools, in which English was the MOI and English prints were used as textbooks and materials (Bolton 2002b). The first higher educational institution that employed English as its only MOI was the University of Hong Kong, established in 1911. In 1963, Chinese University of Hong Kong was founded to enhance the status of education in Chinese, but English was still employed as the MOI in some departments. However, not until the early 1970s did elementary and secondary education become universalized, so among the local Chinese, only children of families of higher socio-economic status were able to complete a secondary education before this period (Bolton 2002b). These children

went through English-medium schools at the elementary and secondary levels with only Chinese language and literacy classes taught in Chinese, and then proceeded to an English-medium university. After finishing their schooling, they could easily find a job in the more prestigious professions, such as the civil service, business, and law, because they were bilingual in Chinese and English and in these professions English was the dominant language, as discussed in the last section. Hence, “a system of *elitist bilingualism* existed within education” (Bolton 2002b: 34). However, from the time of the educational reform in the early 1970s, children from families of lower socio-economic status were given equal access to elementary and secondary education and therefore more opportunities for higher education, which led to the shift from “*elitist bilingualism*” to “*mass bilingualism*” (Bolton 2002b: 34).

The number of Anglo-Chinese schools increased dramatically at the request of parents, who expected their children to acquire English for better jobs and higher social status, but the MOI of these schools gradually became a code-switching between English and Chinese, which was not accepted by the Hong Kong government (Boyle 1995). From then on, the medium of instruction in educational institution has remained controversial due to the status of English and the government’s policies. Insisting on the purity of the MOI, the government published a policy proposal in 1973 to change the MOI in lower grades of secondary schools from English to Cantonese. However, extensive opposition from the public, and from parents in particular, influenced the government’s decision to adopt a policy that left the choice of MOI to school principals (Bolton 2002a). In consequence, by 1992 90% of secondary schools had chosen English as their MOI, yet 90% of elementary schools had been changed to Chinese-medium due to students’ difficulty in comprehending content in a second language (Boyle 1995). Meanwhile, teachers’ classroom instruction in English, on average, decreased from 43% in the 1980s to 15% in the 1990s (Boyle 1997). Switched-code teaching was widely accepted among secondary school teachers (Pennington 1998).

The increase in the number of English-medium secondary schools and the decrease of English in class instruction had aroused many concerns of educators and government officials in colonial Hong Kong, who disapproved of code-switching and viewed it as *Chinglish*. *Chinglish*, literally meaning a mixture of Chinese and English, refers to the regional English variety in Hong Kong, of which a prominent feature is the code-switching between English and Cantonese (Lin 1996). Even though Hong Kong English can be codified as a variety of English, concerning its accent, vocabulary, history, literary creativity and reference works, it has been perceived in Hong Kong society as a decline in the average English proficiency of the population, and its speakers are regarded as defective English learners (Bolton 2000a). For instance, as mentioned earlier, the Llewellyn Report pointed out that only a small group of elite students

benefited from the English-medium instruction and the Hong Kong government should consider adopting Cantonese as the MOI in lower grades of secondary schools (Tsui, Shum, Wong, Tse & Ki 1999). To respond to this report, the Hong Kong government has issued an Education Commission Report every other year since 1984, addressing the question of language in education. As time went on in 1990s, a call for changing the MOI from English to Cantonese in secondary schools became more insistent within the government, claiming that the mixture of English and Cantonese in school instruction caused a decline in secondary school students’ English language proficiency (Boyle 1997). At the same time, research studies on English immersion education showed that these programs had not benefited children’s English proficiency greatly (Yu & Atkinson 1988a, 1988b). Nonetheless, the public insisted that adopting English as the MOI was a better way for the learning of the language.

In sum, although the status of English is well acknowledged by the Hong Kong government and the public, there is some controversy regarding which language should serve as the MOI in secondary schools. This may be due to the following factors. Firstly, the prestigious status of English fostered by colonial government policies and their influence on education, employment and social status led to a strong demand for learning English among the local people. Secondly, the large number of Anglo-Chinese schools, which resulted from the public request, reinforced the strong public belief in the effect of English immersion education on children’s achievement of high English proficiency, despite the schools’ apparent inability to meet the parents’ expectation in educational reports. Lastly, although both parents and the government depreciated *Chinglish*, the parents viewed its instructional use as providing more input in students’ English learning as well as a connection between Cantonese and English. Therefore, the government’s binary choice between English-only education and mother-tongue education could coordinate with Hong Kong people’s needs in and understanding of English language learning.

Why and How Did the Hong Kong Government Mandate the Change of Medium of Instruction Policy?

As discussed in the previous section, the colonial government of Hong Kong made several proposals to change the MOI in secondary schools, which were supported by educational research. Nevertheless, due to extensive public resistance, these proposals were not implemented. Knowledge of this history helped explain how public preference for English had influenced and delayed the implementation of the mother-tongue education policy. Drawing upon the second part of Ricento’s (2000) question, i.e. “... and how do those choices influence – and how

are they influenced by – institutional language policy decision-making (local to national and supranational)?” (208), this section discusses how and why this change of MOI policy finally came into being before Hong Kong’s turnover and how it has been carried out since then.

The Decision-Making Process of the Change of MOI Policy

In the field of language planning and policy, there seems to be an ongoing theoretical discussion about the definitions of language policy and language planning as well as their relationship. From a problem-solving point of view, Haugen (1966: 52) states that language planning (LP) “is called for wherever there are language problems. If a linguistic situation for any reasons is felt to be unsatisfactory, there is room for a program of LP”. Reviewing twelve definitions of language planning, Cooper (1989) suggests a definition of language planning based on behavioral other than problem solving theories: “*Language planning refers to deliberate efforts to influence the behavior of others with respect to the acquisition, structure, or functional allocation of their language codes*” (45) and points out that “language policy sometimes appears as a synonym for language planning but more often it refers to the goals of language planning” (29). While the sequence of which term comes before the other exists in a working question regarding a specific context, the integrated term of *language planning and policy* reveals them as two connected aspects of an integral whole and explains why often they are used interchangeably. Regarding this, Hornberger (2005) provides an integrative framework for language planning and policy as a synthesis of several policy models proposed by different scholars, and notes that a balance of theory and practice constantly exists in the field of language planning and policy. In the case of Hong Kong, Poon (2000) maintains that the language policy, i.e. change of MOI policy or mother-tongue education policy, derives from language planning and becomes part of the process of language planning when it operates at a governmental level.

For more than a hundred years, educators, local and overseas, have advocated using Chinese as an MOI in schools in Hong Kong. In the 1860s, Frederick Stewart, the first inspector of government schools, pointed out that too much emphasis had been placed on English in schools at the expense of Chinese and cautioned that there should not be any attempt to “denationalize” the young people of Hong Kong (cited in Bickley 1990: 294). However, prior to 1973, the Hong Kong government did not have any firm policy pertaining to MOI, and thus the selection of MOI by schools and the selection of schools by parents went through a “social selection” process (Poon 2000). In 1973, the Hong Kong government officially promoted Chinese as the MOI in secondary schools due to the impact of a series of anti-colonial movements (Boyle 1995). Ever since then, a political agenda regarding the MOI emerged and became more and more salient after the Sino-British agreement on Hong Kong’s future

was signed in 1984 (Lai 1999a). Promotion of Chinese-medium instruction has been reiterated as policy statements consecutively in the Education Commission reports from 1984 to 1996 (Lai & Byram 2003).

The EC report in 1984 argued against mandating Chinese as the MOI by saying: “Chinese is likely to assume greater significance while English will still be essential as an international means of communication in commerce and industry. For Hong Kong to retain its position as a leading international center of finance, trade and industry, we are convinced that bilingualism is essential...Education should allow the greatest possible development for students having regard to their different needs and aptitudes” (Education Commission 1984). However, in the fourth EC report in 1990, the government emphasized the difficulties that children encountered in learning through English, recognized that Chinese was undervalued as an MOI, and argued for the change of MOI (Education Commission 1990):

We believe that the expansion of tertiary places and the provision of bridging courses to help Chinese-medium students adjust to English-medium tertiary education should improve this situation. Moreover, as Chinese is increasingly placed on an equal basis with English for legal and administrative purposes, the civil service is localized and the awareness of a Chinese identity is enhanced towards 1997, parental views may change over time.

This passage also shows that parental objection, which had previously been used by the government as a reason for not mandating Chinese medium in schools, was devalued.

However, due to the strong preference of parents, students and the business sector for English as the MOI, the government did not transform the statements into the mother-tongue education policy, but launched a policy that encouraged secondary schools to adopt Chinese as the MOI and reduce mixed-code instruction (Education Commission 1990). Schools were therefore grouped into three types: Chinese-medium, English-medium and two-medium. In addition, a series of supporting measures have been offered since 1986 to encourage mother-tongue education, such as providing additional teachers of English, additional classrooms, additional wireless induction loop systems and additional library grants to enhance English learning in Chinese-medium schools; opening in-service training courses for teachers of Chinese-medium secondary schools; and approving publication of over 160 sets of Chinese-medium text books (Poon 1999).

Perceiving the non-compliance of schools in regard to choice of MOI, the government issued two guidance documents in 1997 to help fully implement the change of medium of instruction from English to Chinese in secondary schools. Ever since Hong Kong’s turnover in July 1997, the

policy has been reinforced and strictly implemented, as described in the introduction of the paper.

Implementation of the Change of MOI Policy

As a response to people's strong disagreement with the policy, the Hong Kong government has developed several assisting measures, in addition to the existing ones from 1986, in order to provide supplies and support for schools to maintain and improve the quality of English education. In 1998, the government introduced the Native-speaking English Teachers (NET) Scheme to address the public concern about Hong Kong students' further declining proficiency in English (Lai 1999b). A target of 700 NETs were to be recruited from overseas to teach English language in local secondary schools. From September 1998, after the NET Scheme was introduced, every Hong Kong secondary school was entitled to up to two native-speaking English teachers. However, this target was not met in reality due to the difficulty of recruiting a sufficient number of teachers. Furthermore, the scheme has been criticized for having no theoretical and empirical support to prove its effectiveness in the Hong Kong educational context, and for acting more as a political placebo to placate the disturbed public than an educational remedy for improvement in English language teaching (Lai 1999b).

Another follow-up measure of the policy to ensure the quality of language teaching and learning is administrating a benchmark examination to access English and Chinese teachers' language proficiency. In order to "promote effective teaching and enhance the quality of education," to "provide an objective reference against which teachers' proficiency can be gauged to help them pursue continuous professional development," and to "ensure that all language teachers possess at least basic language proficiency," the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) of Hong Kong has set language benchmarks for English language teachers, named Language Proficiency Requirements (LPR). The EMB has also stipulated that beginning in 2001 all in-service and pre-service English language teachers, are required to meet the LPR within a certain period of time through applying for either assessment or exemption by providing sufficient evidence of meeting the government's requirements (Education and Manpower Bureau 2000a). As a result, a standardized test called Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (English Language) (hereafter LPATE) has been developed by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) and the EMB. It was first administered in 2001. The test is to "determine a teacher candidate's English language ability for the effective teaching of English in primary and secondary school classrooms in Hong Kong" (Education and Manpower Bureau 2000b) and consists of five tests, i.e. Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking and Classroom Language Assessment, with five criterion-referenced levels of performance ranging from "well-above" to "well below

the benchmark."

The discussion about decision-making and implementation of the language in education policy of Hong Kong in this section has demonstrated that although the Hong Kong government claimed the change of MOI in secondary schools was an educational decision, its documents and related policies from 1970s to 1997 seemed to reveal an underlying political cause for the abrupt and mandatory change from 1997 to 1998. The discussion has also tried to answer, within the decision-making framework, who the decision makers were, what and how the decisions were made, and why. As Poon (1999) points out, during the process of making and implementing the change of MOI policy, language planning in terms of status and acquisition was carried out to encourage and reinforce the status of Chinese as the MOI, and to ensure and improve the quality of English language teaching and learning. The following section addresses the interrelationship between the general public preference for English as the MOI in secondary schools and the mother-tongue education policy.

What is the Interrelationship between the Public Preference for English and the Change of Medium of Instruction Policy?

The discussion on the interrelationship between the preference for English as the MOI in Hong Kong and the change of MOI policy will focus on parents', students', and teachers' responses to the new policy.

Parents

As described in the earlier sections, parental concern and choices seemed to have played an influential role, more or less, in the launching of the language in education policy of Hong Kong. However, with a top-down mandatory policy like the one issued in 1997, their influence has declined. What is interesting about parents' attitudes is that in terms of educational implications, there are no huge disagreements between the government and the people over the issue that use of mother tongue can enhance learning (Kwok 1998). For instance, a survey conducted immediately after the introduction of the policy showed that 89.6% of students and 90.1% of parents felt that classroom learning could be more effective in Chinese and 96.8% of students and 93.2% of parents believe that the motivation for learning could be raised (Lai & Byram 2003). There were, however, inherent worries about the language change. First, students feared the switch to Chinese would negatively influence their chances of finding a job or getting a place at university, because the majority of departments in most universities of Hong Kong are English-medium (Kwok 1998). Second, parents showed great concern about the negative labeling effects of Chinese-medium schools on their children. As some elite schools are still allowed to continue using English as the MOI, par-

ents preferred sending children to English-medium schools because they believed the quality of students in English-medium schools is higher than that of Chinese-medium schools (Kwok 1998). Therefore, to a certain extent, the change of MOI from English to Chinese has further reinforced the prestigious status of English in Hong Kong society, an ironic consequence considering the political agenda of implementing mother-tongue education.

Language policies have been described as “an outcome of power struggles” (Tollefson 1995: 2). In the case of Hong Kong, parental concerns seem to have been translated into the government’s special attention to the implementation of its policy and possible effects, and thus lead to some bottom-up influence on language planning. To support its policy in the face of parental concern and resistance, the government has founded the Support Center for Using Chinese as the Medium of Instruction at the University of Hong Kong, which is the most prestigious comprehensive university in Hong Kong. The center, in cooperation with Education Commission, has conducted surveys and empirical studies to document the results and impact of Chinese MOI (Poon 2000). For instance, it was reported that the effect of teaching and learning in Chinese-medium schools was satisfactory. Although some teachers’ Chinese proficiency did not reach the standard and a few still gave students written feedback in English, the students were more lively in class than their counterparts in English-medium schools, and the teachers could ask more challenging questions that stimulated critical thinking (Poon 2000). In another study conducted by the Support Center for Using Chinese as the MOI, more than two thousand students from the top English-medium and Chinese-medium schools were surveyed to find out the impact of Chinese-medium instructions on students’ self-image, for which the initial finding was that there was not much difference between these two groups of students (Lai 1999a). Meanwhile, the Education Commission has published annual reports that record students’ academic performance in major subjects, including Chinese, English, math, science and social science (Education Commission 2005).

Students

Even though students are the participants influenced most by this language planning, they seemed to assume a passive role in the process of decision making. There appeared to be more attention to the opinions of the government, parents, teachers, and the business sector in the literature on this topic published before 1997. However, it seems to me that after the mandatory implementation of the change of MOI policy, more studies concerned with students’ attitudes have been conducted by educational researchers in Hong Kong. In a qualitative research on students’ feedback on MOI, 12 students from Chinese-medium schools and

English-medium schools respectively were interviewed (Kwok 1999). More than half of the Chinese-medium students interviewed said that their motivation for learning, thinking and comprehension ability had been enhanced, and significant progress in their studies had been made because of Chinese-medium instruction. On the other hand, they felt discriminated against by those whose bias about Chinese-medium schools was deeply rooted. By contrast, the numbers of English-medium students who found lessons easy to understand and learned in a happy and relaxed environment were rather small.

With different studies carried out on various topics, the findings regarding students’ attitudes are mixed. The impact of the policy on students’ English learning is of major concern. In Poon’s (2000) field work in four schools after the implementation of the policy, a principal compared students motivation for learning English before and after 1996 when the school’s MOI was changed to Chinese. He noted that his current students were less motivated to learn English because English was no longer of essential importance to them and their proficiency in English no longer affected the results in other subjects. Formerly his students wanted to improve their English because English was the MOI, and poor English could result in poor performance in content areas. Thus, importance should be attached to these different research results by the government, instead of mainly focusing on the positive effects of mother-tongue education.

Teachers

In terms of teachers, as discussed in the last section, the most influential impact of the policy on teachers is the administration of the benchmark examination for English and Chinese language teachers. Before the launching of this exam, the only requirement for teaching English in Hong Kong was to pass the HKCEE (Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination) in English and thus it was not necessary for teachers of English in Hong Kong to possess either a relevant degree in the subject, or a foreign language degree, or a professional teaching qualification (Glenwright 2005). Therefore, all in-service and pre-service English teachers are, to some extent, “forced to learn” by this “top-down, business-driven government benchmarking agenda” and shoulder the responsibility for the public blame on the government’s changed policy regarding English teaching (Glenwright 2005: 89). From 2001 to the present, the benchmark examination has been administered twice a year. Unfortunately, its passing rate has been continuously lower than expected, and so has drawn negative attention to English teachers’ teaching competence and language proficiency. Therefore, the quality of English education and how best to improve it has become quite controversial. The benchmark test seems to have directed parents’ dissatisfaction about

the change of MOI policy to local English teachers for their unsatisfactory performance in the benchmark test, while the government has been criticized by educational researchers for using a test with no empirically supported validity and reliability (Glenwright 2005).

Conclusion

Based on a synthesis of studies and government reports on Hong Kong's change of MOI policy, i.e. mother-tongue education policy, this paper has tried to explain why English is preferred as the MOI, how and why Hong Kong government implemented the mandatory mother-tongue education policy, and what is the interrelationship between the public, including parents, students and teachers, and the government within its policy. Across three sections of discussion, what has emerged is the dynamics of language planning and policy as a continual contest going between the planner and the planned. Indeed, language planning and policy in secondary education in post-colonial Hong Kong is still a question of on-going debate and negotiation. On the one hand, the social disfavor of Chinese-medium instruction has its colonial as well as social and economic roots, which cannot be corrected overnight (Lai & Byram 2003). On the other hand, many questions seem to remain unanswered. For instance, while people prefer to have schooling in English, is there any empirical evidence on the question of whether elementary students in Hong Kong, after finishing six-year education in Chinese, have acquired English proficiency high enough to learn and perform in different content areas through English-medium instruction? Given the common belief that language immersion can help second language learning, which teaching methods are specifically more effective for Hong Kong students' to learn English? In the last couple of years, educational researchers have advocated a middle-ground policy that can both address the benefits of mother-tongue education as well as the socio-cultural context of Hong Kong (Lai & Byram 2003). Considering the spread of English today and the increasing introduction of English to younger children, the case of Hong Kong can serve as reference and inspiration for other Asian countries and regions when they consider implementing bilingual programs or including more English instruction.

Wei Zeng is currently a doctoral student in Educational Linguistics in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania. Her research interests are second language acquisition, English language teaching in second-and-foreign-language contexts, bilingual education, language assessment, cross-cultural pragmatics and psycholinguistics.

Email: weizeng@dolphin.upenn.ed

References

- Bickley, G. (1990). Attitudes towards English language learning in Hong Kong – Frederick Stewart's evidence. *World Englishes*, 9(3), 289-300.
- Bolton, K. (2002a). Hong Kong English: Autonomy and creativity. In K. Bolton, (Ed.), *Hong Kong English: Autonomy and creativity* (pp. 1-25). Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Bolton, K. (2002b). The sociolinguistics of Hong Kong and the space for Hong Kong English. In K. Bolton, (Ed.), *Hong Kong English: Autonomy and creativity* (pp. 29-55). Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Boyle, J. (1995). Hong Kong's educational system: English or Chinese? *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 8(3), 291-302.
- Boyle, J., & Tomlinson, R. (1995). Job interviews in Hong Kong. *English Today*, 11(3), 36-39.
- Boyle, J. (1997). English in Hong Kong. *English Today*, 13(3), 3-6.
- Cooper, R.L. (1989). *Language planning and social change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Education Commission. (1984). *Education Commission report*. Retrieved April 22, 2006, from http://www.e-c.edu.hk/eng/search_index.html
- Education Commission. (1990). *Education Commission report*. Retrieved April 22, 2006, from http://www.e-c.edu.hk/eng/search_index.html
- Education Commission. (2005). *Education Commission report*. Retrieved April 23, 2006, from http://www.e-c.edu.hk/eng/search_index.html
- Education and Manpower Bureau. (2000a). *Language proficiency requirements for teachers: Background*. Retrieved April 18, 2006, from <http://www.emb.gov.hk/index.aspx?nodeid=1362&langno=1>
- Education and Manpower Bureau. (2000b). *Language proficiency requirements for teachers: Syllabus specifications for the Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (English Language)*. Retrieved April 18, 2006, from <http://www.emb.gov.hk/index.aspx?nodeid=1411&langno=1>
- Education and Manpower Bureau. (2006c). *Education is key to success of economies*. Retrieved April 20, 2006, from <http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/200604/18/P200604180224.htm>.
- Fishman, J. (1996). Summary and interpretation: Post-imperial English 1940-1990. In J. Fishman, A.W. Conrad, & A. Rubal-Lopez, (Eds.), *Post-imperial English: Status change in former British and American colonies, 1940-1990* (pp. 623-641). New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Glenwright, P. (2005). Grammar error strike hard: Language proficiency testing of Hong Kong teachers and the four "Noes". *Journal of Language, Identity and Education*, 4(3), 201-226.
- Haugen, E. (1966). *Language conflict and language planning: The case of modern Norwegian*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hong Kong SAR government. (2006). *About Hong Kong*. Retrieved April 20, 2006, from <http://www.info.gov.hk/info/hkbrief/eng/ahk.htm>.
- Hornberger, N.H. (2005). Frameworks and models in language policy and plan-

- ning. In T. Ricento (Ed.), *An introduction to language policy*. New York: Blackwell Publishing.
- Kwok, H.K. (1998). Mother tongue education and changing language environments of Hong Kong. In H.K. Kwok & S.L. Chan (Eds.), *The theory and practice of mother tongue education* (pp. 56-69). Hong Kong: Hong Kong Teachers' Association.
- Lai, M. (1999a). Hong Kong: Language and education in a post-colonial era. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 12(3), 191-195.
- Lai, M. (1999b). Jet and Net: A comparison of native-speaking English teachers schemes in Japan and Hong Kong. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 12(3), 215-229.
- Lai, P., & Byram, M. (2003). The politics of bilingualism: A reproduction analysis of the policy of mother tongue education in Hong Kong after 1997. *Compare*, 33(3), 315-334.
- Li, D.C.S. (1999). The functions and status of English in Hong Kong: A post-1997 update. *English World-Wide*, 20(1), 67-110.
- Lin, A.M.Y. (1996). Bilingualism or linguistic segregation? Symbolic domination, resistance and code switching in Hong Kong schools. *Linguistics and Education*, 8, 49-84.
- Pennington, M. (1998). The folly of language planning: Or a brief history of the English language in Hong Kong. *English Today*, 14(2), 25-30.
- Poon, A.Y.K. (1999). Chinese medium instruction policy and its impact on English learning in post-1997 Hong Kong. *Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 2(2), 131-146.
- Poon, A.Y.K. (2000). *Medium of instruction in Hong Kong: Policy and practice*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Ricento, T. (2000). Historical and theoretical perspectives in language policy and planning. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 4(2), 196-213.
- Tollefson, J.W. (1995). *Power and inequality in language education*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Tsui, A.B.M., Shum, M.S.K., Wong, C.K., Tse, S.K., & Ki, W.W. (1999). Which agenda? Medium of instruction policy in post-1997 Hong Kong. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 12 (3), 196-214.
- Yu, V.W.S., & Atkinson, P.A. (1988a). An investigation of the language difficulties experienced by Hong Kong secondary school students in English-medium schools: I the problems. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 9(3), 267-284.
- Yu, V.W.S., & Atkinson, P.A. (1988b). An investigation of the language difficulties experienced by Hong Kong secondary school students in English-medium schools: II some causal factors. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 9(4), 307-322.