Cantonese Language Maintenance In Guangzhou Through The Lens Of Migrant Families’ Language Learning Investment

Yeting Liu
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Abstract
The study is situated in Guangzhou. From the inception of China’s economic reform in 1980s, this city has been a southern hub for migrant workers from various socioeconomic backgrounds. As a historically Cantonese-speaking city, its linguistic ecology has been complicated by the national push for Putonghua (standardized Mandarin) and the influx of the migrant population who have different home languages and are assumed to opt for Putonghua as their lingua franca in Guangzhou. In the past decade, there were multiple incidents in which language advocates opposed and proposed local policies, fearing a language shift from Cantonese to Putonghua. In public discourse, the migrant population often gets blamed for that presumed shift. But have migrants learned Cantonese during their stay in Guangzhou? And are they motivated to learn? To find out how migrants contribute to this so-called Cantonese crisis, the researcher conducted a fifteen-month ethnographic study in one primary and one middle school in Guangzhou. These two public schools have received a large number of migrant students which accounted for half of their student populations. Informed by the language investment model (Darvin & Norton, 2015), a sociological approach to language learning motivation that takes into account the social positioning of language learners, and an ethnographic approach to language policy and planning that examines policy making and implementation at various levels accounting for both structure and agency (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007), the researcher administered questionnaires to 321 students and their parents (58% of whom were migrants without Guangzhou Hukou) from four grades, collecting demographic information and self-reported results on their language proficiencies, learning interests, and language use in different domains. This was followed up by participant observation in the schools, individual and group interviews with students, teachers and school administrators, linguistic autobiographies and family visits with focal students. Based on all the ethnographic data and questionnaire results, the researcher finds that the majority of migrant parents were active and successful learners of Cantonese while the children did not attain the same high level especially in speaking. This generational difference is intriguing as it disproves blanket statements claiming that the influx of migrant workers and their families caused the Cantonese crisis. In addition, the time of arrival and the socioeconomic resources adult migrants had when they first came to Guangzhou may have influenced their residential choice, social circles, and thus their investment in learning Cantonese. In particular, migrant parents in my study who came to this city with few resources but managed to make a living in service and sales were more likely to learn Cantonese as the language was related to their upward mobility. As for migrant students, unlike their parents’ more instrumental approach, their Cantonese language learning interest derived from affect, namely their socializing needs with peers and sense of belonging to the city of Guangzhou. So even though their self-reported language use suggested the majority of them were dominant in Putonghua, they are still quite invested in learning and improving their Cantonese. Through analyzing the institutional structure in schools and discursive practices of teachers and students and their underlying ideologies, the researcher also finds there are still ideological and implementational obstacles to overcome and avoid in order to pry open the spaces for either natural acquisition or formal instruction of Cantonese in school settings.

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CANTONESE LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE IN GUANGZHOU THROUGH THE LENS OF MIGRANT FAMILIES’ LANGUAGE LEARNING INVESTMENT

Yeting Liu

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CANTONESE LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE IN GUANGZHOU THROUGH THE LENS OF MIGRANT FAMILIES’ LANGUAGE LEARNING INVESTMENT

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ABSTRACT

CANTONESE LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE IN GUANGZHOU THROUGH THE LENS OF MIGRANT FAMILIES’ LANGUAGE LEARNING INVESTMENT

Yeting Liu
Nancy H. Hornberger

The study is situated in Guangzhou. From the inception of China’s economic reform in 1980s, this city has been a southern hub for migrant workers from various socioeconomic backgrounds. As a historically Cantonese speaking city, its linguistic ecology has been complicated by the national push for Putonghua (standardized Mandarin) and the influx of the migrant population who have different home languages and are assumed to opt for Putonghua as their lingua franca in Guangzhou. In the past decade, there were multiple incidents in which language advocates opposed and proposed local policies, fearing a language shift from Cantonese to Putonghua. In public discourse, the migrant population often gets blamed for that presumed shift. But have migrants learned Cantonese during their stay in Guangzhou? And are they motivated to learn?

To find out how migrants contribute to this so-called Cantonese crisis, the researcher conducted a fifteen-month ethnographic study in one primary and one middle school in Guangzhou. These two public schools have received a large number of migrant students which accounted for half of their student populations. Informed by the language investment model (Darvin & Norton, 2015), a sociological approach to language learning motivation that takes into account the social positioning of language learners, and an ethnographic approach to language policy and planning that examines policy making and implementation at various levels accounting for both structure and agency (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007), the researcher administered questionnaires to 321 students and their parents (58% of whom were migrants without Guangzhou Hukou) from four grades, collecting demographic information and self-reported results on their language proficiencies, learning interests, and language use in different domains. This was followed up by participant observation in the schools, individual and group interviews with students, teachers and school administrators, linguistic autobiographies and family visits with focal students.
Based on all the ethnographic data and questionnaire results, the researcher finds that the majority of migrant parents were active and successful learners of Cantonese while the children did not attain the same high level especially in speaking. This generational difference is intriguing as it disproves blanket statements claiming that the influx of migrant workers and their families caused the Cantonese crisis. In addition, the time of arrival and the socioeconomic resources adult migrants had when they first came to Guangzhou may have influenced their residential choice, social circles, and thus their investment in learning Cantonese. In particular, migrant parents in my study who came to this city with few resources but managed to make a living in service and sales were more likely to learn Cantonese as the language was related to their upward mobility.

As for migrant students, unlike their parents’ more instrumental approach, their Cantonese language learning interest derived from affect, namely their socializing needs with peers and sense of belonging to the city of Guangzhou. So even though their self-reported language use suggested the majority of them were dominant in Putonghua, they are still quite invested in learning and improving their Cantonese. Through analyzing the institutional structure in schools and discursive practices of teachers and students and their underlying ideologies, the researcher also finds there are still ideological and implementational obstacles to overcome and avoid in order to pry open the spaces for either natural acquisition or formal instruction of Cantonese in school settings.
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Chapter 1. Introduction

High mobility is the hallmark of this globalized world. Transnational and domestic migration everywhere has prompted reflection upon and hyper-attention to migrants in relation to issues such as social integration, security, diversity and the lack thereof, across many contexts. Language cannot escape these massive sociopolitical processes. The ever-complex language ecology in metropolis, due to the influx of speakers of different languages, has been constantly evolving, during which some languages are endangered whereas others are thriving (Hornberger, 2002). In other words, not all the languages are equally valued and the language ecology may be very fragile. Institutional endorsement and personal preference underlain by various language ideologies such as cultural pride, national/ethnic identity, and socioeconomic imperative have given rise to the hegemony of certain languages or a particular variety, and the marginalization of others, which to some extent reflect relations of social inequality (Phillips, 2004).

1.1 The problem

In the city of Guangzhou, a southern first tier city in China where the data collection for my dissertation took place, Cantonese has been losing its grip on status of local lingua franca to Putonghua, China’s national language. The local residents are upset about the future prospects for their mother tongue when they see more children living in Guangzhou have become dominant in Putonghua. The unspoken and unattended rivalry between Cantonese and Putonghua eventually gave rise to more explicit protests in the street and other efforts to reverse ongoing displacement of Cantonese in many domains. As a student of language policy and planning, for this phenomenon, I first look to the national language policy to promote the national language Putonghua, which has been vigorously implemented for two decades. However, when I read through locals’ venting online, I often came across the sentiment to blame the decreasing vitality of Cantonese on the growing number of migrants coming to Guangzhou, who were accused of not adapting to the local language use and of changing the language ecology in Guangzhou by speaking Putonghua. While I am not surprised to see such discourse since there have been cases in international contexts where immigrants speaking another home language get blamed and treated as a threat (Duchène & Heller, 2008) and the locals have the right to maintain their language if they see an emerging language shift, I find it urgent to elucidate
the role of migrants in this so-called Cantonese crisis, especially when migrant populations are a minoritized social group in China. Is the blame on migrants justified in the case of Cantonese in Guangzhou?

In order to adapt to everyday living mediated by the languages of the social majority, migrants always have to navigate the oftentimes unspoken linguistic hierarchy, and make decisions about language learning for themselves and sometimes for their children. Migrants’ contribution to the language diversity in their hosting city very often goes unnoticed and their language practices are sometimes stigmatized as nuisances and even threats to security. For many migrant children who grow up in multilingual host cities, though influenced by how parents and the wider society perceive the value of different languages, their desires and commitment to learn languages other than their home language is also determined by their own perception of the languages, their social positions and future vision (Norton 2013; Dörnyei, 2005). In other words, children are not a blank canvas unconditionally reflecting the exact influence from broad sociopolitical brushstrokes. What language(s) does a resident of this city normally speak? What languages do I need to learn to belong to this city and equally participate in city life with my urban/local peer? Do I need to learn English even if I don’t really use it in my life? Migrant children, whose educational and social experiences take place mostly in their hosting city, might answer these questions differently from their adult parents. It’s also worth noting that their very lived experience and participation in their hosting city also contribute to the evolving linguistic landscape and the linguistic profile of the urban residents (Liang, 2015).

For relocated people, “a sense of belonging, social inclusion, access to citizenship” (Pittaway, 2013, p. 169) are the basic criteria for social integration. Language has been found a key factor in this process, yet affecting migrant adults and children in different ways. In China, the lack of proficiency in the local language in the receiving region has been found contributing to the enlarged social distance between adult migrants and locals (Shi, 2010). However, children, with their advantage in picking up languages, gradually develop some proficiency in it in a naturalistic way. The more proficient they are in the local language, the more adapted to the urban life (Hu, 2007). Though not definitive, this might contribute to the finding that inter-generational transmission of social distance is not very strong among migrant children (Xu, 2009). In addition, social integration is never a uni-directional process (Ager & Strang, 2008). In a large project investigating immigrant youth’s sociocultural and psychological adaptations in 13 countries, researchers
found those youths who “retain both a sense of their own heritage cultural identity while establishing ties with the larger national society” adapted best (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006, p. 304). This group of youth, despite their low socioeconomic status, had high proficiency in the dominant language of the hosting society, average proficiency in their heritage language, and a balanced use of both. They also had contact with both immigrant and local peer groups while still identifying with their own family values. It is not hard to tell that for migrants to socially integrate, the language juggle is an inevitable process which involves their agency, resilience and external social influences.

Through the lens of adults’ and children’s investment in learning Cantonese in the city of Guangzhou in China, this study sets out to investigate how this socially minoritized and yet resilient group perceives and manages their language resources in relation to their social adaptation to and identification with their multilingual host city. In this chapter, I will first contextualize migrants’ social positions by articulating the genesis of this group and the hardships it faces, in particular the institutional barriers migrant children experience in their families’ quest to secure affordable and quality education in urban China. Then I will historicize the dominance of the national standard language in China and its competition with the prestigious regional lingua franca in Guangzhou.

1.2 The genesis of migrants and their hardships

The most popular migrant destinations in China are in economically developed eastern and south China where distinct Chinese regional languages are spoken (New Citizen Program, 2014). For many, their adaptation to a city with a new language ecology is critical to their social integration. Their language learning desire reflecting their plan to increase their linguistic capital might be mediated by both pragmatic considerations such as linguistically blending into their hosting city, and the gap between their current and ideal social positions. To understand their desire and commitment, this section will first demonstrate their current social positions and the complexity of the language ecology in their hosting city.

1.2.1 The curse of Hukou- second-class treatment for migrants

Dislocated people who stay away from their place of origin with or without their families for various purposes can be called migrants in general in the international context. Some are elite migrants with economic
means while others are in adversary situations such as forced labor and human trafficking. In China, the migrants who receive a lot of media and scholarly attention are the underprivileged group. In early 1980s, massive domestic migration of surplus rural labor to cities was encouraged during the early stages of the country’s economic reform which aims to transition from planned economy to market economy. During this process, a large number of children migrated to cities with their parents. Many were in fact born in their hosting city. The 6th census in China in 2010 estimates that the number of migrant children reaches 36 million, a 41.37% increase from the 5th census in 2000 (All-China Women’s Federation, 2013). However, along with their migrant parents, they are usually not officially recognized as residents of that city and are deprived of social welfare benefits because they don’t hold local urban Hukou (household registration).

Residence register systems are not uncommon (e.g., Taiwan, Japan) for government to gather demographic data. However, the Chinese version, the Hukou system (household registration system), goes beyond that and functions as a tool for social control for the government. It was set up in early 1950s and became legislated in 1958 when China was still in the era of emulating USSR’s planned economy. This two-track system differentiates urban and rural Hukou, and determines access to food rations and state-allocated housing, education, and healthcare. Access to resources is limited to the specific locality of a person’s Hukou registration. In addition, the emphasis on industrial development and its preference over agricultural work at that time have caused a large discrepancy in the quality and quantity of these state-allocated resources in urban and rural regions. Though incompatible with the massive migration sparked by the transition to market economy, the Hukou system has never been fundamentally changed. Against this backdrop, rural to urban migration or even migration between cities (under strict control from small cities/towns to big cities but not the other way around) for personal reasons without state approval for their changes in Hukou, means losing access to social welfare benefits in places of destination. Therefore, migrants and their families, who are often pejoratively described as “blind flow” or “floating population”, become the underprivileged and “unlicensed” urban residents deprived of the urban entitlements where they live.

For migrant children, the type (urban/rural) and locality of their Hukou is inherited from one of their parents, regardless where the child was born or resides. Their access to local public education is thus blocked. In a word, this legacy of the planned economy for both social and demographic control is incompatible with
the current society, and it functions as a caste system which discriminates against the migrant population that’s rapidly growing in the developed urban China, driven by the market economy since the 1980s. It should be noted that the possession of the local urban Hukou, due to “its integration with other social and economic control mechanisms” (Chan & Zhang, 1999, p. 829), affects migrants in every social class, but it is the poor migrants who are more prone to the repercussions of losing state-allocated social welfares.

1.2.2 Migrant children and their struggle to access public education

Migrant children’s presence was first acknowledged in a 1992 government directive for implementing compulsory education. It recommended urban schools treat migrant children without local hukou as temporary students and charging a related fee was an allowed practice. As the number of migrant children was increasing, a 1998 policy document specifically addressing this problem, called Provisional regulations for migrant children’s schooling, defined migrant children for the first time in article 2: migrant children refer to “children and teenagers ranging from 6 to 14 (or 7-15) years old who have been living in the receiving area for over half a year with their parents or other guardians, and they need to have age-appropriate learning capacity” (MOE, 1998). In 2001, the State Council further released a few directives specifying two guiding principles regarding how the education for migrant children should be managed: a) the local governments of migrant receiving cities should shoulder the most responsibilities to arrange education for migrant children and b) the public schools should be the main facilities to receive these children (State Council, 2001). The first principle regarding access in receiving areas was further included in the Compulsory Education Law in 2006 but the law simply briefly states the detailed measures are at the discretion of local governments (MOE, 2006). This loose control over local implementation without any supervision has spawned many problems for migrant children’s education.

In fact, after transitioning to market economy, one of the structural changes initiated by the central government is to adopt a decentralized decision-making system which was meant to encourage governments at lower levels to work hard on economic development (Shirk, 1993). In exchange for more autonomy in economic decisions, local governments need to shoulder the responsibility of managing the distribution of social welfare. However, this brings more indeterminacy and regional difference based on the capacity and
the priorities of the local governments, which could exacerbate the existing social inequality regardless of the central government’s opinions.

In reality, in order to get access to public education, migrant families have to face local bureaucracy (such as gathering multiple certificates to secure schooling eligibility for their child) and pay a large sum of school sponsorship fee that could be higher than the family income for several months. Even if they are able to navigate the bureaucracy and overcome the financial burden, their allocation is always deemed secondary. Locals are allowed to fill up the space in public schools first. Migrant children can apply only if there is space left. If not, they can go to ill-equipped migrant schools or attend public schools with spots which might be far away from where they live. Therefore, migrant students can rarely get a spot in top public schools. Within schools, both physical and non-physical segregation take place (Yiu, 2016; Li & Placier, 2015; Xiong, 2010). Migrant children might be separated from local children and receive differentiated care from teachers. Many urban parents deliberately remove their children from public schools and transfer them to elite private schools once these public schools start to enroll or mix migrant children with local children in class assignment. In addition, many migrant children in middle school lose their motivation to study because they are frustrated by being barred from high school and college entrance exams in their hosting city because of the lack of local hukou. Some choose to leave their parents and go back to their hometown for the exams to continue their education while others simply give up and start looking for employment.

With so many financial and institutional barriers lying ahead, many migrant families choose to attend ill-equipped migrant schools for lower fees. Most importantly these schools do not require local Hukou. However, these schools are usually set up by migrant community or sympathetic retired teachers with limited resources, or by people with no educational background (Freeman Spogli Institute Report, n.d.). Many suffer from poor and even unsafe infrastructure, low teacher quality, and high turnover rate. Students in migrant schools have relatively low academic performance, and poor social and psychological adaptation (Liu, Holmes & Albright, 2015; Xiong, 2010). The relationships between the local governments and these migrant schools vary depending on the policy direction and the conditions of those schools. Overall, the national policy as mentioned above directs public school to gradually include all migrant children, at least for the period of compulsory education (grade 1-9). Therefore, second and third-tier cities with enough public
educational resources and a relatively smaller number of migrant children tend to shut down most migrant schools; whereas in mega-cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou where there is a much higher concentration of migrant children, the public school system does not have the capacity to receive all migrant children and migrant schools are still an important and affordable educational channel for migrant families. Whether the government should support migrant schools’ parallel development to state-run public schools or shut them down entirely is still heatedly debated in China (Yu, 2013, Kwong, 2004).

To sum up, migrant children from families without much economic means can only attend private migrant schools or regular public schools with urban poor and working class children (Xiong, 2015). Thanks to the voices from NGOs, media and scholars, the central government has been more aware of the hurdles facing migrant families. One of the major working themes of the Hu administration (2002-2012) features educational equity. Regarding migrant children’s education, more specific policies have been rolled out to urge local receiving governments to take migrant children into account in their education fiscal budget, ban extra fees, and get rid of the Hukou requirement for taking exams for post secondary exams (State Council 2008, 2012; MOE, 2010). The access to public education has been widened. Still, as mentioned above, how these polices are implemented depends on the agenda of the local governments. Some scholars have pointed out that all the institutional barriers are intended to select perceived high-value migrants (such as entrepreneurs and the highly educated) who can easily circumvent and fulfill all the demanding requirements, as compared to millions of low-skilled manual labors in manufacturing and service industry who cannot (Lu, 2016; Solinger, 1999). Many migrant families are still overpowered by the institutional inequalities.

1.3 Linguistic context

In this section, I will trace back the rise and hegemony of Putonghua and its rivalry relationship with Cantonese in Guangzhou to set the scenes for my exploration of the role of migrants in this linguistic ecology.

1.3.1 The national language in China and its hegemony

China is a multilingual country. The ethnic majority Han people constitute about 92% of the population in China. Their mother tongue is Chinese (Sinitic) language, a sub-branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family. The remaining 8%, the ethnic minorities, speak non-Chinese languages (e.g., Korean, Tajik,
Tibetan, Manchu) which belong to five other language families. The total number count of living languages varies from 80 (official record in China) to 292 (Ethnologue) due to different criteria of distinguishing languages and dialects (Kurpaska, 2010).

Figure 1. Map of Chinese languages

Within the Chinese language, there are 7 varieties that have very low mutual intelligibility: Mandarin, Yue (Cantonese), Wu, Min, Hakka, Xiang, Gan. The geographic distribution is shown in the picture above. It is easy to see that the Mandarin speaking region (light pink) is the biggest and Mandarin is indeed spoken by 70% of Han people (Kurpaska, 2010). However, even though other Chinese language varieties have much smaller numbers of speakers, all of them have long histories and cultural legacies such as local operas.

The current national language in China is Putonghua (“normal speech”), a standardized language based on Mandarin used in Beijing. Though Mandarin is comprised of many sub-varieties, many in the

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1 Adapted from http://www.chinalanguage.com/
western world simply use Putonghua and Mandarin interchangeably. Technically, Putonghua is a newly created sub-variety of Mandarin that has short history, no historically associated region, and no native speakers. While a national lingua franca is necessary for communication in a multilingual country, the decision to promote a language or its variety very often goes beyond a simple linguistic choice. In the case of China, Putonghua’s elevated status and spread as the national language has been causing crisis for other Chinese varieties because of the deep-seated “monoglot idealization of the link ‘language-people-country’” (Blommaert, 2006, p. 244). I will illustrate this in three parts: a) the history of emergence of the national language in contemporary China (Ramsey, 1987); b) the hegemony of Putonghua created by the current language policy; and c) the controversy in labelling Chinese language varieties: language vs. dialect.

a) At the beginning of the Republic of China in 1912 when the feudalist Qing Empire was overthrown, the reformers, many of whom were educated in the west or Japan, started a national language movement. Under the impression that most powerful western colonial powers that tried to force the Qing Empire to open up for trade have their national languages, these reformers found it necessary to have a standard national language in China to represent this new modern nation-state and support its urgent need of modernization (Hsu, 1999). This monolingual nation-state imagery from Europe (Blommaert, 2006) seems to have spread in China from then. However, this ideology was not immediately taken up by everyone. During the 1930s, the linguistic problem was often debated in politics. The left found each Chinese variety should have their own standard and equal status. A new national language would increase the illiteracy rate especially for the south where Mandarin was unintelligible to most speakers of other Chinese varieties. The right claimed any attempt to stop the creation of a standard national language was jeopardizing the unity of the country. From 1920, the subject of Chinese at schools started to teach this new variety.

In 1932, two decades after the initial proposal to establish a standard national language, the National Language Unification Commission supported by the right-wing nationalists made its final call and published an authoritative dictionary using the vernacular written Chinese (a more colloquial and modern style in contrast with classical Chinese) phonetically transcribed with the sounds in the Beijing dialect of Mandarin. Though technically it is a new creation with no native speakers, northern speakers of other Mandarin sub-varieties only need to make minor adjustment to their daily language practice whereas speakers of other
Chinese varieties in the south (such as Cantonese and Wu) have to learn this new national language from scratch.

After the communist party defeated the nationalists and founded the current People’s republic of China (PRC) in 1949, they adopted the term “Putonghua” for this Mandarin based language in 1955 with minor revision. In 1982, the Constitution of PRC officialized its national language status and clearly stated the government’s intention to popularize Putonghua among all ethnicities.

b) From the emergence of Putonghua, we can see that the elevated status of one particular Han people’s language variety involves two underlying presumptions: the higher status of Han over other ethnicities, and the notion that one language can represent the Han ethnic culture. The former, a manifestation of ethnocentrism, has been taken for granted because Han ethnicity is used to its dominance in population size and age-old culture despite the fact that Han people have been integrated with other ethnic minorities many times as they expanded their territories throughout history (Yang, 2010). Indeed, the blend of Chinese national identity and Han ethnic identity is seldom problematized by Han people. In fact, in the 1930s, the decision to adopt a national language was discussed only among Han people to select a variety of Chinese language for the national identity. Other non-Chinese languages were never included in the competition in the first place.

The second presumption that one language represents one ethnicity simply disregarded the internal cultural and language diversity of the ethnic Han people. This monoglot ethnic-language ideology seems comparable to the monoglot nation-state imagery. This ideology is further reflected in the language policy articulated in the PRC Law of the national Common language and writing released in 2000 (the Language Law hereafter). Based on this Language Law, Putonghua should be the only language used in public domains such as mass media and education. Any plan to use other Chinese varieties (framed as “dialects” in the Language Law) in these domains has to be approved by the government first. As for ethnic minorities, their linguistic rights are respected by being given the autonomy to develop their own (non-Chinese) languages as long as they also learn Putonghua. For Han people who natively speak varieties other than Mandarin, the use of their mother tongue is virtually suppressed. They have no legal support to preserve their Chinese varieties.
as they are “dialects” from the perspective of the Language Law. Therefore, it is hard to argue for any linguistic right with legal means. In a way, the languages of ethnic minorities are in a better situation as the status of their languages are recognized precisely because of the one language-one ethnicity ideology.

It is worth mentioning that the hegemony of Putonghua is also reflected in the fever of Putonghua (Mandarin)-as-a-foreign-language learning around the globe due to its spread in China. Even in Chinese diasporic communities such as those in the US (e.g., Leung & Wu, 2011; Wiley, 2008) and Singapore (Li et al, 1997), the co-existence of many Chinese language varieties (such as Cantonese, Hakka, Min) and their gradual shift to Mandarin even in family domain are acutely felt. Meanwhile, with the overseas promotion of Putonghua from the Chinese government and its economic potential perceived by students, the language programs for heritage Chinese learners conducted in other varieties of Chinese have been gradually replaced by Mandarin (Liu, 2010).

c) So are these Chinese varieties languages or dialects? Modern Chinese linguistic scholars insist that there is one unitary Chinese language and its varieties are just a continuum of “dialects”. In contrast, western scholars find that, similar to romance languages, Chinese languages consist of a collection of different yet related languages. In modern folk Chinese language practice, varieties of Chinese other than Putonghua are usually called 方言, a word which is normally translated into English as “dialects”. However, this translation is misleading or even erroneous because in western linguistics, dialects of a language should be more or less mutually intelligible whereas Chinese language varieties are not. They would be closer to the “language” end of a continuum between language and dialect. In ancient China, this term 方言 in classical Chinese is actually a two-mono-syllabic-word noun phrase and its literal translation is “方言” (spoken word/speech). It was also used to refer to other non-Chinese languages spoken in the peripheral regions of the ancient empire or its vassal states such as Korea (Ramsey, 1987).

Therefore, referring to regional varieties as 方言 (“dialects”) in modern Chinese, is not due to Chinese people’s foolish stubbornness for refusing to recognize the lack of mutual intelligibility among these varieties. Instead, I find it a case of “lost in translation”. Some scholars in linguistics have proposed that a more equivalent term to translate “方言” in modern use should be “topolect” or “regiolect” in case of the
Chinese varieties (Groves, 2010). Though some find the use of dialect in referring to Chinese varieties is politically motivated (Ng & Zhao, 2015), I would not immediately concur since there is also evidence that dialect used to refer to different languages historically (Ramsey, 1987). In data analysis chapters, I will use mostly dialects to refer to Chinese regional varieties such as Cantonese or the heritage language of the migrant parents because that was how my research participants talked about them and I adopted an emic description to make the narrative coherent. Despite the label “dialect”, people in China do acknowledge the stark difference between Chinese language varieties. Regardless of the controversy in typology, I agree that “The question whether or not the lack of mutual intelligibility does determine the linguistic borders goes beyond the domain of linguistics and enters the area of politics, anthropology and history” (Kurpaska, 2010, p. 203).

Unlike the controversies in labelling other Chinese varieties, the status of the sole national language clearly reflects that all other varieties are deemed secondary to Putonghua, which ironically affirms the pejorative connotation of dialect. As stated above, the Language Law in mainland China essentially stipulates a diglossic situation in which Putonghua is the high variety for official circumstances while dialects are the low varieties reserved in private domains such as home. However, this imagined stable diglossia is not really happening. With the strong push for Putonghua nationwide, the Putonghua speaking population in China reached over 50% in the early 2000s (China Daily, 2004) and it climbed to 73% in 2014 (Chinanews, 2014). Though all Chinese have the right to use their regional languages at home and in daily communication, the lack of institutional support to preserve them has given rise to early signs of language shift toward Putonghua even in private spaces. Many parents complain that their children are not learning their dialects and are predominantly using Putonghua at home. This phenomenon in economically developed regions (such as Wu or Cantonese speaking areas) has been well documented (Liang, 2015; Gao, 2012; Shen, 2016) whereas other Chinese varieties associated with less developed regions are hardly mentioned in literature. In addition, most studies in China simply take the perspective of the local people who feel their language is threatened by Putonghua-speaking migrants. Very few pay attention to the actual linguistic practice and language learning effort of the migrant population.
1.3.2 Conflict between two lingua francas - regional prestige of Cantonese and pushback to Putonghua

Cantonese is the lingua franca in Guangdong province (Min and Hakka are also the mother tongues for some residents within this province). It has some speakers using it as a home language in nearby provinces in mainland China. It is also the dominant Chinese language used in Hong Kong in both public and private spaces (Lai, 2001). To defend the fame of Cantonese, many native Cantonese speakers in mainland would tell you the anecdote that Cantonese lost by only one point to Mandarin in the election of the national language. In addition, many find Cantonese would be a better symbol of traditional Chinese culture as it preserves many sounds in Middle Chinese as used in Tang dynasty (from 7th century) which are absent in Mandarin (Ramsey, 1987). Though it is spoken by fewer people than Mandarin in China, Cantonese does have a long-standing international presence. The earliest Chinese immigrants to the US were mostly from Cantonese speaking areas. Because of their connection with ancient Tang dynasty, they call themselves Tang people and their literal translation of Chinatown (唐人街) is “Tang People’s Town”. Even the medium of instruction in Chinese heritage language program in the US were exclusively Cantonese from late 19th century (Liu, 2010).

In addition to its history and international spread, Cantonese has long been associated with economic development. In early stages of the economic reform in China in the 1980s, Cantonese speaking Guangdong province was chosen as the trial base for the transition to market economy and attracted investment from overseas Chinese in Cantonese speaking Hong Kong (when it was still a British colony) and pockets of the Chinese diaspora in southeastern Asian countries (Naughton, 2007). Also during this period, Guangdong province has been the most popular destination for migrant populations as it needs many low-skilled workers to shore up the labor demand in its booming manufacturing industry (such as clothes, shoes, toys, electronics).

Despite the vigorous promotion of Putonghua since the 1980s, Guangdong province had the privilege to preserve Cantonese as the high form in a diglossic situation because of relatively loosened government control. Even in the 1990s, the use of Putonghua instead of Cantonese in both private and public spaces was considered less favorable (Bai, 1994). Besides Putonghua, Guangdong province was allowed to have a Cantonese speaking TV channel to compete with propaganda in Cantonese from Hong Kong TV stations which project a disapproving tone vis-à-vis China. Cantonese songs and movies produced in Hong
Kong have been explosively popular in mainland China. Cultural products in any other dialects could not match its impact. In a word, Cantonese enjoys a prestigious regional status in Guangdong province. The spread of Putonghua here is not as fast as in other dialect regions because of Cantonese’s strong cultural and economic connection and the incidental lax political control.

However, from the early 2000s when the Language Law was promulgated, the declining number of speakers of Cantonese in the younger generation and the passive aggressive language regulations have led to multiple protests from the locals, especially natives residing in the provincial capital city Guangzhou (Gao, 2012). News reports and academic studies have documented instances where Putonghua is not only required in class for instruction but also in recess time, and children are punished for speaking Cantonese in school, which makes them reluctant to even use it at home (e.g., Hu & Zi, 2010; Liang, 2015). In 2010 when Guangzhou was to host the Asian Games, a politician suggested to ban Cantonese and adopt Mandarin only in broadcast and TV because Putonghua better represents its national image in this international event. This sparked several rounds of protests in the streets of Guangzhou. The “Support Cantonese movement” was also echoed by demonstrations in Cantonese communities in Hong Kong and Chinese diasporic communities.

Although the provincial government attempted to quell the anger and repeatedly claimed that the promotion of Putonghua was not meant to weaken the regional status of Cantonese, it nevertheless promulgated its provincial regulation on language use (Guangdong Provincial Government, 2012) which restated the passive aggressive content in the national Language Law from 2001 (National People’s Congress, 2001). In both of them, there are clear requirements to ensure the use of Putonghua in public spaces but no counter-measures to prevent Putonghua from permeating into private spaces. The latter, however, is what has been happening and what provoked the locals who take pride in their regional language to push back.

This competition between two lingua francas illustrates that it is probably naïve for government to aim for a stable diglossia if the language policy is monoglossic in nature and protects only the rights of the language with higher status. Though neither the government nor the Cantonese speaking locals claim to disfavor multilingualism, the ramification of these de facto monoglossic policies is the rising hostility to
Putonghua which is in turn transferred to the migrant population who are perceived to dominantly speak Putonghua when they move to urban environment.

After sketching out the social and linguistic contexts in which migrants in Guangzhou are located, the next two chapters will introduce my conceptual framework, research questions, and methodology before sharing four chapters of data analyses based on my questionnaires and ethnographic fieldwork with the migrant children, teachers, and parents in two public schools in Guangzhou.
Chapter 2. Conceptual framework

My study is informed by relevant theories and studies on children and language learning in three strands: studies of migration, second language acquisition (SLA) and language policy and planning (LPP). Though the knowledge in these fields sheds different lights on my perspectives and methodological approaches, the common thread I find in them is perhaps the balance between agency and structure.

In the scholarship on migration, the role and understanding of children in migration have concurred with my previous field observation that the agency and resilience of children and their difference from their parents should not be overlooked. In SLA, studies revolving around second language learning motivation and investment from different perspectives also reflect interaction across individual psychology, different layers of social contexts and other actors. From LPP, the critical ethnography of LPP has also called for attention to how local actors negotiate and appropriate top-down policies. In my study, the connection among the three bodies of literature I spot and try to incorporate in my dissertation study is that the varied adult migrants’ and their children’s investment in Cantonese and language use is, in effect, language acquisition planning instantiated at the local level. This specific lens requires the researcher to examine both agency of individual language learners and the sociopolitical structure they are embedded in.

2.1 Children as agents in migration

The call to adopt child-inclusive migration research (White, Ni Laoire, Tyrrell & Carpena-Mendez, 2011) and the reconceptualization of childhood (Ensor & Gozdzia, 2010) are relatively recent trends in the field of human geography. The previous research on migrants is more adult-centric and counts the household as a migrating unit while children were previously treated as an inactive extension of adult migrants and a source of anxiety (Orellana, Thorne, Chee & Lam, 2001; Dobson 2009; Huijsmans, 2011). In contrast, recent studies have started to view children as active agents playing a role as linguistic brokers for adult families (Orellana, 2001), taking initiative in establishing new networks (Beaverstock, 2002), and developing different identities from their parents in their host nation/city (van Blerk & Ansell, 2006).
This change in research focus should also be attributed to the new realization that a specific phase of childhood is not universally recognized and the conceptualization of children as needy, passive and vulnerable is a western idea that emerged after the nineteenth century when socioeconomic conditions in western societies had reached a point that children could cease to be treated as “proto adults” and thus be excused from typical adult activities (Ensor, 2010, p. 18). However, this conceptualization has been repeatedly challenged because it cannot account for the role and characteristics of many children in developing countries, especially those in studies on voluntary and independent child labor. Therefore, there has been a call for theoretical refocus on children’s agency and resiliency in migration and research on the children’s here and now instead of their prospective adult life (Dobson, 2009; White et al., 2011).

In responding to this new trend, Ansell (2009), whose work extensively focuses on the Global South, warns that it is inadequate to uncritically celebrate children’s agency in their daily life on a very micro-scale as they are still rather limited by what they can do and where they can go. Researchers should not lose sight of the wide social processes inevitably influencing the activities of children. I find both sides have fair points and their argument reflects concerns that many studies simply oscillate between agency and structure. However, it should be noted that Ansell is not against zooming in on child’s agency. Rather, she emphasizes the importance of examining different scales. Therefore, I find it “important to acknowledge that children’s agency, and their ability to overcome the challenges of migration, is framed by their evolving capacities and reflects their own individual and socially generated vulnerabilities and resilience” (Ensor & Gozdziak, 2010, p. 7).

This balanced view attending to both the multiple layers of contexts and the agency of children is barely reflected in studies of migrant children in China. As pointed out by Xia (2015), most studies in the field of psychology, education and sociology usually compare migrant children with urban children. The findings and discussion tend to focus on their maladaptation such as low academic performance, socialization and identity crisis as well as the gravity of the institutional barriers and social inequalities facing migrant children. Only very few adopt a resiliency perspective (e.g., Zeng, 2011). It should be noted that though it seems reasonable to compare urban and migrant children at similar age, the general gap between their
socioeconomic conditions makes the comparison unfair and the latter group is more likely to appear lagging behind.

In my study, there is no direct comparison between local and migrant children regarding the difference in the relationship between their language learning achievement and intended learning efforts. However, I do find the influence of significant others such as peers and families should not be overlooked in migrant children’s planning for their second language acquisition. In fact, the negotiation among their own attitude toward a language, parental expectation, and peer influence would be an opportunity to foreground their agency in language learning decisions.

2.2 SLA: language learning motivation and investment

*Motivation* and *investment*—these two terms represent psychological and sociological approaches to investigating individuals’ language learning desire and commitment in the field of second language acquisition. Most recent developments in scholarship on motivation (e.g., Dorynei’s L2 motivational self system, in Dorynei 2005, 2009) and investment (Bonny Norton’s model of investment, in Darvin & Norton, 2015) grew out of dissatisfaction with the once dominant dichotomous view of language learning motivation rooted in social psychology, namely *integrativeness* (identification with native speakers’ culture and values in the target L2 community) and *instrumentality* (utilitarian purposes). This original conceptualization of motivation as a rather stable individual trait was developed by Gardner and his colleagues (Gardner & Lambert, 1959; Gardner 1985) based on their research on second language learning motivation in Canadian educational contexts. In particular, integrative motivation was found to best predict L2 learning effort and achievement.

However, this dichotomy was found not applicable in many other sociocultural contexts for two main reasons. To start with, the concept of *integrativeness* has lost its relevance in many contexts nowadays because language learning motivation is not necessarily oriented toward a static target L2 community. For example, as English has become a global lingua franca (Jenkins, 2007), more people are motivated to learn English as a communication tool in life and work with anyone who does not speak their mother tongues. The interlocutor does not have to be a native English speaker. In addition, the World English paradigm finds that
globalization has made English speaking ability a feature of the successful global citizen desired by many learners (Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2006). Lamb (2004) reported that the Indonesian adolescents in his study were strongly motivated to learn English as it indexed the identity of a well-off urban middle-class Indonesian. In the same vein, researchers Islam, Lamb & Chambers (2013) found that Pakistani college students deem English-speaking ability a feature of the globalized Pakistani and critical to the national interests of Pakistan in the international community.

On the other hand, others found there might not be a clear-cut boundary between integrativeness and instrumentality after all, and motivation might be better conceived as dynamic and context-dependent (Ryan, 2009; Ushioda, 2001). In this view, language learning motivation would be determined by the internal psychological system (e.g., self-efficacy, self-confidence) and its interaction with situated contextual factors such as instruction quality and peer influence (Noels, 2003). In EFL contexts, it is possible that a learner who suffers from anxiety to speak English is deeply drawn by cultural products such as hip-hop music from US, and later becomes even more motivated when he meets a good teacher or realizes English will be critical to his career advancement in the future even in his own country. Classroom-based studies on motivational strategies also reveal that motivation shifts over the period of class time, and learners’ entire learning trajectory (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008). In a word, the multiplicity and dynamic aspects of motivation in this globalized world simply cannot be captured by the static dichotomy of integrativeness and instrumentality.

In response to this theoretical inadequacy, influenced by Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987) and the theory of Possible Selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986), Dörnyei (2005, 2009) proposed an L2 Motivational Self system which is composed of Ideal L2 Self, Ought-to L2 Self, and L2 learning experience. The two future self-guides implying evolvement and change are the two pillars in this model as ultimately motivation is conceived as an individual psychological construct by scholars who subscribe to a more psychological approach. The underlying assumption is that an individual will be motivated to reduce the discrepancy between the present self and an envisioned future self (“Ideal L2 Self”) who will enjoy life (e.g., landing a good job; making more friends) with a desired level of L2 proficiency. This concept subsumes integrativeness and instrumentality-promotion (internalized instrumental motives). Sometimes another future
self ("ought-to self") is subject to external expectations and obligations to prevent negative results in life. It also includes *instrumentality-prevention* such as preventing parents’ disappointment or peers’ discrimination in poor academic performance. The last component, *L2 learning experience*, “is conceptualised at a different level from the two self-guides” (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 29) and refers to the specific *here and now* in the learning context in contrast with the future oriented selves in this model. This concept is very often operationalized as attitude toward language classes.

Studies adopting the L2 Motivational Self System to evaluate L2 learning motivation have shown that this newly proposed model is able to account for L2 learning motivation in various national contexts (e.g., *China*, *Japan* and *Iran* in Taguchi, Magid & Papi, 2009 and Ryan 2009; *Indonesia* in Lamb 2004, 2012; *Hungary* in Csizér & Kormos, 2009; Dörnyei, Csizér & Németh, 2006; *Hong Kong* in Gu & Cheung 2016). However, it should be noted the best predictor is not necessarily the *ideal L2 self*, especially in Asian contexts. In addition, one of the reasons this model could capture some common factors in different national contexts is because the constructs tested in the surveys are sociocultural context free. Various studies have started to test extra or mediating motivational variables that they found specific to the sociocultural context they work in. A case in point would be Gu and Cheung’s (2016) inquiry into the Chinese learning motivation of ethnic minorities (e.g., Indians, Filipinos) in Hong Kong. In addition to the self-guides and the learning experiences, the researchers also included variables demonstrating the degree of acculturation to the mainstream culture and the heritage culture. The former was found to strongly affect participants’ intended Chinese learning effort. Indeed, these cultural and context-dependent factors—substantiated in the social contact languages learners have (Islam et al., 2013)—were not included in the original L2 Motivational Self System. The only component focusing on the *L2 learning experience* that potentially implies a social context to some extent in the triadic model from Dörnyei is limited to language classes in formal educational settings. This is not sufficient to capture the language learning motivation for migrants in my study who mostly have been learning Cantonese in a naturalistic way. What’s more, the L2 Motivational Self System is focused on identifying motivational variables. It does not work well if the unit of analysis is individuals or groups of learners whose psychological or social uniqueness is crucial to the analysis. On top of it, the social factors *per se* are not easily operationalized as discrete survey items in the first place. Previous research results that
have advanced our understanding of motivation very often come from qualitative parts of the studies (e.g., Lamb, 2004).

In contrast with the psychological approach that is more “micro” and limits its focus on the individual psychology in the immediate learning context, the sociological approach to study L2 motivation features a critical look at the wider social context. Bonny Norton’s notion of language investment (Norton Pierce, 1995) is proposed as an alternative to the term motivation due to the fact that earlier models (Integrativeness vs. Instrumentality) from a psychological approach (Gardner & Lambert, 1959) were unable to explain the language practices she found in her longitudinal study of the language learning experience of five immigrant women in Canada. Her conceptualization of language investment presupposes a poststructuralist view of identity that a language learner could possess multiple, evolving and sometimes contradictory identities and that identity is “a site of struggle” (Norton Peirce, 1995, p. 20). Learners might be guided by their imagined identity in an imagined community which is not available in their immediate context for any physical participation, but may shed light on their future learning trajectory. Drawing on Bourdieu’s (1977) economic metaphor of cultural capital, language command is conceived as a form of cultural capital owned by native speakers. Learners’ investment in a target language refers to the desire and commitment to learn the language in order to boost their cultural capital in the situations where this language practice is most valued.

However, a learner’s investment in a specific learning context could drastically decrease if they feel the investment contradicts with other valued aspects of their identity. For example, one of the immigrant participants in Norton’s study, Felicia, was a middle-class woman from Peru who yearned for a higher English proficiency. Although living in English speaking Canada, she did not actively engage in oral practice to improve her English speaking skill. She was afraid that her interlocutors would not be aware of her privileged Peruvian background and thought of her as a stereotypical poor immigrant in Canadian society due to her dis-fluency in English. Her withdrawal from language practice was at odds with her high commitment to learn English. This conflict would be hard to explain without considering the social dimension. Through the story of Felicia and language learning experiences of other tenacious women,
Norton’s study powerfully illustrated how the immigrant group was discriminated against by the dominant social group in Canada yet managed to learn English.

To more systematically capture the inequitable power relations between native speakers and L2 learners, Norton’s most recent model situates language investment in the intersection of capital, ideology and identity, in which learners’ desire is shaped by battles between agency and a set of normative ideas that “predisposes them(learners) to do what they believe is expected of them and to develop relations that are deemed appropriate” (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 45). In a specific sociocultural context, this model leads our attention to the embodiment of the systemic patterns of control over and resisted by the learner, positioning of/by the learner and affordances/perceived benefits by the learner. In other words, the approach will highlight the influence on language learning motivation from social processes at a macro level by zooming in on language practice. In my study, I am interested in finding out how migrant adults and children manage their language resources during their adaptation to urban life, and whether their future identity and language capacity are related to their social integration to this city. All these imaginations and aspirations could also be reflected in how children internalize or resist various ideologies and the systemic inequality they are experiencing.

To sum up, a sociological approach to understanding language learning desire and commitment usually uses qualitative research methods to study a small number of learners. It treats language use as social practice which reflects power relations between interlocutors or differing (and sometimes biased) social perceptions of competent speakers and developing learners. In studying socially unprivileged language learners when mistreatment cannot be easily quantified, the stories of individual learners are likely to provide more explanatory power in excavating the systemic inequality and symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991). In other words, it could shed light on why learners are (not) motivated to learn a language. This approach usually attends to both the scales of temporality and wider social context.

Researchers adopting a psychological approach to language learning motivation usually collect data through surveys from a large sample of relatively homogenous language learners, and perform quantitative analysis to give researchers a big picture of the characteristics of this group. It treats motivation as a
psychological construct and is interested in finding out what generalizable factors in its immediate contexts can contribute to it. Recent developments in this approach have also attended to the scale of temporality by emphasizing the importance of future vision (the future self-guides). In addition, many researchers who adopt a psychological approach are aware that each sociocultural context could entail specific motivations for students to learn a new language (e.g., learning English as protecting national interest in Pakistan) that are not transferable to other contexts but worth investigating. Also it should be noted that a psychological approach predominantly focuses on the relationship between different psychological activities; for example, how the imagined future selves who speak another language can predict the intended effort. Sometimes, there could be a big gap between intended effort (e.g., willingness to participate) and materialized effort (e.g., observable participation in class). Also, I find the reason behind the gap could be psychological, social or both, depending on the specific case. On top of this, what eventually comes out of a one-shot survey based study reflects a snapshot of the attitudes towards a language by its learners at the moment. Therefore, I find that for socially underprivileged groups, the sole use of survey and quantitative analysis cannot illuminate the particularities about their language learning.

By reviewing both the sociological and psychological approaches, I hope to demonstrate that though these two approaches reflect a cognitive-social divide in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) (Zuengler & Miller, 2006) and different research foci, their research methods can be complementary in some research projects. The field of SLA has been calling researchers to judiciously draw on research methods from different epistemological stances so that they can “focus on authentic, real-world language learning problems that demand input and collaboration from the many lines of research across the field of second language studies” (King & Mackey, 2016, p. 222). In my study that focuses on the language learning experience of migrant adults and children, I adopted a qualitative approach while using questionnaires which provided quantitative data as well. The purpose of the questionnaires was not to test whether the motivational factors identified in previous studies were still significant with my research objects. Instead, the quantitative results about migrant parents’ and students’ language proficiency in different L2 languages in their immediate learning context (such as Cantonese, Putonghua and English) and their language use in daily life would become part of the contextual information, and complement the interpretation of qualitative data. The
main method used in this study was participatory ethnographic work informed by the concept of investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015) through which I tap into how migrant adults’ and children’s language achievement, practice and learning motivation are mediated by their social positions and language ideologies.

2.3 Language policy and planning (LPP)

As I mentioned earlier, how migrant parents and children desire to learn languages and their language practice can be conceived as language policy and planning at an individual level. However, for children, in particular, what they are able to use and learn is constrained by both the explicit and implicit language policies in school, the curriculum and testing mechanisms guided by national education and language policy as well as other fluid discourses and ideologies surrounding them. Thus it is helpful to draw on methodological approaches developed in the field of LPP.

LPP started out in the 1950s as a technocratic project in which linguists were called upon to solve seemingly neutral communication problems in newly founded post-colonial countries by planning the corpus and status of the languages in order to expand language form and use in a top-down manner (Haugen, 1959; Kloss, 1969). The introduction of the notion of acquisition planning to increase the number of speakers recognized the salience and importance of LPP in educational contexts (Cooper, 1989). Since the 1970s, critical approaches to LPP point out that language policies are never neutral but ideological (Tollefson, 1991; Spolsky, 2004). By tracing and examining historical and sociopolitical processes, scholars in this strand are devoted to uncovering how social inequalities are perpetuated and marginalization of indigenous and minority languages are caused by ideologies through manipulating all sorts of policy devices (Shohamy, 2006). This focus on how power is exerted on a macro level by language policy makers was soon complemented by postmodern thoughts (e.g., Pennycook, 2002, 2006) that found it was crucial to examine discourses at a micro level since the top down policies were eventually enacted by local actors’ discursive practice.

The ethnographic approach to language policy and planning is a burgeoning research paradigm in this field that attempts to resist this dichotomous attention to either structure or agency with a focus on individual voices. It proposes to “slice through the layers of the LPP onion” (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996)
to reveal agentive spaces in which local actors implement, interpret, and perhaps resist policy initiatives in varying and unique ways (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007, p. 509). In particular, Hornberger (2002, 2005) points LPP researchers to examine the interconnected ideological and implementational spaces carved out at policy levels and in individual educator’s practice in multilingual contexts. Top-down multilingual policies that open up ideological spaces can enable the implementational spaces at the community, school and individual levels (see examples in South America and Africa in Hornberger, 2005). At the same time, individual practitioners’ initiatives in advancing multilingual programs in their community could also provide counternarratives to monolingual policies and expand the ideological spaces with new discourses from the bottom up. However, the tension between structure and agency is ever changing. Both spaces wedged open by top-down policies or even intermediary policies could be closed when new policy makers decide to roll back the progress made previously (Johnson, 2010).

In practice, the ethnographer will delineate and monitor the ideological and implementational spaces by navigating through policy texts, discourses and language practices from policy creators and arbiters at macro, meso and micro levels. Through making intertextual and inter-discursive connections with analytical tools such as critical discourse analysis or nexus analysis (Johnson, 2011; Hult, 2015), the ethnographer seeks to understand why a certain policy is appropriated in a specific context as well as its consequences.

Despite different foci in various approaches to study LPP, all acknowledge the importance of uncovering and understanding the role of language ideology because it underlies language policy documents, and guides individuals to interpret and implement these documents in different ways. Schiffman (2006) finds language ideology, the genesis of language policy, is usually derived from *linguistic culture*: “the sum totality of ideas, values, beliefs, attitudes, prejudices, myths, religious strictures, and all other cultural ‘baggage’ that speakers bring to their dealings with language from their culture” (p. 112). Therefore, ideologies are very context-dependent and have historical and sociopolitical antecedents specific to a group in society. Spolsky (2004) broadly defines language ideology as “a speech community’s consensus on what value to apply to each of the language variables or named language varieties that make up its repertoire” (p. 14).
However, even within the same speech community, ideologies could vary. In Jaffe’s (1999) account of Corsican language revitalization in Corsica, a Mediterranean island and French territory, she documented a debate in the 1980s over whether a French novel should be translated into Corsican. One party, who held a strong regional nationalism and mapping between language and identity, opposed this idea as they found that the introduction of a French cultural product would corrupt the ongoing Corsican revitalization against French domination. In contrast, the other side, being more instrumentalist and perceiving language as a tool, found it would increase Corsican’s expressive power instead. Though the two parties shared the goal of revitalizing their endangered language, different ideologies drove them to view the attempt to expand language function in opposite light. This debate would not make much sense on the surface without teasing out the different ideologies held by each party and contextualizing them in the colonial history and politics of this island. The example further demonstrates that language ideologies are very often intertwined with identity and power relations in a specific context.

In my study, I drew on the ethnography of language policy, delving into how policy texts are interpreted and appropriated by actors at different levels (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996; Johnson, 2013) and also probing the language ideologies that motivate them to arrive at their understandings against the backdrop of social and linguistic contexts I delineated in the preceding chapter. In addition, my study portrays children not as passive policy recipients, but active planners of their own language acquisition in both home and school environments, instantiated by their language learning investment. The agentive roles of children (Wiley & García, 2016; McCarty 2014) in my study will also resonate with the line of research foregrounding children as policy makers in studies on family LPP, especially within immigrant families where children very often manage more linguistic resources and act as socializing agents for their adult family members (King, Fogle, and Logan-Terry, 2008; Fogle & King, 2013; Luykx, 2005).

2.4 Literature review: how do Migrants and their children think of Cantonese and Putonghua?

In the past three decades, a series of studies on the attitudes towards languages used in Guangdong province with both local and migrant groups have documented the unaltered strong integrative attitude to Cantonese language by the locals and the ascent of Putonghua in its social status (Kalmar, Yong & Hong, 1987; Bai, 1994; Zhou, 2001; Miao & Li, 2006; Wang & Ladegaard, 2008; Liang, 2015; Ng & Zhao, 2015).
Despite acknowledgement of a higher national status, similar to the attitude toward English, Putonghua has been consistently regarded as only an instrumental tool in this region by the Cantonese speaking locals (Ng & Zhao, 2015).

Some recent studies have examined the language use and attitude of migrants in this region. Miao & Li (2006) compared elite adult migrants (who have all secured urban Hukou) in Guangzhou and Shenzhen regarding their proficiency and learning motivation in both Cantonese and Putonghua as well as their domain specific language choices. They found that both languages had comparable status and use in Guangzhou where the Cantonese speaking community is still strong and vibrant. In addition, the attitudes towards Cantonese are more integrative because migrant respondents in Guangzhou mainly use Cantonese with their local friends. But it is not the case in Shenzhen, a former fish town and now hub of elite migrants in finance and higher technology who mostly use Putonghua as lingua franca. Wang & Ladegaard’s (2008) case study investigated the language use of and attitudes toward Putonghua and Cantonese among both local and migrant adolescents in a middle-class secondary school in Guangzhou. Though over 80% of the migrant group report to have some proficiency (only 18% self-identified as “good” and “excellent”) in Cantonese, they still had a preference for Putonghua in all domains. As for the local group, though the majority prefer Cantonese, it was observed that there was an unexpected number of respondents using Putonghua as the home language in this group.

The aforementioned studies are mostly one-shot survey based and provide inadequate evidence for further evaluation of the change that migrants brought to the language ecology and the attitudes of the speakers. Liang’s (2015) linguistic ethnography is one of the few exceptions. She examined the language attitudes towards Chinese language(s) of both local and migrant students in two elementary schools from two different socioeconomic neighborhoods in Guangzhou. Though the author documented the superseding of Cantonese in educational settings and revealed her concern for the language shift from Cantonese to Putonghua sporadically in her study, she did provide some informative and interesting results with migrant students in those schools which point to an unexpected hope in preventing the acceleration of the language shift she worried about.
First, there seem to be language enclaves associated with socioeconomic conditions where Cantonese is better preserved in some areas. For the school located in the modern city center where most students (including elite migrant students whose schooling are not constrained by their Hukou) live in residential high rise and have less interpersonal contact with Cantonese speaking locals, the dominant language is Putonghua. Within the student participants, 46% self-identified Putonghua as their first dialect\(^2\) (D1, deemed as mother tongue) while those who hold Cantonese as D1 constitute 33%. Liang also found instances that some Cantonese speaking parents whose children attend the school with a strict Putonghua-only policy switched their home language to Putonghua once they found the child suffered academically because of low proficiency in this language. In contrast, in the school located in the low SES urban village, 80% of her surveyed respondents claimed to speak Cantonese as their D1 while only 3% identified Putonghua as their D1 despite the higher percentage of migrant children in this school’s student demographic. Liang found that both the less stringent language policy in the local school and the less segregated housing situation in the neighborhood contribute to the maintenance of Cantonese in this neighborhood. In this urban village, though migrant children speak their own dialects at home, they have more chance to interact with local children, and access to social resources with the regional lingua franca Cantonese.

More importantly, her study points to the emergence of a plurilingual generation and a new regional identity held by these young newcomers. Besides the multilingual migrant children in the urban village, a number of student participants in the high socioeconomic neighborhood found they strongly identify with their current hosting city in spite of their Putonghua D1 and less developed proficiency in other languages including Cantonese. This uneven language development did not deter them from forming a sense of belonging to this historically Cantonese speaking city. In other words, the regional identity for these children does not perhaps entail a monolingual ideology nor does it neatly correspond to Cantonese, which contrasts with the regional identity held by many locals who developed hostility towards Putonghua because of a deep-seated monolingual ideology.

\(^2\) The researcher decided to adopt an emic view and call Chinese language varieties as dialects.
Regardless of the different linguistic practices in these two neighborhoods, the study hints that multilingualism is the emerging normality for the city of Guangzhou, and the fluid linguistic practices of the migrant children may greatly impact the future linguistic ecology in this city. However, Liang’s research participants are elementary school students whose language proficiency and learning interest are still evolving as is their identity formation. In addition, the numbers mentioned above should be taken cautiously with the awareness that Liang only informally surveyed around 40 students in each school including both migrant and local students. Therefore, the number of migrant students involved is even lower. Last but not least, it is still unclear whether the difference in students’ language preference and identification is associated with their socioeconomic background or simply the language exposure available in their neighborhood that happened to vary.

To sum up, migrants as a socially disadvantaged group in China are adapting and reshaping the multilingual landscape in their hosting cities. The diversity and the varied status of the languages spoken in China are magnified within this group because when they migrate and cross linguistic borders, they often have to consciously make second language learning decisions. Moreover, we should not assume this is a homogenous group. As mentioned in the migration study above, migrant children and adults tend to exhibit different levels of adaptation in many aspects, including languages. By the same token, their lived experiences (working adult vs. school-age child), and the ramifications of the current language policy in China–especially the decreasing vitality of Chinese varieties other than Putonghua and the hostility between speaker groups– could impact the children’s language learning investment differently from their parents. Do migrant students generally learn Cantonese if they live in urban villages? What about their parents? Do elite migrants only speak Putonghua? How does their identification with their host city affect their language learning investment and achievement?

Through analyzing migrant adults’ and children’s investment in learning Cantonese and their language practices, this study aims to unveil the role of migrants in the so-called Cantonese crisis in Guangzhou and reflect on its implications for Cantonese maintenance by exploring answers for the following questions.
2.5 Research Questions

1. Does the increasing migrant population contribute to decreasing vitality of Cantonese in Guangzhou?

2. What contributes to or detracts from adult migrants' investment in learning Cantonese?

3. How does migrant children’s lived experience in and outside of the school mediate their investment in learning Cantonese?
Chapter 3. Methodology

My study adopted an ethnographic approach to understand the role of migrants in the so-called Cantonese language crisis through analyzing their investment in learning Cantonese. As explained in the previous chapter, my focus on the agency of micro-level language policy arbiters and interest in the social contexts of second language development of a group of underprivileged language learners call for a qualitative approach. The choice of ethnography in particular was due to its advantage in providing rich description and cultural interpretation of a particular people’s perspective (Hornberger, 2015).

Wolcott (2008) explains an ethnography is essentially a way of seeing by the ethnographer. In a way, it highlights the subjectivity of ethnographic study which has long attracted critique from researchers embracing different philosophical assumptions of the existence of reality and researchers’ relationship with their research objects. As an emerging researcher, I agree with Wolcott’s point that all social research is participant observation in nature, assuming a researcher could not fully erase his or her influence on a study and thus is participating to some extent. In fact, one distinguishing feature of ethnography is that the researcher is treated as research instrument (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). It fully embraces the subjectivity of the researcher and requires the researcher to constantly keep it in check throughout the research process through a series of techniques. In addition, I believe the methods used in ethnographic studies are designed to bring the emic perspective (the lived experience/reality from the perspective of the research subjects) to the fore.

In this chapter below I will first introduce my field sites, explain my data collection and analysis methods, and close with my researcher positionality.

3.1 Field sites

The data collection for this study revolved around two schools in the city of Guangzhou. The city of Guangzhou was chosen because this southern hub for migrant workers has been subject to the ongoing national promotion of Putonghua, a reported Cantonese language shift to Putonghua, and a reception of new
languages, due to influx of migrants. These factors make it an interesting site to examine how the newcomers to the city manage the languages around them and the language learning demands in schools.

Guangzhou is the center of the Pearl River Delta and the capital city of Guangdong province in southern China. Guangdong province has been a frontrunner in economic reform and a popular migration destination. A report from All-China Women’s Federation (2013) shows that Guangdong province received 4.34 million migrant children which constituted 12.13% of all migrant children in China, ranking the highest among all receiving provinces. The Pearl River Delta region where Guangzhou is located has been steadily getting the lion’s share of migrant children coming to this province (Zhong, 2008). Linguistically, Cantonese is the mother tongue for most locals and the lingua-franca in Guangzhou. Migrants to Guangzhou (over 80% from Hunan, Guangxi, Hubei, Sichuan and Jiangxi, cited in Liang, 2012) have brought Gan, Xiang, Min, Hakka and Mandarin languages, which are not mutually intelligible.

3.1.1 Choosing participating schools

Two public schools (one elementary school; one middle school), spanning the nine-year compulsory education (grades 1-9) in Guangzhou, were selected as the focal participating schools. When I had the rough idea of investigating migrant students’ language learning motivation (which later evolved into the more specific topic now), I communicated about it with professors in my alma mater undergraduate university in Guangzhou who have collaborated with many local public schools. They helped me select the two schools and formally introduced me to the schools.

These two public schools were chosen because they are located in two districts that received over 35% of the migrant populations in Guangzhou (Liang, 2012) and are progressive enough to take in a large number of migrant children (over 50% of their student populations). As mentioned in the discussion of migrant children’s access to schools in chapter 1, public schools attended by migrant children are regular schools (in terms of their ranking in academic achievement) as they cannot access the prestigious ones. These two schools also fit this characteristic.

In addition, schools at both elementary and secondary levels were chosen to account for the changing migration pattern reflected in the migrant children group in public schools across the grades (Li,
Based on census data from 1990 and 2010, as time went on, more migrants (an increase of 20%) moved to cities with their families to settle down instead of migrating as singles to seek opportunistic employment only. Therefore, a large number of migrant children in junior high schools now were transfer students from schools in their hometown, whereas most migrant children in elementary schools came to cities with their parents before schooling age, or were born in the host city. It seemed possible that the different length of stay and their educational experience first in their rural hometown and later in metropolitan Guangzhou might affect the older children's identity formation, interaction with parents, peers and teachers, and attitudes toward the languages around them.

3.1.2 The elementary school

The elementary school (grades 1-6) had a student population of over 700 and fewer than 50 teachers during my fieldwork. It was located right in the center of an urban village in Baiyun District, a formal northern outskirt area of Guangzhou composed of smaller villages and towns. Urban villages are a transitional product of the expanding urbanization in Guangzhou during which former rural villages became part of the urban area while the infrastructure was not improved to the city standard. The low-cost living and vicinity to city centers have turned them into “oasis” for low-income population including migrant workers.

This school has been expanding its enrollment due to the increasing number of students living in its catchment. In the past, it usually set 3 classes for each grade but in recent years, this has been increased to 4. Although migrant students were asked to pay 30000 Yuan (around USD 4428) in sponsorship fees to gain access, which unfortunately was the de facto practice throughout the public schools in Guangzhou, there was no attempt to segregate migrant and local children in class assignments. There were about 20 migrant and 20 local students in each class. In fact, due to its location and the large population of migrants, the district has been very conscious of the necessity to integrate the migrant population. During the first week of my fieldwork, I attended and helped out a district-wide meeting taking place in this school on the theme of inclusive education. Later on, the school also launched a series of events strengthening home-school communication which included inviting parents to host classes in the extra-curricular program that I also contributed to as an English instructor.
I was given access to one class each in grades 2, 4 and 6 to observe. The classes were recommended by the vice principal based on whether the students in class tended to behave well from a teacher’s perspective. But I do not think there could be huge difference in choosing one over another in each grade for the purpose of the study since the local and migrant students were integrated in all classes. In fact, in the sixth grade, I accidentally walked into the wrong class and decided to stick to that class. The administration in the school had no problem with it and they were only concerned that students in that class would not be as “cooperative” as the one they had chosen for me.

3.1.3 The middle school

The middle school (grades 7-9) had 8 classes and around 300 students in each grade, slightly under half of whom were migrant students without Guangzhou Hukou. The school was located in Haizhu District, a former southern “border” of the urban area in Guangzhou but now a very central district due to the expanding urban area. There were quite a few urban villages in the district. Since 2013, the district has started a trial to give access to migrant students to several public middle schools within the district as long as they meet the respective cut-off lines set for their elementary school exit exam. In other words, this is a policy to recruit high achieving migrant students and not exactly very inclusive. Nevertheless, it has benefitted a good number of students. The admission was also differentiated by their test score by setting two cut-off lines. If the students could reach the higher one, they would be awarded with fee-exempt access. If they could not but their test score still surpassed the lower cut-off line, they could be admitted with a costly condition similar to the one in the elementary school mentioned above. As mentioned in the introduction chapter, the central government in China has released directives for local governments to take initiative in opening local public schools to migrant children. In Guangzhou, according to the principal in the middle school, this special trial program was developed after those inclusive policies were released in 2012. However, the progress was slower than expected. The original goal was to have 70% of migrant students attend public schools by 2020. However, by the time of the interview in 2018, five years after the program started, the percentage of migrant students who could attend public schools was still below 50%.

This whole admission game was also due to the fact that from middle school, education becomes more selective and test oriented. Selection and elimination mechanisms kick in. Although the three years in
middle school are still part of the compulsory education period in China, at the end of it, students need to choose different tracks. Technically, they can start working though a decent job is usually not available for an underaged person with only middle school education. If they plan to continue with their education, they can choose either vocational schools or academic high schools, with the latter considered more desirable and indeed more competitive. A middle school with a higher percentage of graduates entering high school would be considered better in its academic performance. So schools are motivated to receive high performing students in the first place.

In addition, unlike the elementary school, local and migrant students are partially segregated based on their potential prospects. In each grade, four classes were composed of local students with Guangzhou Hukou who could enter the school as long as they live in the school catchment. Two academically advanced classes (fee-exempt classes) were exclusively for those high performers in tests. The other two classes were mixed classes with half migrant and half local students. For some migrant students in this school, since their admission was not related to their home address, they could come from urban villages near and far in the district.

In this school, I communicated my research interests in migrant students with my liaison and negotiated to have access to one academically advanced class and one mixed class in grade 8. For the academically advanced class I regularly observed, there was only one local student in the class while the rest were all migrant students.

3.1.4 Previous visits to these schools

My official fieldwork for this dissertation started in the spring of 2017. But I had contacted the schools back in 2016. In the summer that year, I initiated some piloting fieldwork in these two schools. During three weeks observing classes and participating in some of their professional development, I informally talked with students and teachers to gauge whether the schools would be appropriate for the study and made a preview for my presence.
3.2 Data collection methods and products

Ethnographic fieldwork can appear “deceptively simple” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 20). Indeed, compared to quantitative studies, there seems to be less preparation prior to the data collection. Even in the process of carrying out the research, ethnographers do a lot of people watching and chatting. However, this is quite a challenging process as there is no clear how-to guide. Unexpected demands from others may arise and one's own research focus evolve. Frankly, during my year and a half of fieldwork, I learned to stick to my planned activities but also be mentally ready to abandon them at the same time. Despite the messiness in the fieldwork, Wolcott (2008) categorized ethnographic data collection techniques into three moves: *experiencing* (participant observation), *enquiring* (interviews), and *examining* (archival research). I will more or less follow this order to talk about my data collection methods and the data that came out of them.

3.2.1 Experiencing (participant observation)

My fieldwork lasted three academic semesters in China. During the spring semester of 2017, I spent one or two days (sometimes half days) each week in each school to observe classes in any subjects appearing on the schedule on that day. As I was working as a part-time lecturer in my alma mater college during that semester, my time was fragmented. I had to juggle my own teaching schedule and the schedules of the five class I was observing. Although it was difficult, I tried to visit each school both in the mornings and afternoons to understand how they operated and how the atmosphere felt on a daily basis.

I was not very selective in terms of the classes to observe during this period as I wanted to see how students behave and talk with each other and their teachers in those more serious classes such as Chinese, math and English and also in those less intense ones such as music, gym and art. I mostly took notes by hand about the class content, ways of teaching, activities, and any incident of language use that I found notable. If possible, I would write down their conversation. If not, I would write a few phrases to remind myself what happened when I transferred them to my official fieldnotes on the laptop later. My fieldnotes were not always immediately written as the events I observed unfolded. As Emerson, Fretz & Shaw (2011) note, sometimes the immersion experience had to be prioritized while the note could be brief. For me, in order to follow the students to different classes and be part of them, I often took mental notes first. For example, in gym classes, I would be their badminton partner or the needed person for a game so that I could casually talk with them...
regarding their teachers’ language use or their own, or chime in on any topic they were engaged with. Notes would not be officially taken until the end of the day and sometimes even days after.

I also spent lunch breaks in the middle school as that was the only big chunk of time the middle school students could freely talk for extended periods of time. I would go to the student canteen to buy my lunch and quickly come back to the classroom to join student lunch groups. This kind of chitchat during lunch breaks helped me get close to students and they would ask me questions about my student life in the US. Leading a student life as one of them helped me to remember their names and the things they did, which became handy as conversation starters either casually in recess chatting or formally in interviews.

During the second and third semesters, I spent one semester each focusing more on one school and also narrowed down the classes I observed to mostly language classes. In addition, I increased my interaction with teachers. In the middle school, I was given a vacant teacher’s office where I worked alone, which turned out to be convenient for one-on-one interviews. Later, when the teachers were used to my presence, I would go visit their offices and casually strike up some conversation, and observe how they talked in their office. In the elementary school, I was more involved in the school’s daily activities. Since they were always short on teachers, I sometimes helped out in the role of a teacher in both teaching and administration. I was stationed at a table in a shared teachers’ office where I could talk to other teachers. Instead of eating lunch with students, I always had my lunch with teachers in their teacher exclusive canteen where adults could chitchat. I knew I was seriously treated as one of them when they assigned me to a bed in the teachers’ napping lounge where teachers could nap for around an hour at noon. Similarly, the students in their classrooms could nap at that time.

At both schools, I mostly took notes of my observation in English for privacy. Usually, when students and teachers saw me taking notes, they would want to check what I was writing. If they realized it was in English, they usually gave up and simply asked what I was jotting about. Overall, my participant observation was conducted with varied successes as in the middle school I had a better immersed experience with the student group while in the elementary school I had a more successful rapport with the teachers.
3.2.2 Enquiring (interviewing, questionnaires and others)

As mentioned above, I chatted with students and teachers informally on various occasions (at lunch tables and recess time, in the office and playground) to elicit potentially useful data. In a way, this laid the way for my later individual interviews focal students. In this section, I will talk about the more structured data collection steps such as questionnaires, linguistic autobiographies, formal interviews in schools and during home visits, and online follow ups.

Questionnaires

I prepared a student questionnaire and a parent questionnaire enquiring into their demographic information, language proficiencies in Putonghua, Cantonese, English, heritage languages (hometown dialects for migrants from other language backgrounds), language use in different domains (such as at work and in school), attitudes towards their own or their children’s language development. The questionnaires are included in the appendices.

Before putting the questionnaires into use, I invited local adult friends and a few students in 4th grade to fill out the questionnaires to identify any ambiguity or difficult words for children and made revisions accordingly. All parent questionnaires were given to students to take home and collected by homeroom teachers in the elementary school (2nd, 4th, and 6th grades) and class presidents in the middle school (8th grade). For the student questionnaire, 8th graders had a week to fill them out and return. For lower graders in the elementary schools, I collaborated with their teachers to have students fill them out in school with our presence to explain any words they did not understand. Therefore, the return rate for the student questionnaire was quite high (99.1%).

The questionnaires were administered during the second semester in my fieldwork. The students and parents in the five classes I had been observing were invited to fill out the questionnaires. Because the return rate of the parent survey was relatively low compared with that of the student survey, I negotiated with the elementary school to send out questionnaires to one more class in grade 2, 4, and 6 each. In the end, 8 classes across four grades were invited to answer the questionnaires. 318 students and 263 of their parents returned them. The data from parents were especially valuable since the locus of my participant observation was the
schools and the number of parents I talked to was low. So it was helpful to get complementary information about the language environment at home from a different source other than the students. The students were also asked to report their language choice with different family members at home which provided useful insights when compared with the data from parents as it pointed out different language use patterns across two generations.

*Linguistic autobiographies*

Linguistic autobiography has been used to encourage language learners to share their life stories, language learning motivation, and joyful or frustrating experiences in their language learning process (Nieto, 2001; Norton, 2013). In order to make inroads into understanding their language life prior to the current city or school and their language ideologies, this data collection technique was also used.

I am aware that linguistic autobiography could be very personal and emotional, and students could shy away from it. I wrote down my own linguistic autobiography to share with them first. By opening up my own fluctuating language learning adventures as well as migrating experience (e.g., from my hometown to attend college in Guangzhou and then to the US) which they might sympathize with, I was hoping students would have more trust in me when they share their own stories and understand that they don’t have to limit their language learning experience to formal instruction in school; the language does not have to be perfectly acquired; and their experiences of learning either a language or a dialect could be included. In other words, I drafted my linguistic autobiography from the language-as-resource perspective (Ruiz, 1984) and hoped to elicit a more holistic language learning experience from students.

For this task, I invited focal students to participate. For all the students in the five classes I followed, I had access to their student record which contained information regarding their Hukou status and places of origin. Based on those, I selected focal migrant students likely from different regions and linguistic backgrounds to participate in the activity of writing linguistic autobiographies and drawing their family trees with languages spoken by each member marked in their tree. 16 students were invited from each of the two classes in the 8th grade, and 15 were invited from the two classes in 4th and 6th grade (9 from the 6th grade and 6 from the 4th grade). In total, I collected 47 student linguistic autobiographies. I did not ask 2nd graders to
write down their experience as this writing task might be too demanding for them and I elicited information on this by chatting with them in recess or group interviews.

I read all their biographies and took notes and prepared questions based on them before I had interviews with them later on so that they could make reference to it, and elaborate on the parts I took special interest in.

**Formal interviews in schools and during home visits**

Formal interviews were mostly conducted during the spring semester in 2018, which was my last semester in the field. I interviewed focal students from 4 grades, language teachers and some homeroom teachers for each class, some school administrators and parents. All interviews were semi-structured (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). I prepared interview protocols as shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>With students</th>
<th>With parents</th>
<th>With teachers/administrators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Were you born in Guangzhou?</td>
<td>Why did you decide to come</td>
<td>Where were you from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When did you arrive?</td>
<td>to Guangzhou?</td>
<td>originally?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you compare your life</td>
<td>To what extent do you think</td>
<td>Could you introduce your</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>here with that in your</td>
<td>you have adapted to the life</td>
<td>teacher training experience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hometown?</td>
<td>in Guangzhou?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What about education?</td>
<td>Was Cantonese an obstacle</td>
<td>Why did you choose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there anything you find</td>
<td>when you first came?</td>
<td>Guangzhou and this school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hard to adapt to in</td>
<td>How did you learn Cantonese?</td>
<td>What kind of professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guangzhou?</td>
<td>Is it necessary for your</td>
<td>development is available?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s your Putonghua level?</td>
<td>child to learn Cantonese?</td>
<td>What is your Cantonese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think of the</td>
<td>What is your Putonghua</td>
<td>speaking proficiency?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cantonese language? What is</td>
<td>level? Did you try to improve</td>
<td>What about your children?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>your current level? How did</td>
<td>your Putonghua?</td>
<td>Is it necessary for newcomers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you learn it?</td>
<td></td>
<td>to learn Cantonese?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under what circumstances</td>
<td>About children’s education:</td>
<td>What is your instructional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>would you come in contact</td>
<td>Was it difficult to get your</td>
<td>language in class?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with Cantonese?</td>
<td>child into elementary school? Do you use other languages sometimes? (if yes) Why did you use them?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think it’s necessary</td>
<td>Could you talk about the</td>
<td>Do you or your colleagues use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to learn to speak Cantonese</td>
<td>experience?</td>
<td>dialects sometimes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>when living in Guangzhou?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why did you decide to come</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to Guangzhou?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent do you think</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you have adapted to the life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in Guangzhou?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was Cantonese an obstacle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>when you first came?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you learn Cantonese?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is it necessary for your child</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to learn Cantonese?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your Putonghua level?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you try to improve your</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putonghua?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is it necessary for newcomers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to learn Cantonese?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your instructional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>language in class?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you use other languages</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sometimes? (if yes) Why did</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you use them?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you or your colleagues use</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dialects sometimes?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What about your parents? Who do they hang out with more, local friends or fellow hometown folks living in Guangzhou?

Do you know why your parents wanted you to study here?

How would you evaluate your academic performance in each subject?

Has English been challenging to you? Do you have any learning methods?

Do you go to extra-curricular classes?

What languages do people use at school based on your observation?

Is there any rule about the language use in your school?

What languages do you use at home?

What about people in your neighborhood?

Do you think you could be called a Guangzhouer after living here so long?

Is it necessary to learn to speak your parents’ dialects? What level do you want to reach? How do you plan to learn it?

Is there another foreign language you are interested besides English?

---

Table 1: Interview protocols

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How about middle school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hometown dialects:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How was your child’s level in your dialect?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If not satisfied:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In what ways did you find your child’s proficiency in your dialect is declining?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you try to do something about it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What languages do you usually use at home?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How about your other children’s proficiency in your dialect?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regarding English learning:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why are you concerned most about your child’s English learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s your expectation of your child’s English level?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think English will be useful in their future jobs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your future plan:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you like living in Guangzhou?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does it compare to your hometown?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you plan to stay here if possible?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(if it is a local teacher) Do you see any effect on the command of Cantonese from the promotion of Putonghua?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(if not local teachers) Do you see any effect of Putonghua promotion on you or your students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think it is necessary for schools to specifically allow dialects beyond class instruction and participation?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
By then, I had amassed fieldnotes, questionnaires, and a linguistic autobiography for each focal student. Each interview was conducted after I reviewed the information I had collected through the above mentioned sources so that I was ready to go off the “script” (i.e., the interview protocols I had prepared in advance).

With students, I had individual interviews with 4th, 6th and 8th graders. For 2nd graders, I had several group interviews in which students could come with their self-identified friends. Group interviews with second graders were very difficult to manage but quite productive. Students could not sit still for the interviews and they went off the topic all the time. But at the same time, they brought in unexpected topics, challenged each other to answer, tested their friends’ language skill, and loved to overshare individual trivia which to some extent helped me understand them better. In addition to migrant students, I also talked to a group of local students in the middle school to get their perspective. All the individual and group interviews with students were audio-recorded with their permission double checked before the interviews. The interviews with students lasted from 20 minutes to an hour.

Interviews with adults were not audio-recorded. I took notes by hand and later converted them into more coherent narratives in my fieldnotes. With adults, especially school administrators, parents or teachers in the middle school with whom I was not that familiar, I was concerned that the presence of the voice recorder could distance them and make them more guarded.

With parents, I was able to make five home visits. Interviews were conducted in their home environment. I asked about their migration experience and the language learning in this process, their expectation and evaluation of their children’s language proficiencies with more elaborated reasons compared to the questionnaires. Interviews with parents would be interlaced with other events such as talking to their guests, colleagues and roommates, eating, and touring the neighborhood’s market and parks. So I usually spent half a day or a whole day for home visits. When I returned home, I would write down what I remembered from the day, and tried to put together the parents’ migration experience in a chronological order as portraiture I could use later.

With teachers and school administrators, formal interviews were conducted either in their offices or some quiet place on campus. Most teachers were quite open about their past, life in Guangzhou, their own
changing language use in school, and the styles of the principals in the school. With school administrators, I would not directly ask the questions in the protocols but started out with more broad questions about the migrant population in the school such as the admission process, the prospects for their high school admission, the teacher team, and then the language use. The length of interviews with adults in schools varied from 30 minutes to 3 hours.

Online follow-ups

After I completed my fieldwork and returned to the US, I still kept in touch with a few focal middle school students in my study. After they finished middle school, I chatted with them online to follow up on the results of their middle school exit exam, and their plan for the next step according to their test results. Later on, I also asked about their experience in high schools if they made it into one.

In addition, I was in touch with my landlord who was an urban villager, Mr. Zhen. During the first year of my data collection, I was living in one of his properties, an apartment in a high-rise residential building. The building was finished in around 2016 and was quite new when I moved in. Although everything was new and shiny with modern infrastructure, this place used to be an urban village where many migrant workers lived. Mr. Zhen talked about the changing renter demographic over the years before and after his village was renovated, which provided very useful contextual information that I would not have had access to otherwise. As a local village resident and landlord, he also provided his take on the pros and cons in living in the original urban villages and the renovated ones. He also kindly shared photos and videos of his village before the renovation.

All the chatting histories with these student and adult participants were extracted as textual or visual data.

3.2.3 Examining (archival research)

This step means collecting existing data. In my study, I collected documents shared with me from the two schools such as meeting agendas and admission plans. I also took a lot of photos with my cellphone on campus (e.g., student activities, large school events, classroom decoration, campus signages), the residential neighborhoods in which the schools were located, and the linguistic landscape in Guangzhou when I was
living in the city. Figure 2 below shows the decorative and promotional use of Cantonese by merchants (upper left: the Latinized transcription of the restaurant name represents its Cantonese reading; upper right: the two character statement on the back of this man’s T-shirt means “watch the road / pay attention to where you are going”; bottom left: the bottom sentence with a large font size on this receipt from an old local eatery means “the good stuff is here!” in Cantonese; bottom right: a warning sign on the counter of a tea shop reminds people not to litter and if they do, to retrieve the trash on their own).

![Image of signs and receipts showing Cantonese use]

**Figure 2: A glimpse of the presence of Cantonese in the linguistic landscape in Guangzhou**

I also collected news related to controversial language use and policy on different scales, and located online discussions generated by those topics on popular social media such as Weibo (similar to Twitter) and Zhihu (similar to Quora), and commentary videos on Bilibili (popular streaming website with youths in China). All this online information was organized in the software Zotero.
3.3 Data analysis methods

My data came in the formats of numbers, texts, and images. In this section, I will go through my analyzing process with illustrating examples and briefly preview the results coming up in the next data chapters.

For the questionnaires, I input the responses in Excel first and analyzed them in SPSS with both descriptive and inferential statistics. Chapter 4 shows the results of migrant students’ and parents’ language proficiencies in Putonghua, Cantonese and English, explores their intergenerational differences in Cantonese proficiencies, and compares their language choices in different domains. Similar analyses were done with responses from local families. The main purpose of the statistical analyses is not to prove a causal relation of any kind or identify particular factors affecting a high or low Cantonese command among migrant parents or students. Instead, it helps me to identify whether there are general patterns in migrant families’ language learning and use (especially in Cantonese) or great variability among my research participants. Either case will entail more qualitative data to illustrate and illuminate.

All my audio-recorded interviews were first transcribed by machine and then manually read and revised by me. Since the main analyses I did were thematic analyses which focused on the content instead of the language form and interactional contexts, I found the level of accuracy provided in machine-generated transcripts met the needs of the analyses. Then all the textual data (fieldnotes, memos, interview transcripts, linguistic autobiographies) and photos were imported into Atlas.ti for storing and analyzing.

The strategies I used to analyze my qualitative data could be summarized as connecting and categorizing (Maxwell, 2013). For connecting, I tried to write portraiture for the focal studies for which I had a variety of data. This very descriptive process entailed reading through and reflecting on relevant data collected about this person. I also compared across my research participants, asking myself what was different or similar in their lived experiences that pushed them or prevented them from developing their Cantonese. Some useful ideas and concepts emerged from this process. For example, by comparing the stories of teachers who migrated to Guangzhou and parents of migrant students in my study, it occurred to me that the initial
social positioning of migrants and the language ecology in Guangzhou at the time of their arrival mattered in their investment in learning Cantonese.

At the same time, the categorizing strategy meant that I coded my data in Atlas. ti. I started with an inductive open coding and made mostly descriptive emic codes where I extracted words used by interviewees (e.g., “half-Guangzhouer”) or briefly summarized them myself. Bazeley (2013) points out that the novice qualitative researcher may run into the problem of over-coding when they code within a software since it is less laborious to assign codes. I was also worried about whether the codes I had could be too trivial and I might never need to use them when I code narratives or interviews from other students. My own coping strategy was to check the frequencies for my codes which is neatly available in the code manager in Atlas. ti (illustrated in the snapshot below) and then try to decide whether I could merge less frequent codes into others so that I have more concise and inclusive codes (categories) which later could be themes in data chapters or sections.
Figure 3: An illustration of code manager in Atlas.ti

Here I demonstrate the development of a semantic theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the table below, I merged the codes in the upper left cell into one category since they were all talking about the advantages of living in Guangzhou. In the lower left, I have codes regarding their description of life in their hometown. By combining these two (and other categories not listed here), I came up with a potential coherent theme of the contrasting rural-urban living experience for migrant children, to which I later attributed the emotional belonging migrant children developed and their investment in learning Cantonese.
I am aware that these coding categories generated from the interviews eventually tend to correspond to the topics embedded in my interview questions. However, this process helped me identify supporting evidence (e.g., quotes) associated with lower-level descriptive codes. In contrast with these semantic themes from interviews, I also identified latent themes drawn from different sources of data, such as online discussion about a controversial proposal to include Cantonese as a requirement for obtaining a Guangzhou Hukou, themes that “examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations - and ideologies - that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>More descriptive codes</th>
<th>Coding categories</th>
<th>Potential themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More friends in Guangzhou</td>
<td>Advantages of living in Guangzhou</td>
<td>Migrant children’s contrasting experience in Guangzhou and their hometowns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot of entertainment in Guangzhou</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guangzhou is Modern</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresh air in hometown</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More communication with neighbors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good sceneries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer the food in hometown</td>
<td>Pros and cons of hometown</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like my hometown but I’m not used to living there anymore</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My hometown is backward</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>…</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: An example of “codes to theme” development

Another coping strategy to prevent myself from drowning in trivial codes was to step back and make a list of “critical or key events” (Creswell, 2007) and think about how relevant my codes are to these events and whether they capture any insights to explain some aspects of the events.
3.4 Researcher positionality

In the previous sections, I mentioned several steps to increase the validity and trustworthiness of this study such as long-term involvement, multiple sources of data, and member checks. Since the researcher as instrument is a unique feature for qualitative studies, I would like to talk about how I decided to do this study and some issues I was conscious of during the data collection process.

3.4.1 Rationale

As mentioned above in my own linguistic autobiography, I was a migrant as well. I grew up in the outskirts of a medium sized city in eastern China. It was predominantly occupied by employees of a company producing locomotive engines. Many engineers living there came from Shanghai. The variant of the Wu dialect spoken in my neighborhood was slightly different in vocabulary and pronunciation from those used by people in the city. While I was attending a middle school in the city, I had several experiences I still remember to this day in which I was mocked for the way I talked. Later I got to know that the families of both my parents did not originate from my hometown either, which explained why my home language environment was also different from that of children in the city. When I left my hometown for college in Guangzhou, I faced a completely new language just like the migrant children in my study. What was different was that, as a college student living in Guangzhou, my social circle was able to accommodate my language need to use Putonghua and I never felt compelled to learn Cantonese.

Fast forward to the time I started getting involved in language research as a graduate student and collecting data in China in the early 2010s, I crossed paths with unexpected migrant populations in public schools in my hometown. During the data collection process, I was informed how the local government had closed migrant schools and directed them into public schools. Although it sounded like a good idea to have children access quality education, teachers in the school complained about how migrant children differed from the students they usually received. Differentiated treatment to migrant students was not uncommon in my later visits to some schools in other cities. There was both blatant and unspoken discrimination against this marginalized group at different levels. In big cities such as Shanghai and Guangzhou, migrants also get blamed for causing a crisis for the local language variety. As a language researcher deeply sympathizing with the migrant population, I felt it was high time for me to do something within my capacity that might bring
some positive changes and clear their names. A small effort I can make perhaps is to find answers to the empirical question: what is the role of migrants in the so-called Cantonese crisis?

3.4.2 Issues in data collection

At the onset of my data collection, I was formally introduced to the two schools as an associate with my undergraduate college since I was a part-time lecturer. Although I was also open about my identity as a PhD student in a prestigious US university, being affiliated with a local university and introduced by a professor they trusted carried more currency and made it easier for people in the schools to legitimize my presence. My entry was affirmed in person by the principals in both schools.

Although I was aware that impression management is also an important aspect of fieldwork (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007), I still faltered in maintaining an image optimal for data collection and perhaps I could have managed my field relations better. To be more specific, I underestimated how I was perceived differently by teachers and students in a school.

As I was prioritizing blending in with students, I tried to wear plain shirts with some cartoon images and shorts which made me look even younger than my age. This worked well with students, especially in the elementary school as they referred to me as “the big sister”. In the middle school, as I attended many classes with the students together, they started to have me fill the vacant student ID left by a student who had transferred away. I was No. 19 to them for a while. Whenever teachers nominated that number to answer questions, the rest of the class would look at me and giggle.

Despite the success with the students, my style was questioned one day by my liaison teacher in the middle school as he asked why I did not wear pretty dresses as the student teachers from my college who usually came to this school for their practicum. I lost my words for a second not because I took offense at his uninvited comment on my style but at that moment it dawned on me that I might accidentally have distanced myself from the teachers as I only “dressed” to impress the students. As I mentioned above, unlike my extensive participation in the elementary school in both teaching and administrative work, I was not involved in the daily operation of the middle school at the teachers’ level, so I had few opportunities to build a reciprocal rapport with them. Neither did they have a chance to know exactly who I was. I wondered how
the teachers thought about me with my inappropriate clothing as an alleged college lecturer! The worst-case scenario would be that they did not take me seriously since I was a complete outsider to them and had no productive roles in their school at all.

Later I took initiatives in talking to the teachers after their classes and in their offices. They started to be aware of my identity as a student from US. One of the English teachers put me on the spot in her class one day to consult me about (or quiz me on) an English synonym for being nearsighted. Fortunately, I knew the word *myopic* which seemed to satisfy her and impressed the class. On another occasion, the Chinese teacher made a compliment when she saw I was jotting down notes in English. In a way, my English might have brought me some credit and hopefully they were convinced that I was a serious researcher.

In hindsight, I also wonder about whether my different reception at the two schools was related to the hierarchy built into the middle school. Had I dressed in a more mature way to establish my legitimacy, would they have treated me differently? Fortunately, perhaps looking like a young student made me not intimidating. My interviews with all the teachers went well though it would have been better if I was in a more cordial relationship with them.

### 3.5 Results

There are four upcoming data analysis chapters. Chapter 4 shows the quantitative results from questionnaires illustrating language use patterns and language proficiencies of both the parents and children in the local and migrant families respectively with a focus on the latter. It also draws attention to the migrants’ intergenerational differences in Cantonese learning. Chapter 5 focuses on adult migrants’ varied Cantonese learning investment by tracing the changes in language ecology in Guangzhou, portraying the changing image of Cantonese speakers and discussing the social positions relative to locals taken by migrants from different social classes. Chapters 6 and 7 are devoted to understanding the factors boosting or suppressing migrant children’s Cantonese learning interests and behaviors in and outside of schools.
Chapter 4. Sketching Language learning of migrant parents and students in Guangzhou: findings from questionnaires

In this chapter, based on the information gathered through a student questionnaire and a parent questionnaire in 2017\(^3\), and student records provided by the two participating schools, I will present the demographic information of my participants, their language proficiencies, and language use pattern in different domains with a focus on the language of Cantonese.

In the elementary school and the middle school, two classes in each of the 2\(^{nd}\), 4\(^{th}\), 6\(^{th}\) and 8\(^{th}\) grades were invited to answer the questionnaires. In total, 321 students and their parents were invited. For the student questionnaire, since all elementary participants finished the questionnaire in class with the presence of the researcher and their teachers, and middle school participants finished independently given a weeklong period, the return rate was high. I retrieved 318 student questionnaires from the 321 invited (retrieval rate: 99.1%). As for the parent questionnaire, the return rate was relatively lower. 263 were retrieved (retrieval rate: 81.9\%\(^4\)). The demographic information is mostly derived from student records and the parent questionnaire while the language related findings are from both questionnaires.

Some preemptive measures to increase validity and reliability were taken. With elementary school students, any words or question format that could be confusing were explained in person. For parents, brief notes were provided to any questions that might be confusing in the questionnaire. The results of the questionnaires are intended to sketch a general image of my participants, and provide some leads and data triangulation opportunities for the qualitative inquiry which will be presented in subsequent chapters. Therefore, the findings below may not be transferred to another research setting without examining the similarities of the study contexts.

\(^3\) See questionnaires in appendices A & B.
\(^4\) The parental questionnaire retrieval rates are lower in higher grades: 87.5\% (Grade 2), 90.1\% (Grade 4), 78.9\% (Grade 6), 71.4\% (Grade 8).
4.1 Demographic information about my participants

Among the parent respondents, 58.18% (N = 153) do not have Guangzhou Hukou, for which their families would be called migrant families. However, they are not necessarily the economically incentivized and transient opportunists portrayed in the stereotypical image of migrant population. In fact, the migrants in my dataset have lived and worked in Guangzhou for 15 years on average. Most of them were from less economically developed regions within Guangdong province (where the city of Guangzhou is) or nearby provinces. 74.5% of the adult migrant respondents reported holding a rural Hukou which likely indicates they came from a rural area.

The reported annual family income is illustrated in Figure 4. According to the Guangzhou Bureau of Statistics 2018 Yearbook, the 2017\(^5\) annual disposable income per capita for urban residents in Guangzhou on average is 55400.49 Chinese Yuan. Per this standard, a family of three’s annual income on average is over 150K Chinese Yuan. In comparison, a good proportion (70.61%, in first three clusters) of my participant families, be they local or migrant, live below the average income level in Guangzhou. This is consistent with the fact that the two schools in this study are located respectively in an urban village and an old neighborhood where migrant enclaves abound because the living cost especially the housing in these types of communities is relatively affordable.

In particular, migrants (in green) cluster more in the lower end of the income range. Based on interviews, many migrant children reported having siblings which make the family expenses higher and potentially a more stringent life. Meanwhile, 11.07% of migrants in my study fall in the higher income groups (200K+). It seems that there were some financially well-off migrant families regardless of their Hukou status. In my ethnographic inquiry, I did find that migrant families who run their own small business likely fit this description.

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\(^5\) Questionnaires in my study were administered in 2017.
Figure 4: Annual family income reported by parents

Among the Guangzhou Hukou Holding respondents (in orange), the majority are Guangzhou residents born with local Hukou. Around 38 are former migrants, who had migrated to Guangzhou and later successfully acquired Guangzhou Hukou. This subgroup accounts for 19.8% of the total respondents who were not locally born but currently residing in Guangzhou in my dataset.

As for the students, Table 3 shows the breakdown of the 321 retrieved in each grade by gender. Overall, there were more male students in each grade which likely reflects the gender imbalance in China as shown in the past two censuses.

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6 Although no information could be collected on how these parents acquired their Guangzhou Hukou, a government-run, point-based Hukou application system is available in which points are determined by factors such as applicants’ educational credentials, length of stay, professional skills, tax-paying record and so forth. This detailed criteria for selecting desired residents in this system could vary by cities.

7 According to the 6th and 7th national censuses in 2000 and 2010 available on the website of China’s National Bureau of Statistics, the gender ratios (male/female) among newborns are 1.178 and 1.179 respectively.
### Table 3: Counts of student participants in each grade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The student records I had access to include their Hukou status. Among the student respondents, 58.88% (N = 189) don’t have Guangzhou Hukou. The percentage is similar to the result from the parent questionnaire (57.52%). The other 132 students are locals born with Guangzhou Hukou or those whose migrant parents secured Hukou during their stay.

Among all the student respondents, 48.8% (N = 159) were born in Guangzhou, and 31.45% (N = 50) of these locally born students do not have a Guangzhou Hukou. This local birth rate for migrant group hovers around 30-40% in my dataset\(^8\), which corresponds to Li’s (2015) finding that migrant workers tend to bring their families to settle in their hosting city in recent years. How this fact plays a role in migrant children’s Cantonese proficiency or affects their interest in learning it will be explored through qualitative analyses in later chapters.

As for migrant students who were not locally born in Guangzhou, their arrival age trends lower. Even if they were born and raised in their parents’ hometowns for several years, more students in lower grades had their educational experience solely in Guangzhou. Figure 5 below shows the students’ response to the question whether they have attended schools (including pre-schools and kindergartens) outside of Guangzhou. 15.58% (N = 50) of all students had this experience, with more in 8\(^{th}\) grade and fewer in lower grades.

---

\(^8\) The percentage of locally born migrant students: 30.2% (Grade 2); 27.6% (Grade 4); 39.3% (Grade 6); 33.3% (Grade 8)
grades. This group of students are most likely migrant students whose parents left them behind in their hometown with relatives while they were working in Guangzhou. When the parents’ financial situation stabilizes and potentially when it’s getting close to the schooling age for the child to attend elementary school, the child would join the parents in the hosting city. Later interviews with parents and students (e.g., IN8522P) also revealed that migrant parents were aware the better educational resources in Guangzhou compared to their rural hometowns and would like to take advantage of them when the access to education was becoming more inclusive or when they could afford private education that overlooked their Hukou status.

![Bar chart showing counts of students who have or have not experienced school transfer by grade.]

**Figure 5: Counts of students who have or have not experienced school transfer**

Migrant parents also behaved similarly to their local peers in capitalizing on the educational resources in big cities. In responding to my questionnaire, almost 50% of the local parents reported sending their children to extra-curricular programs. 44% migrants did the same. Math and English are the two most popular subjects. In addition, for both groups of parents, their dissatisfaction about their children’s English development in 2nd grade is quite high (> 50%). This is a notable result since English is introduced as a fun experiential course during the first two years in elementary schools in China for which achievement tests are not allowed.
Technically, parents should not be so concerned about their children’s performance in this subject in second grade.

Before transitioning to the section on the language related findings emerging from the questionnaires, I would like to make a clarification about the description of my participants. While going through my questionnaire data, it occurs to me that in analyzing language related responses, it might not be most useful to distinguish participants as either migrants or locals based on whether they have Guangzhou local Hukou or not. For the subgroup of migrants who acquired local Hukou mentioned above, they would be classified as locals per the Hukou criteria. However, their affiliations and attitudes to different languages do not change overnight the moment their Hukou status changes. After all, coming to work in a new city is a conscious choice in their adult years, and they generally have lived with the identity of migrants for years before receiving their Guangzhou Hukou, the impact of which cannot be written off so easily. So before moving on to present the findings regarding languages in the questionnaires, I should clarify that I regrouped my participants as *locals* and *new residents* in most statistical analyses below. Locals refer to those who are born with Guangzhou Hukou. New residents refer to all the participants from families who came to reside and work in Guangzhou from another place regardless whether they’ve secured a local Hukou or not. Per this procedure, the student population in my dataset is now composed of 223 new residents (69.47%) and 98 locals (30.53%).

### 4.2 Language related findings

In both questionnaires (see appendices A & B), participants were asked to report their command of Cantonese, Putonghua, and English in listening and speaking skills. For the parent respondents, they also reported their spouse’s Cantonese proficiency so that the researcher could identify whether Cantonese is a heritage language in the family. As for children, they also reported their command of their parental mother tongues (which are considered heritage languages within the families). Responses were also elicited in the following themes: Language use in the various domains, expectation of, satisfaction with and concern about children’s language development, and children’s interest in gaining proficiencies in various languages in the future. The presentation of findings will be in sequence, beginning with a probe into the language proficiencies across two generations (parents & children), followed by an examination of parents’ and child’s
language choice in different domains and ending with a brief look at the status of heritage languages within migrant families.

4.2.1 Overview of language proficiencies

This section will present the language proficiency results of parents and their children in both local and new resident groups.

*Parents*

Figures 6 & 7 show the self-reported language proficiencies in listening (L) and speaking (S) of Cantonese, Putonghua, and English in a five-level proficiency scale ranging from *no command* to *native like* for the parent respondents in local group and new resident group respectively.

![New Resident Parents’ Language Proficiency](image)

**Figure 6: New resident parents’ proficiencies in three languages**
For the two parent groups, both are much more proficient in Putonghua and Cantonese than in English. It should be noted that for all parents, they grew up speaking their own dialects, some of which are unintelligible for Putonghua speakers. Putonghua is a language picked up later in their life by repeated exposure since Putonghua was not enforced as the language of instruction in schools until 2000 per the Language Law. In several linguistic autobiographies of migrant students (e.g., LA8501, LA8522, LA8605), they mentioned that their parents worked on their own Putonghua speaking skills while helping the child who was about to start schooling in Guangzhou and had not met school’s expectation to function in Putonghua. Therefore, the self-reported perception of Putonghua level is impressive since it’s a naturally acquired second language. It illustrates the abundant opportunities of Putonghua use in their life in Guangzhou. In fact, the new resident parent group reported that Putonghua was the most frequently used language in their daily life outside their home (62%) and at workplace (51%). Even for the local Guangzhou parent group, Putonghua was used for 30% of the interaction in daily life and 40% at work. Although there are slightly more local parents in the higher proficiency levels than the new resident parents in both Putonghua listening and
speaking, the difference is not significant based on the result of comparing these two groups with an independent-samples t-test (Listening: $t(523) = 1.84, p = 0.066$; Speaking: $t(523) = 1.34, p = 0.182$).

As for Cantonese, it’s the mother tongue for the majority in the local parent group and indeed over 90% of the local parents reported advanced (3) or native-like (4) level in both listening and speaking. Table 4 shows the average proficiency levels of the two parent groups in both listening and speaking skills. Compared to their new resident peers, the advantage of the local parent group in Cantonese is significant (Listening: $t(468) = 11.61, p < .05, d = 0.98$; Speaking: $t(481) = 13.57, p < .05, d = 1.15$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Local Parents Mean (Standard Deviation)</th>
<th>New Resident Parents Mean (Standard Deviation)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cantonese Listening</td>
<td>3.66 (0.590)</td>
<td>2.80 (1.095)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cantonese Speaking</td>
<td>3.62 (0.657)</td>
<td>2.46 (1.273)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putonghua Listening</td>
<td>3.26 (0.786)</td>
<td>3.12 (0.793)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putonghua Speaking</td>
<td>3.10 (0.814)</td>
<td>2.99 (0.825)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Listening</td>
<td>1.37 (0.786)</td>
<td>0.93 (0.837)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Speaking</td>
<td>1.32 (0.747)</td>
<td>0.88 (0.805)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Descriptive statistic of parents’ listening and speaking proficiencies in Cantonese, Putonghua & English

Meanwhile, quite a few new resident parents reported high levels (3-4) in Cantonese listening (67.4%) and speaking (54.7%). Only 4.5% reported that they did not understand Cantonese at all. On average, new resident parents reported conducting around 25% of their interaction in Cantonese in daily life outside their home and at workplace. But the chances for using Cantonese vary a lot. It seems to depend on where they live and the type of jobs they have, which later chapters will elaborate on. In general, new resident parents are active and successful language learners of Putonghua and Cantonese.

As for English, very few parents in either group reported high levels (3-4). A third of new resident parents reported no command in English at all. As mentioned above, around 75% of the new resident group came from rural areas where the educational resources were limited. English might not have been part of the curriculum one or two decades ago in the elementary or middle schools in their regions. Many parents’
education might have ended after the compulsory education period (grade 1-9). Based on interview data, some even did not finish elementary school. Few went to college. This does not mean English is disconnected to their life now. In fact, among 60.2% of new resident parents who reported having inconveniences or bad experiences with languages at workplace, 35% identified English while 15% said Cantonese, which is consistent with their general high proficiency in Cantonese and low proficiency in English.

When asked which language they would like to improve most for their work, an overwhelming 77% of new resident parents chose English. In the same vein, in answering which languages they want their children to be proficient in, English was chosen as often as Putonghua. On the one hand, the fact that their work might involve English (e.g., some parents trade with foreign clients) while their proficiency is very low could be a driving force behind their own aspiration to improve their English. On the other hand, new resident parents also reported the actual use of English only accounted for 2.4% in their work on average. It means their anxiety or insecurity about English is not based on an acute pragmatic need. English has yet become a must-have skill for working and living in Guangzhou. But its value is high in the eyes of new resident parents.

To sum up, both groups of parents have a high proficiency in Putonghua and Cantonese. Although they have a low proficiency in English, the interest in improving it is very high.
Students

Figure 8: New Resident students’ proficiencies in three languages

Figure 9: Local students’ proficiencies in three languages
Figures 8 and 9 present students’ proficiencies in Putonghua, Cantonese and English. Both local and new resident students are highly proficient in Putonghua. Over 95% of them reported advanced (3) or native-like (4) levels across both listening and speaking, with the majority in the native-like category. Even for Guangzhou local students in my dataset, Putonghua seems to be their strongest language despite that local parents report to use 71.87% Cantonese when speaking with their children at home (see Figure 12 below).

As for English, the self-reported proficiency does not seem reliable since there are about 30% claiming they were at advanced or native-like levels in both local and new resident groups, which is not consistent with my filed observation and their English teachers’ evaluation.

When it comes to Cantonese, the local student group seems more likely to stay in the high levels (3~4). Similar to the local parent group, Cantonese is mother tongue for most of local students. So it is notable that the percentage of students reporting native-like speaking (56.30%) dropped significantly compared to their listening (72.9%) at this level. It seems to reflect the issue of Cantonese attrition particularly mentioned in my group interview (IN1804283542) with local students in the middle school. Because of the predominant use of Putonghua at school, many Cantonese speaking local students transferred this habit to their home environment. They use it in conversation with their parents and siblings. When their conversation is conducted in Cantonese, from time to time, they may blank on words in Cantonese and need to consult their parents. When the same situation happens with their ruthless Cantonese speaking teenage peers, they might be called out for not being like a “Guangzhouer”. For the locals, it seems that the identity of Guangzhouer is very much tied to Cantonese command, an issue further discussed in chapter 5.

As for the new resident student group, their Cantonese proficiency is much lower than the local group. Across the languages, the reported Cantonese proficiency is even lower than their English proficiency (though English is likely overrated as explained before). Almost 60% (level 0 ~1) could barely speak Cantonese and 37.1% (level 0~1 in listening) could barely understand it.

Since migrant families could come from other Cantonese speaking areas in Guangdong province or nearby provinces with Cantonese speaking pockets (e.g., Guangxi province and Hainan provinces),
Cantonese could still be a home language or a heritage language for some migrant children. I explored whether Cantonese as a heritage language makes a difference in their reported Cantonese proficiency.

Table 5 shows the crosstabulation of new resident students at different levels of Cantonese listening and speaking divided by whether Cantonese is a heritage language. There are more students in “yes” rows (namely students whose heritage language is Cantonese) at high levels (3 ~ 4: 75% for listening; 65.4% for speaking). A further Chi-square test was performed to prove that the advantage is significant for both listening and speaking (Listening: $\chi^2 (4, N = 221) = 54.79$, $p < .0001$, $V = 0.498$; Speaking: $\chi^2 (4, N = 221) = 75.77$, $p < .0001$, $V = 0.586$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cantonese skill</th>
<th>Cantonese is heritage?</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4 Native-like</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(16.6%)</td>
<td>(29.0%)</td>
<td>(20.7%)</td>
<td>(26.0%)</td>
<td>(7.7%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(3.8%)</td>
<td>(5.8%)</td>
<td>(15.4%)</td>
<td>(25.0%)</td>
<td>(50.0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(35.5%)</td>
<td>(35.5%)</td>
<td>(18.9%)</td>
<td>(7.7%)</td>
<td>(2.4%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(5.8%)</td>
<td>(13.5%)</td>
<td>(15.4%)</td>
<td>(32.7%)</td>
<td>(32.7%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Frequency table of new resident students’ Cantonese proficiency levels

This result means that although at the societal level in Guangzhou, Cantonese is not used as much as before, a migrant child’s Cantonese acquisition could still benefit from Cantonese language use at home. However,
it should be noted that 5.8% of the Cantonese heritage new resident students could not speak Cantonese and 13.5% claimed they were speaking it at a beginner level, despite their parents’ being native speakers.

As for students who do not have Cantonese as part of their heritage languages (in "no" rows), it seems very few made it to the high proficiency levels. Between the two skills, they are slightly better in listening. Speaking is understandably a more demanding skill. Around 10% reached high levels (3&4) in Cantonese speaking, and 35.5% each reported that they could not speak it at all or spoke it at a beginner level respectively.

Table 6 below shows the average proficiency level in Cantonese of new resident student with no Cantonese speaking parents by grade. The result of a one-way between subjects ANOVA shows that there is a significant difference in Cantonese listening skill at the p < .05 level for students across four grades (F(3, 165) = 4.692, p = 0.004, η² = 0.079). Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean Cantonese listening command of 2nd graders was significantly lower than that of 6th graders and 8th graders at the p <.05 level. As for Cantonese speaking, although there seems to be a slight advantage for 4th, 6th and 8th graders compared to 2nd graders, the difference is not significant (F(3, 165) = 1.370, p = 0.254). The average Cantonese speaking skill seems trapped at beginner level or slightly above in all four grades.

It should be noted that, this is a cross-sectional dataset with different student cohorts in each grade. So although I compared their Cantonese attainment between grades, I do not intend to draw any conclusion from a developmental or temporal point of view. There could be many other factors affecting their language exposure and development which is more appropriate to discuss in subsequent chapters.
I also isolated new resident students who were born outside of Guangdong province (indicating the family is likely coming from other provinces) and does not have Cantonese a heritage language. For this subset of students (N = 52), Cantonese learning seems more challenging. Over half (51.9%, compared to 35.5% in table 3) reported no command in Cantonese speaking. For those who claimed to have speaking ability to some extent, the vast majority (46.2% in this subset) were at a low level.

To sum up, both local and new resident students reported they were best at Putonghua. The local group remains at a high level in Cantonese listening on average but there seems to be an attrition since the percentage of students at a high level of speaking is relatively lower despite the fact that Cantonese is their mother tongue. As for the new resident group, their reported Cantonese proficiency is significantly lower in both listening and speaking than their local peers. Similar to their local peers, their listening skill is better than their speaking skill. Whether Cantonese is heritage language-indicating potential Cantonese exposure within family domain-seems to play a role in their overall Cantonese development. The next sections will explore the inter-generational difference in Cantonese proficiency among the new resident parents and children as well as the language use at home.

4.2.2 Zooming in on intergenerational difference in Cantonese proficiency

Figure 10 illustrates this comparison between new resident students (children) and their parents. Overall, parents are more successful learners of Cantonese. Their advantage is more pronounced in Cantonese speaking ability (right column). A chi-square test of independence was performed to confirm that the differences are significant in both skills (Listening: $\chi^2 (4, N = 601) = 51.66, p < .005, V = 0.293$; Speaking:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>6</th>
<th>48</th>
<th>1.13</th>
<th>1.024</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>1.073</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: New resident students’ Cantonese proficiencies by grade

\footnote{The larger sample is due to the inclusion of both parents since the language proficiencies of both parents are reported. A larger sample size provides enough statistical power to perform a 5 by 5 chi-square test.} \footnote{Due to the multiple comparisons in a 5 by 5 chi-square test, Bonferroni correction is applied to prevent type I error and the new alpha level is .005.}
χ² (4, N = 601) = 79.29, p < .005, V = 0.363. In particular, in each skill, many more parents in the high levels cluster in the higher end of the proficiency range while many more students flock in the lower end.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cantonese Listening skill</th>
<th>Cantonese Speaking skill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>New Resident Parents</strong></td>
<td><strong>New Resident Children</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 No Command</td>
<td>1 Beginner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 No Command</td>
<td>1 Beginner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 10: Comparison of Cantonese listening and speaking skills between new resident parents & students

Although the new resident students as a group (lower half of Figure 10) in general reported lower Cantonese level compared to the parent group, this does not mean Cantonese-speaking parents were not helpful for their children to learn Cantonese at all. In order to explore whether there is any relationship between parents’ and children’s proficiencies in Cantonese within an individual family, Spearman’s Correlation was selected to examine this question. The choice of Spearman’s Rho is due to the fact the proficiency data is ordinal, namely entailing a nonparametric test. Due to the low return rate of parent questionnaire and missing data, I was able
to isolate 180 pairs of parent and child in the same household to explore the intergenerational difference in Cantonese proficiency within a family.

Table 7: Spearman Correlation between parent’s and child’s Cantonese listening skill

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spearman’s rho</th>
<th>Parent_Cantonese_Listening</th>
<th>Correlation Coefficient</th>
<th>1.000</th>
<th>.383**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>180</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child_Cantonese_Listening</td>
<td>Correlation Coefficient</td>
<td>.383**</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>180</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 8: Spearman Correlation between parent’s and child’s Cantonese speaking skill

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spearman’s rho</th>
<th>Parent_Cantonese_Speaking</th>
<th>Correlation Coefficient</th>
<th>1.000</th>
<th>.475**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>180</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child_Cantonese_Speaking</td>
<td>Correlation Coefficient</td>
<td>.475**</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>180</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Tables 7 and 8 demonstrate the Spearman Correlation between parent’s and child’s Cantonese speaking and listening skills. Both show that there is a statistically significant, positive relationship between parent’s and
child’s Cantonese in the same household. This is also reflected in the upward trend across parent proficiency groups in Figure 11 below. It means if a parent is high in Cantonese, the child’s Cantonese level tends to be high. But when a parent is low in Cantonese, the child is less likely to have a high command in Cantonese. This positive correlation does not contradict the aforementioned difference in Cantonese command between new resident parents and children. In Table 9 or Figure 11, it is not difficult to see that the percentage of child in high level (yellow bars in figure 11) is relatively small at 21% (38/180) while for parents it registers at 62.8% (113/180, third clustered column group).

Meanwhile, the percentage of child with no proficiency (green bars) drops to 17.7% (“parent high group”) from 60% (“parent no command group”). When the parent is still at a low level (the second column cluster), almost half (45.6%) of the children reported no command in Cantonese at all, which is high. It might suggest that only when parents themselves reach a relatively high level (the third column cluster in figure 11) could they provide useful help for their children’s Cantonese learning.

![Parent-child proficiency pair](image)

**Figure 11: Parent-child proficiency pair**
However, the exact role of the parent in the child’s Cantonese development is unknown based on this correlational analysis. This result does not mean the parent is directly responsible for the child’s high or low proficiency in Cantonese though the parent could provide some incentives. There could be other mediating factors (e.g., some parents do not see the value of Cantonese for their children or they are unwilling to use Cantonese if their own proficiency level is low), or external factors affecting parents and children differently. This issue will be further discussed with illustrating examples in details in chapter 6. Here I will further present data on parental language use at home which could also help understand the intergenerational difference in Cantonese proficiency.

In the parent questionnaire, parents reported their language choices when interacting with their children and the relative amounts in percentages. Figure 12 illustrates the distribution of language use from three parent groups: new resident group as a whole (N=189), local group (N=75) and new resident parents whose mother tongues are not Cantonese (a subgroup of new resident parent group, N = 136).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent proficiency</th>
<th>3 (High)</th>
<th>2 (Low)</th>
<th>I (no command)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 (High)</td>
<td>34 (30.1%)</td>
<td>3 (5.3%)</td>
<td>1 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 (Low)</td>
<td>59 (52.2%)</td>
<td>28 (49.1%)</td>
<td>3 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I (no command)</td>
<td>20 (17.7%)</td>
<td>26 (45.6%)</td>
<td>6 (60%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Subtotal of each parent group | 113 | 57 | 10 |

Table 9: Frequency table - Parent-Child proficiency pair

---

The original proficiency level is recoded for this analysis: 0 (no command) to 1 (no command); 1 (beginner) & intermediate (2) to 2 (low); 3 (advanced) & 4 (native-like) to 3 (high).
Cantonese is still the top choice for local parents (71.87% in Figure 12). As shown in the frequency tables below (tables 10 and 11), 82.4% of local parent respondents use Cantonese quite often (50% ~ 100%). A third (33.8%) of local parent respondents reported no use of Putonghua by them at all. This shows that language use in the private family domain of local families is not devastatingly affected by the prevalence of Putonghua in public domains, at least not for the parent generation. The perception of a crisis for Cantonese for the locals perhaps has more to do with its declining status in the public domains rather than its practical use among the local population.

**Percentage of Cantonese used with children**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Putonghua used with children</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Valid Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid 0%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>33.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10: Frequency table for local parents’ use of Cantonese with children
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>80%</th>
<th>1.3</th>
<th>1.5</th>
<th>98.5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>68</td>
<td>90.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Missing System</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>75</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11: Frequency table for local parents’ use of Putonghua with children

In contrast, in new resident households, shown in figure 12 above, Putonghua (58.15%) has replaced Cantonese (19.13%) and even parents’ dialects (22.22%), becoming the most used language by parents. In households where Cantonese is not the mother tongue of either parent, the use of Cantonese dropped to 6.82% (circled in figure 12), which could help explain the finding in the preceding section that children in this kind of family tend to have low proficiency in Cantonese. Table 12 below shows the parents’ proficiency in this subgroup. Indeed, there are some parents who never learned to speak Cantonese (11.6%) themselves and cannot introduce Cantonese to their family language repertoire. However, within the same subgroup, 42.1% reported to reach advanced or native-like levels in Cantonese speaking skill. This means it is likely that parents speak very good Cantonese but somehow are not utilizing this resource in their home environment very often. So the child could not capitalize on it and Cantonese is therefore not transmitted between the two generations in many cases. And since I find that there is a positive correlation between parent’s and child’s Cantonese command, it means if families that have valued their Cantonese resources did actively incorporate it in their family language repertoire, the child has a good chance to learn it. Parents may play a crucial role in the family language planning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cantonese Listening</th>
<th>Cantonese Speaking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 No command</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Beginner</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Intermediate</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Advanced</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is also notable that in the subgroup where Cantonese was not either parent’s mother tongue (as shown in Table 13 below), 25% gave up using their hometown dialects (0% used in the family) and around 50% use them very slightly (below 20% in their interaction with children). The maintenance of heritage languages (in this case parents’ dialects) is much worse than that of Cantonese in local families. It seems that in new resident households, Putonghua is displacing other languages, giving children little space to pick up Cantonese, and perhaps even their heritage languages as well.

### Table 12: Non-Cantonese parents’ proficiency in Cantonese

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>.7</td>
<td>.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To sum up, this section presents an analysis that illustrates a significant intergenerational difference in Cantonese learning between parents and children within new resident families in Guangzhou. New resident parents are more successful learners of Cantonese in both listening and speaking. Meanwhile, within the same household, if a parent reaches high level of Cantonese, the child is likely to have higher command as well. Further inquiry in parent-reported language use with their children at home suggests Putonghua is the most frequently used language while Cantonese and heritage languages (parents’ dialects) are much less used. The insufficient language exposure at home could partially attribute to the low Cantonese proficiency of the new resident child group. In comparison, parents in local families still hold on to their mother tongue Cantonese regardless of external pressures from Putonghua. The next section will change the perspective and move on to student-reported language choices in different domains.

4.2.3 Language use in migrant students’ life: the matchless Putonghua

In previous sections, I have presented migrant parents’ self-reported language use with their children, which to some extent reflects the language input migrant children receive at home. In this section, I will switch the perspective and present migrant students’ self-reported preferred language use in different domains relevant to their lives.

Migrant parents and children live in the same family unit in Guangzhou. However, their different societal roles expose them to distinct daily activities beyond the family scale. To put this another way, the language input and demands could be quite different. Even if children are at a prime time for learning languages, it

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>80%</th>
<th>90%</th>
<th>99%</th>
<th>100%</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>.7</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>98.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>.7</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>94.9</td>
<td>97.1</td>
<td>97.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13: Non-Cantonese parents’ frequency in using their heritage dialects with children
will not be surprising that they lag behind their parents in Cantonese acquisition if their Cantonese input is impoverished. In fact, students in this study were asked to rank their familiarity (or command) of various languages present in their lives. For students without Cantonese as a heritage language, Cantonese was ranked lower than English\textsuperscript{12}. In other words, Cantonese is more foreign a language than English for them. This to some extent reflect that their daily exposure to Cantonese is quite limited. More on this will be present in subsequent chapters.

Unlike their parents' engaging in more diverse social encounters, students split most of their waking hours between home and school where they interact with their teachers and peers. The latter is an institution with a set of codes of conduct which include language use and determines the language exposure students can get in schools. Per the law of commonly used spoken and written languages implemented from 2001, all schools have adopted Putonghua as their language of instruction. Although schools do not necessarily have a strict Putonghua-only policy for activities other than class instruction, the promotion of Putonghua associating this language with civil conduct on campus indirectly encourages the adoption of Putonghua for school activities across the board. Meanwhile, if we zoom in on students' daily interaction, their human agency is inevitably at play. That is to say, language use of students likely reflects their evaluation of the acceptance and appropriateness of languages in different domains.

Tables 14 and 15 respectively show an overview of new resident and local students’ self-reported language use in different domains: home, school and beyond. Students were asked to identify the language(s) they prefer to use in each interaction situation. More than one language could be chosen if needed. So in each

\textsuperscript{12} A Friedman’s ANOVA was performed and detected a significant difference among languages involved (Putonghua, Cantonese, parents’ dialects, English): \( \chi^2 (4) = 354.42, p = .000 \). The mean rank of all languages resulted in the following familiarity rank: Putonghua > Parents’ dialect > English > Cantonese. Post hoc analysis with Wilcoxon signed-rank tests was conducted with a Bonferroni correction applied, resulting in a significance level set at \( p < 0.005 \). It was found that the difference between Cantonese and English was significant (\( Z = -3.587, p = .00033 \))
The sum of the percentage is very often over 100%. The percentage in each cell indicates the frequency of students choosing this language in a given interaction situation.

### Language Choice(s) of New Resident Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Interact with:</th>
<th>Putonghua</th>
<th>Cantonese</th>
<th>Mother’s dialect</th>
<th>Father’s dialect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mom</td>
<td>147 (66.8%)</td>
<td>49 (22.3%)</td>
<td>95 (43.2%)</td>
<td>84 (38.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dad</td>
<td>137 (62.3%)</td>
<td>50 (22.7%)</td>
<td>84 (38.2%)</td>
<td>97 (44.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>grandparents</td>
<td>77 (35.5%)</td>
<td>42 (19.4%)</td>
<td>126 (58.1%)</td>
<td>116 (53.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>siblings</td>
<td>168 (77.1%)</td>
<td>30 (13.8%)</td>
<td>62 (28.4%)</td>
<td>67 (30.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>classmates</td>
<td>215 (97.3%)</td>
<td>14 (6.3%)</td>
<td>2 (0.9%)</td>
<td>3 (1.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>close friends</td>
<td>210 (95.0%)</td>
<td>20 (9.0%)</td>
<td>5 (2.3%)</td>
<td>5 (2.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>unacquainted</td>
<td>213 (96.8%)</td>
<td>7 (3.2%)</td>
<td>4 (1.8%)</td>
<td>4 (1.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>students</td>
<td>217 (98.2%)</td>
<td>8 (3.6%)</td>
<td>1 (0.5%)</td>
<td>1 (0.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outside home &amp; school</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>strangers</td>
<td>192 (88.1%)</td>
<td>43 (19.7%)</td>
<td>12 (5.5%)</td>
<td>11 (5.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14: Frequency table for language choice(s) of new resident students in different domains

### Language Choice(s) of Guangzhou Local Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Interact with:</th>
<th>Putonghua</th>
<th>Cantonese</th>
<th>Mother’s dialect</th>
<th>Father’s dialect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mom</td>
<td>40 (41.7%)</td>
<td>79 (82.3%)</td>
<td>38 (39.6%)</td>
<td>34 (35.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dad</td>
<td>25 (25.8%)</td>
<td>83 (85.6%)</td>
<td>32 (33.0%)</td>
<td>37 (38.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>grandparents</td>
<td>21 (22.3%)</td>
<td>74 (78.7%)</td>
<td>40 (42.6%)</td>
<td>34 (36.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>siblings</td>
<td>44 (45.4%)</td>
<td>67 (69.1%)</td>
<td>33 (34.0%)</td>
<td>34 (35.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>classmates</td>
<td>90 (93.8%)</td>
<td>23 (24.0%)</td>
<td>3 (3.1%)</td>
<td>3 (3.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>close friends</td>
<td>84 (86.6%)</td>
<td>26 (26.8%)</td>
<td>4 (4.1%)</td>
<td>5 (5.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>unacquainted</td>
<td>88 (91.7%)</td>
<td>9 (9.4%)</td>
<td>2 (2.1%)</td>
<td>1 (1.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>students</td>
<td>93 (95.9%)</td>
<td>7 (7.2%)</td>
<td>1 (1.0%)</td>
<td>4 (4.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outside home &amp; school</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>strangers</td>
<td>67 (71.3%)</td>
<td>49 (52.1%)</td>
<td>5 (5.3%)</td>
<td>5 (5.3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15: Frequency table for language choice(s) of Guangzhou local students in different domains
Across Tables 14 and Table 15, some similar and different patterns emerged. In terms of language use domain, there was an overwhelming preference for Putonghua for interaction in schools for both groups of students. This indicated that the use of Putonghua is very common for students. Is it because the Putonghua-only policy was explicitly stressed in these two schools or perhaps students are just very self-disciplined? Or both?

I inquired into students’ perception of language rules in the elementary schools and middle school they have gone to. As shown in Table 16 below, the majority of students in both schools (79.1% and 82.9%) did not perceive this kind of rule in their current school, which is consistent with the researcher’s observation in the fieldwork. However, in practice, Putonghua was almost solely used as reported by students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>“My elementary school has(d) a Putonghua-only rule”</th>
<th>“My middle school has a Putonghua-only rule”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes (%)</td>
<td>No (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New resident</td>
<td>48 (20.9%)</td>
<td>182 (79.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>elementary school</td>
<td>students (N = 230)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New resident</td>
<td>50 (59.5%)</td>
<td>34 (40.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>middle school</td>
<td>students (N = 84)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 16: New resident students’ perception of language rules in schools

Interestingly, 59.5% of 8th graders in the middle school reported they had experienced an explicit language rule requiring Putonghua back in their elementary schools. In fact, 71% of 8th graders had perceived this change as they changed schools. That’s to say, these students went to an elementary school where they were asked to speak Putonghua only and later entered the current middle school finding no such rule anymore. 8th graders in my study went to many different elementary schools. This indicated that in late 2000s and early 2010s (when they were in elementary schools), the explicit implementation of the Putonghua-only rule was widespread. But now, it seems the implementation of this language policy is not as vigorous. Only a small percentage of students reported perceiving this restriction. Yet, the majority still conformed to this rule. It’s evident that the implementation was successful and speaking Putonghua is normalized among students. There is no need for strict and explicit rules to manage this behavior. As for the home domain, the two groups of
students differed in their language use pattern. Cantonese is the most frequently chosen language by local students for interaction with different family members and it was followed by Putonghua, which was similar to what their parents reported. This means local families still preferred their dialects to Putonghua in daily interaction.

In contrast, new resident students reported using Putonghua more than their parents’ dialects in communication with parents. The popularity of Putonghua among students was also consistent with the language preference reported by their parents (shown in Figure 12 above) in communication with their children. When they communicated with grandparents who likely lived in their parents’ hometowns, dialects were the most popular choices as grandparents may not have command in Putonghua. In particular, the popularity gap (frequency difference) of Putonghua over parents’ dialects (in table 14) is much larger in peer interaction (i.e., with siblings) than parent-child interaction (i.e., with parents & grandparents). This generational difference also indicated a looming crisis for the further declined use of dialects among migrant children. The infrequent choice of Cantonese was not surprising since new resident students were generally at a low level in Cantonese speaking. There might be a tendency to avoid using an unfamiliar language. To summarize, although there are no rules requesting migrant families to phase out their mother tongues and adopt Putonghua in their private domain, the language choice of both migrant parents and children seems to reflect this trend. This trend is more pronounced in the younger generation. Was it intentional family language planning or not and why? This would be touched on in later chapters.

Both groups also reported their language choice when meeting a stranger in the streets of Guangzhou. Although Guangzhou used to be a Cantonese dominant city, the unanimous popularity of Putonghua across the local and new resident student groups suggested a potential language shift at work. Still, a good proportion of local students also chose Cantonese whereas only a fraction of new resident did so.

It should be noted that although new resident students tend to use less Cantonese and their proficiency is low, their interest in improving it is high. When answering whether they would like to attend a Cantonese language class if one is available in school, 70% showed interest in joining. When asked about their expectation of their language commands in the future, over half (52.7%) expressed their wish to be fluent in
Cantonese. If Cantonese is suffering from a decreasing vitality, the interest from new resident students is a glimmer of hope. But why would new resident students take interest in learning a language that was not frequently used at home, in schools and in the street of Guangzhou? Later chapters will pursue this question.

To sum up, this section presents students’ preferred language use in different domains. Putonghua is the go-to language for new resident students across all domains. It has seeped into the family domain except for that of the Guangzhou local families. The young generation prefer using Putonghua with peers. This language use pattern also indicates a shifting language ecology in Guangzhou from a Cantonese dominant one to a Putonghua dominant one. However, this shift might not happen at a fast pace because for one thing, the existing local Cantonese speaking population are actively using it within their families, and for another, new resident children, though low in Cantonese command, do have an interest in improving it.

4.2.4 Heritage languages in migrant families

Heritage languages for migrant families refer to parents’ mother tongues in this study. As alluded to in previous sections, they were by no means the most frequently used languages in most migrant families. Children’s command of these languages varies.
Figure 13: New resident students’ command of parents’ dialects
Students reported their command of their parents' dialects in the questionnaire. Figure 13 showed that overall students were higher in listening skills than speaking skills. Approximately 60 ~ 70% reported they were at a high level (3 ~4) in listening while less than 50% reported at this level for their speaking skills. In fact, there was an alarming high proportion in the lower end of the proficiency range. In particular around 30% of the students (circled in figure 13) reported they spoke little to nothing in their parents’ dialects. A breakdown by grade in Figure 14 revealed that it seemed to be a trend across the grades with a particular high proportion in 2nd and 8th grade.

In the parental questionnaire, 41.1% of parents who reported they were unsatisfied with their children’s command in their dialects subsequently chose a more detailed description of their dissatisfaction. Many
(34.6%) were upset their children could neither understand nor speak their dialects. Some (25.2%) reported their children had been receptive but never learned to speak their dialects. Others (25.2%) reported an attrition phenomenon. Their children were able to understand and speak their dialects when they were little, but this ability had diminished as they grew up. Now the children could barely speak their dialects and became receptive only.

Although children varied widely in their command of the languages by the time they responded to the questionnaire, their parents were rather optimistic and had very high expectations. Over 70% of parents expect their children to understand and speak their dialects well. 75% of the children imagine themselves reaching this level in the future. Less than 10% of parents found it would not bother them if their child no longer knew their dialects or there was no need to pass down their dialects. As for their children, when they foresee the languages they could fluently speak in the future, parents’ dialect is the least popular choice overall. In addition, there seems a decreasing interest in higher grades as shown in Table 17.

### New Resident Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2nd</th>
<th>4th</th>
<th>6th</th>
<th>8th</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Putonghua</td>
<td>33/53 (62.3%)</td>
<td>30/44 (68.2%)</td>
<td>29/55 (52.7%)</td>
<td>35/68 (51.5%)</td>
<td>127 / 220 (57.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cantonese</td>
<td>27/53 (50.9%)</td>
<td>28/44 (63.6%)</td>
<td>29/55 (52.7%)</td>
<td>32/68 (47.1%)</td>
<td>116 / 220 (52.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ Dialects</td>
<td>30/53 (56.6%)</td>
<td>23/44 (52.3%)</td>
<td>21/55 (38.2%)</td>
<td>21/68 (30.9%)</td>
<td>95 / 220 (43.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>34/53 (64.2%)</td>
<td>36/44 (81.8%)</td>
<td>44/55 (80.0%)</td>
<td>56/68 (82.4%)</td>
<td>170 / 220 (77.3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 17: Languages chosen for question “I wish to fluently use these languages”

Besides parents’ high expectation and children’s mediocre interest, there are some logistic issues emerging from the questionnaires. 35.6% of the new resident students reported that they were bi-dialectal families. Without planning, children may have very little exposure to one of the dialects, and some parents may decide to use Putonghua instead of either of the parents’ dialects. In fact, among new resident families,
almost 40% reported that they no longer use their dialect in home interaction. 75% reported that talking in
dialects accounted for less than 30% of all the communication they did at home.

To sum up, new resident parents had high expectation for their children’s command of their heritage
languages. However, they could be over optimistic because a good proportion of new resident children have
no command of these languages.

4.3 Summary

Through analyzing the responses to the questionnaires used in this study, this chapter presents and
compares local and migrant students’ and their parents’ language proficiencies and language use in different
domains. The results consistently point to the dominance of Putonghua in public domains. Its prevalence has
even seeped into private domains for migrant families, which may constitute a threat to their maintenance of
heritage languages. In terms of Cantonese, the focus of this study, the reported proficiency and use show a
diverging pattern. For the local families, the use of Cantonese reported by both parents and children remains
high for interaction within their families. Though attrition in Cantonese speaking may have happened to some
children, the overall proficiency in Cantonese for the parents and children in this group is high. In contrast,
there is an inter-generational difference in Cantonese learning achievement between migrant students and
their parents, with the latter surpassing the former especially in speaking. How does this result speak to their
adaptation and integration into the hosting city of Guangzhou? How come the adults performed better while
the children lag behind in learning Cantonese even if they are interested in learning it? Are there some
boosters or barriers unique to their respective learning process? The rest of this dissertation will try to answer
these questions.
Chapter 5. Does a Guangzhouer Speak Cantonese?

I start this chapter with three short stories from three residents in Guangzhou. In a way, they are all Guangzhouers. But not all of them agree with each other what being a Guangzhouer means and its relationship to Cantonese.

Mei, a participant in this study

Mei, by the time of her individual interview with me in 2017, was in 4th grade. She was born in 2006 and raised by her grandparents in the rural area of her parents’ hometown Chaozhou (潮州), a Min speaking area in the eastern coast of Guangdong province. At the age of three, she left for Guangzhou to reunite with her parents who ran a small business that manufactured car seat covers in an urban village and sold the products in a wholesale market in downtown Guangzhou from the early 2000s. The parents were fluent in Min, Cantonese and Putonghua. When Mei mentioned that her parents’ Putonghua was really good, she was proud and attributed this to their parents’ living experience in a big city like Guangzhou. This contradicts the negative stereotypical image of a person from Guangdong province whose Putonghua is usually heavily accented. In comparison, Mei was most fluent in Putonghua and handled daily conversations well in Min. However, she did not like Cantonese nor speak it. Living in the urban village was not a pleasant experience for her when she first arrived and knew nothing about Cantonese. In her interview, she revealed that the local villagers were always talking in Cantonese and once called her a country bumpkin for not understanding Cantonese. Since then, she tried to avoid interacting with them. Later when she started attending the elementary school in the village, she often witnessed her deskmate, a local boy who deployed Cantonese whenever he got into squabbles with others and wanted to swear, which further discouraged Mei from learning Cantonese.

Anonymous responder on Zhihu (similar to Quora)

In 2019, Zhipeng Han, a local TV commentator and a member of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference Committee in Guangzhou, suggested that the skill of speaking Cantonese could be
included as one of the qualifying criteria for Guangzhou Hukou application. This triggered waves of backlashes online. On Zhihu, a Q&A platform, an anonymous doctoral student’s objection was well-received. Besides pointing out it was unfair for interested applicants from non-Cantonese speaking regions, he provided further personal observations “At the SunYat-sen University (a local university in Guangzhou), only a handful of professors know how to speak Cantonese. I’ll go out on a limb to say that right now among the elites who have Guangzhou Hukou, those who can speak fluent Cantonese are the minority. Except in urban villages and old districts, I highly doubt that people speaking Cantonese would constitute the majority in skyscrapers…Extreme Cantonese advocates are doing it completely the wrong way. You can’t force people to speak it for the continuation of the language. Otherwise it’s no different from the Nazis. What the continuation of a language needs is standardization, and universality. At present, is Cantonese standardized for common use? What would be the standard for a Cantonese proficiency test? (Even) the Cantonese used in different cities of the Pearl River Delta vary, which prevents the language from being standardized.”

*Anonymous Guangzhou local netizen*

In 2020, on the website of the Guangzhou Bureau of Education, a letter to the “commissioner’s mailbox” titled “It breaks my heart that Guangzhou children don’t speak Cantonese because of the school education in Putonghua” was selected to be published. This anonymous netizen talked about what upset him in his family in the letter: “I am a Guangzhouer. Nowadays, all schools teach in Putonghua. So my nephew does not know Cantonese. (When he is) back home, he also speaks Putonghua. This stings me as I feel he keeps at a distance and my family is torn apart. “The official reply was also published. It mainly stated how the current school practice and language choice abides by the national laws and the city’s efforts to work with universities to preserve Cantonese and promote Cantonese opera among younger students. This correspondence was quoted and therefore getting more publicity by a Guangzhou high school student who makes videos to promote Cantonese language on Bilibili, a mainstream social media in China. By the time he made the video to talk about this issue, the reply from the commissioner was rated one star out of five regarding the satisfaction to the reply. By the time I looked it up on the website of the education bureau earlier this year, the satisfaction had somehow risen to two stars.
The three stories all revolve around Cantonese but are spoken from various perspectives, carry different even contradicting sentiment and each presents a particular imagination of an urban Guangzhour.

Mai was a migrant child living in Guangzhou for almost ten years without a Guangzhou Hukou. In her lived experience, Cantonese was actively used by the locals in the urban village where she resided. Her parents, who were migrants as well, spoke it well but not her. This corresponds to the different patterns in Cantonese proficiency between migrant parents and children reflected in the questionnaire analysis in chapter four. Her story seems to provide one potential reason why migrant children are not learning Cantonese. The discomfort stemming from her condescending ridiculers who equated a lack of proficiency in Cantonese with the identity of unsophisticated people from rural areas turned her away from Cantonese. Although her ridiculers might not know whether she was a Guangzhou Hukou holding Guangzhour or not, they made a call based on language ability, an arbitrary marker. In addition, the contrasting image of a Guangzhour implied in the personal attack seems to be a modern and Cantonese-speaking urbanite occupying a higher socioeconomic status. Although those ridiculers are also urban villagers, their attack on Mei reflects their self-perceived higher status as a Cantonese-speaking Guangzhour compared to migrants who don’t speak Cantonese and are expected to learn it.

However, this image was rejected by the doctoral student in the second story. He detached the traditional lingua franca Cantonese emplaced in Guangzhou from the image of an elite Guangzhour, who acquired Guangzhou Hukou, an institutionally sanctioned identity by competence not inheritance, considering the issue he was responding to. He did not reveal whether he was a local Guangzhour or not, but he did not find Cantonese speaking skill was associated with a modern elite Guangzhour or worth promoting as a necessary skill for future Guangzhouers. The Cantonese speakers in his mind live in beaten-up areas and are not competitive enough to secure good jobs and work in modern buildings. Cantonese as a dialect is intrinsically ill-suited for modern urbanites due to its lack of standardization and dwindling number of elite speakers. In other words, he is contrasting elite Putonghua dominant migrants who fare well in Guangzhou and become
the new faces of Guangzhouers with local Cantonese speaking Guangzhouers who might not do well economically.

In the last story, the perspective shifts to a local Guangzhouer, one by inheritance. According to the Guangzhou uncle who penned the letter to the commissioner of the education bureau, the continuation of Cantonese is at stake based on his family’s home language use and he blames the policy of Putonghua-medium education. This contradicts my questionnaire finding that Cantonese was maintained well within Guangzhou autochthonous families (chapter four). It also alludes to his perception of a competition between Putonghua and Cantonese during which Putonghua has the upper hand and is seeping into private domains.

Though he might provide a melodramatic account, this uncle’s worry is shared by many. The concern for the status of Cantonese has been simmering over the past two decades. In the summer of 2010, thousands took to the street to protest the city’s plan to replace Cantonese with Putonghua in prime-time broadcasting activities of several local TV channels. The municipal government tried to justify the plan by citing the status of Putonghua as the national language which better represented the country during the Asia Games Guangzhou was holding later that year. This incident seems to reflect a pushback to top down policies, but it was not the only reason that mobilized so many people to vent their dissatisfaction in a public outcry. Among the signs protesters were holding in the street, one reads “广州人讲广州话，听唔明就翻乡下” (Guangzhouers speak the speech of Guangzhou (Cantonese). If you can’t understand, go back to the countryside), which echoes the connection between Cantonese speaking ability and the identity of Guangzhouer shared by urban villagers in the first story. It also points to tension between the Guangzhou locals and the growing numbers of migrants imagined as non-Cantonese speaking rural people whose presence worsens the so-called Cantonese crisis.

But to whom could their anger rightfully be directed – migrant workers like Mei’s parents who they look down upon but who manage to learn Cantonese, or the elite migrants / new Guangzhouers depicted in the second story who find Cantonese irrelevant to their urban life in Guangzhou? The concern for the declining vitality or the shrinking domains for Cantonese use is derived from multiple actors' behaviors in sociopolitical processes happening in China over time. Who does or does not speak Cantonese and where? Are Cantonese
speakers Guangzhouers? Does assimilation to Guangzhou society entail Cantonese speaking ability? Can we lose our grip on Cantonese since its role of lingua franca is replaced by Putonghua? Do answers to the previous questions vary depending on who’s answering or simply change over time? This chapter will try to untangle the relationship between Cantonese, its speakers and the identity of Guangzhouer through the lens of migrants from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

5.1 Discourses of pride and profit

Duchêne & Heller (2012) observe that the discourses used in campaigns of language endangerment and revitalization have been shifting from “pride” to “profit”. In the discourses of pride, language is usually seen as a symbol or index of territorial tradition, cultural authenticity, or ethnic identity. In other words, it is often associated with a place and a people. Although language is likely just a contingent factor of an ethnic or regional identity (May, 2004), activists advocating for indigenous or small languages who subscribe to a linguistic human rights perspective often assume they are inseparable. May (2004) finds each ethnicity or social group might assign different weights to various aspects of their culture. For some, one particular language is not indispensable to their core value. Therefore, among the efforts to maintain or revitalize endangered languages, the discourse of “pride” is not always convincing enough for potential speakers from the same ethnicity to join the language activists.

In the discourses of “profit”, which appear more since the 1990s, the economic potential of a language, such as access to the global market, the added value and upward social mobility it might bring, are foregrounded. In this way, the cultural and political aspects of a language are downplayed unless they can be marketed as signs of cultural authenticity (e.g., foreign words on the packaging of an imported snack). Another way language is incorporated in the global economy is its instrumental aspect, used as” a technical skill, decoupled from authenticity” (Duchêne & Heller, 2012, p. 10). But this presupposes that a standardized register of that language is available which can be used as if it is “independent of place, time or speaker identity” and “indexes economic interests” (Gal, 2012, p. 30).

Therefore, the two discourses are not always in opposition and could be intricately intertwined, especially in recent decades with ever increasing mobility (Duchêne & Heller, 2012). Gal (2012) provided such an
example from the trilingual policy in European Union (EU). In order to progress as a union of 27 independent
countries, EU needs a standardized language as a lingua franca for the ease of communication and labor
migration among members, which is a reflection of “profit”. At the same time, each country will need at least
one language to reflect its cultural uniqueness as a nation, namely its “pride”. So people in the EU are
encouraged to master a mother tongue, a lingua franca and a third language at their own choice. This policy
seems a compromise between the two discourses, but only to some extent. After all, each country cannot be
neatly represented with one culture and one language (Blommaert, 2006). In fact, the internal linguistic
diversity within nation-states in the EU has been regarded as a threat and a problem to its national “pride” in
some cases (e.g., French in France is said to be threatened due to rich regional varieties and languages brought
by immigrants (Duchêne & Heller, 2008). So the mastery of their mother tongue, say a regional language,
might not help affirm the “pride” of a nation-state if the mother tongue is not recognized as the national
language. Therefore, this attempt to balance “pride” and “profit” cannot stand up to scrutiny.

In the case of Cantonese in Guangzhou, although this regional lingua franca is nowhere near being
moribund, perhaps just like the French in France, the palpable crisis for its local speakers, “Guangzhouers”,
could be better understood by delineating the pride and profit discourses surrounding it in relation to the
competing national standardized lingua franca Putonghua.

5.2 Models of personhood

The terms describing a particular social group such as Guangzhouer are frequently taken for granted in
daily conversation. Here are some interpretations:

a. A Guangzhouer is a person who lives in Guangzhou

b. A Guangzhouer is a person with a Guangzhou Hukou

c. A Guangzhouer speaks the speech of Guangzhou (Cantonese)

d. A Guangzhouer enjoys cuisines with light taste

e. A Guangzhouer leads an urban lifestyle
The list can go on and is by no means exhaustive. They are all partial and possible descriptions of a Guangzhouer, and perhaps not always agreed upon. Though people do not specify what they mean exactly when they use the term Guangzhouer, the level of ambiguity does not seem to irritate interlocutors. This indicates that for some social groups, there are at least some denotational meanings implied and shared, just like the uncle in the third story who unapologetically used the term Guangzhouer to demand some explanation from the bureau of education as if the enactment of this term or the alleged ownership of this identity lends him enough legitimacy for his grievance.

This stance is possible because for one thing we can always tolerate some ambiguity in communication and for another, there is some stability of the shared image enveloped in those terms. Worham, Mortimer & Allard (2009) proposed models of personhood to describe the shared images people draw on when they try to identify whether a person belongs to a social group based on the characteristics associated with the image. The model encapsulates “characterizations of the dispositions, typical behaviors and life prospects of a person or group” (p. 391).

Among many signs people take into consideration to make sense of others, language choice and use is an important sign to activate certain models of personhood. Even though linguists had long identified AAVE’s seemingly syntactic deviation from standard English (e.g., deletion of third-person singular -s or the habitual be) is systematically rule governed, the use of this variety was still controversial to say the least, and often activated a racialized model of personhood that was lazy or not educated enough to deploy standard English in the US (Rickford, 1999). However, fifty years later, with AAVE’s frequent use in rap music that is popularized around the world, this variety would be associated with a very different and perhaps more positive model of personhood now. Flores, Lewis & Phuong (2018) analyze how Latinx students’ deployment of certain linguistic tokens are policed by teachers as this language use in combination with the students' social status in the US made the teachers enact a linguistic model of personhood in which the students would be considered a threat to the US society. However, the same linguistic tokens used by a white politician in a campaign speech was not scrutinized the same way because his high social status did not connect him with
that particular model by his audience. As Wortham, Mortimer & Allard (2009) explain, models of personhood are flexible, can change over time and space, and look differently depending on the beholders (Dick, 2010). Therefore, models of personhood should be analyzed in the actual event where the models are enacted.

5.3 Guangzhouer and Cantonese across time and space

In the opening stories, the emerging models of Guangzhouer seem to live in different urban areas, speak different languages and occupy varied rungs of the socioeconomic ladder. What is more intriguing is that this seemingly regional identity is not only about the residency in the city of Guangzhou. Some deem it as an institutional identity associated with ownership of Guangzhou Hukou while others value the ability to speak Cantonese, a more easily recognized and testable sign. This constructed nature reflects individuals' evolving perceptions of models of personhood shaped by the sociopolitical processing at a macro-level. In the following sections, by analyzing experiences of three migrant teachers in relation to migrant parents who came to Guangzhou in different decades, I hope to shed light on the diverging models of Guangzhouer and the relevant language capacity in relation to social class.

5.3.1 A shifting language ecology over time for migrant teachers

During my fieldwork, after spending more time with the teachers in the middle school, I found that quite a few of them did not originate from Guangzhou. In other words, they were migrants as well. But as skilled migrants with college degrees, all of them have settled down in commodity housing estates in urban neighborhoods and secured Guangzhou Hukou for their families. Therefore, their social positions were quite different from the parents of most migrant students in the school. The school thus is a site where I could have access to migrants in different social classes to some extent.

The middle school where I did my fieldwork is located in a district with a large number of migrant workers overall. The specific neighborhood where the school is located used to be farmland surrounded by

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13 The word “commodity” in this phrase emphasizes that the properties are purchased by these individuals at a market price. A housing market for buying and selling real estate properties with private fund did not exist in China until 1980s. During the planned economy prior to 1980s, many workers in urban environment lived in the housing provided by their workplace. So housing was allocated as a welfare instead of being traded as a commodity in a market economy.
rural villages. With the sprawling urbanization in Guangzhou, the urban area in this district has expanded and this neighborhood has become the periphery of its downtown where both new commodity real estates and old housing units can be found (a housing legacy from the era of planned economy assigned to workers from their affiliated workplace). The nearby rural villages still exist, and have become part of the urban area, receiving the name of urban villages, which is quite common in Guangzhou. Because of its informal and affordable housing options, these villages also have become enclaves for migrants with limited budget.

Figure 15: A glimpse of residential buildings near the middle school: the first and second ones are the old housing unit and new commodity high-rise building; the third picture shows a juxtaposition of both.

This school is average in its academic achievement but somewhat progressive in its student admission policy. Since 2012, it has been one of the trial schools in this district to receive migrant students whose families do not have a Guangzhou Hukou and thus would not have access to public schools. This trial school initiative aims to respond to the national policies to address the educational need for migrant children, in which the public school system in the hosting cities should take the initiative to provide education for migrant children (MOE, 2012).

It should be noted that the trial schools are able to open up to migrant students because they have unfilled capacity originally prepared for neighborhood students with local Hukou – who still take precedence over migrant students. However, since this is not a key middle school with outstanding academic performance, the high achieving local students whose families can afford top public or private schools have forfeited their
spots here. So the local educational bureau decided to make use of the freed-up educational resources to create a win-win situation. On the one hand, migrant children can attend quality public schools, consistent with the national policy. On the other, the schools can receive enough funding from the district financial bureau, based on their student population. While the local student pool of this school is dwindling and losing high achievers, the general student pool has been balanced with the enrolled migrant students, many of which are high achieving, on track for high schools. In contrast, the majority of the local students attending this school are usually on track for vocational schools.

5.3.2 Cantonese learning in 1990s and 2010s for new arrivals in Guangzhou

For the two classes I’ve been following in the middle school, Mrs. Z and Mrs. S were the language teachers in Chinese and English respectively. They happened to be two teachers arriving in Guangzhou from non-Cantonese speaking regions in two different decades. Their investment and contrasting achievement in Cantonese learning illustrates a shifting language ecology in Guangzhou.

Mrs. Z

Mrs. Z is from a Min (闽) speaking area and was able to secure a teaching position in this middle school after she graduated from a teachers college in Guangzhou in the mid-1990s. Although she did not grow up in a Cantonese dominant region in Guangdong province, she picked up some Cantonese by watching TV programs both produced locally and imported from Hong Kong. After she arrived in Guangzhou for college, almost everyone around her spoke Cantonese even in school. She said it was not difficult for her to further become a fluent speaker as she wanted to blend in.

During my stay, Mrs. Z was a homeroom teacher for one of the local student-only classes. She taught her subject Chinese in Putonghua because it was the school policy and she knew there were one or two individuals who did not understand Cantonese even though they were assigned to the local class. The students in her class, likely feeling relaxed around Mrs. Z who is usually soft-spoken and approachable, often made commentaries in Cantonese in class openly for which she would respond in Cantonese occasionally. When
she was in her office, she made phone calls with their parents mostly in Cantonese to discuss some problems of their children.

Mrs. Z told me that some of her older Guangzhou local colleagues simply did not learn to speak Putonghua and had taught everything in Cantonese till they retired. Some teachers at her age who were bilingual in Cantonese and Putonghua would teach in Cantonese unless their classes were observed by teachers from other schools or the educational bureau. In other words, back in the 1990s teachers were expected to teach in Putonghua but the rule was bent from time to time for old-timers who were never trained in Putonghua. Her colleague Mr. Li, who was also a Cantonese speaker, told me that the reason he switched his instructional language for chemistry from Cantonese to Putonghua was because from the beginning of 2000s, he started to have more non-Cantonese speaking students in his class. He wanted to make sure his students could follow his lessons.

Mrs. Z also taught Chinese in a mixed class with half local students and half migrant students. The students assigned to this class were higher in academic performance compared to the local class. Although she always taught in Putonghua, occasionally she would insert some Cantonese comments to introduce cultural references related to the content they were learning or simply loosen up the more uptight atmosphere in this class by a brief switch of her language gears. She found it popular among the students in this class who were curious about Cantonese, and effective for her to build a rapport since she spent much less time with this class.

Mrs. Z was comfortable using Cantonese in her daily life, but it was not the case for her daughter in 5th grade at that time. Her daughter was sent back to her hometown and raised by her parents until the age of 6 when she came back to Guangzhou to start formal schooling. But her daughter was not fluent in Mrs. Z’s hometown dialect. Instead she was dominant in Putonghua. With a Guangzhou local Hukou, the daughter had no problem attending a local elementary school with many Cantonese speaking children, which was a new challenge for the girl. She was willing to learn Cantonese if possible. But according to Mrs. Z, her daughter, though living in Guangzhou for almost six years, was not getting enough exposure to speak
confidently in public, not to mention among her peers which carried more stakes for her. So at home, the
daughter would beg Mrs. Z for time to practice speaking Cantonese with her.

Mrs. S

In contrast to the senior teachers who are mostly from Guangdong province and have been in this middle
school since the late 1990s, a good proportion of the teaching team are composed of teachers from other
provinces who were recruited because of their teaching excellence. This tradition started back in the early
2000s, initiated by one of the previous principals who was known for being progressive. This policy was
intended to improve the academic performance and the quality of the teaching team in this school. Many of
these teachers came from other provinces and grew up with another Chinese dialect or language. Therefore,
Cantonese is likely to be unintelligible to them upon arrival.

Mrs. S, the English teacher for the mixed class, was from a northern province where the local language
was a dialect of Mandarin. She moved to Guangzhou when her husband’s job brought them here, and she
started working in this school in 2012. Before coming to Guangzhou, she graduated from a teachers college
in her home province and worked as a high school English teacher for three years. Back then, Putonghua was
the dominant language for her at workplace and even home because the city she was in hosted many migrants
as well and Putonghua was used as a lingua franca. After she came to Guangzhou, living with a new language
Cantonese was a challenge, but not a daunting one. She initially was interested in learning Cantonese along
with her husband who she claimed to be more gifted in language learning than her. They bought Cantonese
learning books and watched dramas in Cantonese together. However, these two Cantonese learners quickly
diverged into different paths. Her husband quickly mastered the pronunciation and started using the language
in his work. In contrast, Mrs. S was frustrated by her husband’s teasing of her pronunciation and attributed
her failure in learning Cantonese to a lack of language learning aptitude even though she speaks English well.

She also found very few opportunities to practice Cantonese. At school, everyone was supposed to and
was able to speak Putonghua with her. She worked mostly in the English subject teachers’ office on campus
where her colleagues did not give her much peer pressure to speak Cantonese. Even though she also taught
a local class, because her class focused on English learning, Cantonese rarely had its chance to take the stage.
After work, although there were a few farmers’ markets near the school where she could bargain, she frequented large supermarkets for grocery where everything was clearly labeled with prices. She did not need to talk to anyone for clarification until it was time to check out with human cashiers. In recent years, with ubiquitous mobile payment in big cities like Guangzhou, even at the check-out stage, she can finally avoid all language induced embarrassment and literally complete the whole process without talking to anyone. Mrs. S usually took the subway to go home. The broadcast on the public transportation system in Guangzhou is trilingual – Putonghua, Cantonese and English. Thanks to her English, she could understand the broadcasting by catching the English version if she missed the Putonghua version. In fact, she congratulated herself on her English because she said she missed the Putonghua broadcasting very often. Occasionally, there were elderly locals who only speak Cantonese approaching her. She just waved her hand to suggest she did not understand.

Although Mrs. S felt teachers were less respected in the south because of their relatively low salary in Guangzhou, and parents’ deference is superficial (e.g., they fail to see to their children’s study even though they agreed to do it), she was still content with her life in Guangzhou after migrating here. Because of her job in the public school system, it is easy for her to secure a Guangzhou Hukou, and the benefits affiliated to that. Although Cantonese is present in her life and can be challenging for her, it is quite easy for her to avoid it. She told me that she could count up to ten in Cantonese and that was all she could do with Cantonese now.

5.3.3 The decreasing incentives to learn Cantonese over time for new arrivals

Mrs. Z and Mrs. S perhaps mirror many skilled migrants in Guangzhou. With their skills, they were able to settle in and reach middle-class life in Guangzhou without much trouble, in contrast to the parents of many migrant students who came to Guangzhou with little socioeconomic resources. However, their encounters with Cantonese illustrate the changing language ecology in Guangzhou in different decades.

Based on what Mrs. Z described, Cantonese was widely spoken in every domain in Guangzhou, including education, before the 2000s. The campaign to promote Putonghua had yet to gain enough power to reshape the language practice of local residents. For new residents like Mrs. Z who came to Guangzhou for her own education and work, acquiring Cantonese was a sensible investment as it was conducive to her social life with friends in college, adapting to the life in Guangzhou, and later on communication with colleagues
residing in urban Guangzhou, and parents from nearby rural villages at that time. In other words, this language at that time was universally used by local residents in different social classes. As for new migrants, skilled or unskilled, Cantonese at this time was bundled up with upward social mobility and was a necessity to assimilate into the daily life and culture in Guangzhou. To put it another way, Cantonese was the language associated with more cultural and social capital in the local linguistic market. The discourses of profit and pride converge in the same language during that period.

As for Mrs. S, who came to Guangzhou two decades later, her initial interest in learning Cantonese was based on her impression that Cantonese was the language Guangzhouers use in this region. In other words, the language was associated with regional identity and the carrier of the local culture, part of the discourse of pride. What differed from her colleague Mrs. Z's experience was that in her decade, the language for middle class like her was not critical to their upward social mobility. Mrs. S no longer had any peer pressure to learn Cantonese to blend in at her workplace since her local colleagues were fluent bilinguals and willing to accommodate for her language use in Putonghua, a circumstance which might however not hold for migrants in other social positions.

In her daily life outside the school, as she described in her commuting and shopping experiences, although she could have practiced Cantonese by talking to produce vendors in the farmers market, she also had alternatives to avoid the potential embarrassment due to her accent. The advancement of technology helped her to be less dependent on face-to-face interaction with local Cantonese users. In other words, new arrivals like Mrs. S could share the urban living space and resources with local residents in a linguistic parallel where language use of the locals and newcomers coexist but do not blend, giving rise to an increasing Putonghua dominant group that reshapes the linguistic landscape in Guangzhou.

This was made possible as Putonghua was more present and integrated in the life of residents in Guangzhou thanks to the decades-long effort to promote Putonghua. Even in public spaces such as the subway, the use of multiple languages acknowledges the multilingual reality of the city and the increasing number of non-Cantonese speakers. It alleviates the pressure for new arrivals to learn a new language, providing less incentives for learning Cantonese. Cantonese is not necessarily associated less with the
territory of Guangzhou, but for new Guangzhouers such as Mrs. S, its association is reduced to a particular social group living there, namely the autochthonous Guangzhouers. Learning Cantonese is not relevant to Mrs. S’s adaptation to life in Guangzhou. A Putonghua dominant model of Guangzhouer has emerged.

However, this divergence in the languages associated with the old and new models of Guangzhouers and the different values assigned to Cantonese cannot be fully explained as the result of the implementation of the national language policy over time. Parents of migrant students in my study demonstrated a high level of Cantonese proficiency as shown in the quantitative analysis and the opening vignettes. Students such as Mei living in urban villages still find Cantonese widely used there, which is quite different from the language environment of Mrs. S. The following section will transition into how models of Guangzhouer intersect with the social positions and spatial distribution of Cantonese language users amidst the urbanization and economic development in Guangzhou over time especially in the eyes of migrants in different social classes.

5.3.4 Residential mobility of migrants and the good & bad about urban villages

Migrants’ housing choices very often are tied to their budget. Mrs. Z and Mrs. S mentioned above have been working for a public school in Guangzhou and were able to secure Guangzhou Hukou. Each of them is living in a unit in a modern high-rise apartment building in a gated residential compound, which is common for the middle class in China. However, for many migrant parents of children involved in my study, living in an urban village a bus ride from the school is more common, though some managed to buy or rent an apartment unit in the neighborhood near the school.

Tian (2008) defines urban villages as “villages with a heterogeneous population and land use that are encircled by the inner city but where ownership of the land is retained by village collectives” (p. 282). What Tian describes is typical in more marketized southern cities like Guangzhou in China in contrast to Beijing and Shanghai where there is more governmental control and the rural villages are mostly located on the edge of the city (Li & Gou, 2020).

In Guangzhou, due to the expanding urbanization, some previously rural areas were turned into new urban districts and the villages therefore could be in close proximity to newly emerging financial districts or
other urban facilities such as subway stations. Despite the central location in the city where the land price has skyrocketed in recent decades, urban village land is still owned by village collectives, making the renovation of these villages difficult sometimes, there being no agreement between the government and the village collectives for years. Although autochthonous urban villagers are able to change their Hukou from rural to urban in this process, they still keep ownership of their self-built properties on the land and the revenues generated from them, as well as other welfares benefits associated with rural Hukou holders in the past (e.g., having two children instead of one). Many villagers, who never left their villages, could now call themselves urbanites since they own an urban Hukou. Although their institutional identity changed, their residential environment, namely their living conditions in their villages and lifestyle did not change overnight.

In fact, the discourse around urban villages is mixed because of its neighborhood quality and functions. The infrastructure and public facilities in urban villages are not subject to the regulations of municipal urban planning and the village collectives might not be incentivized to invest in them, often causing problems in sanitation and safety (e.g., undependable water & electricity supplies, hazards from exposed electric lines, sewage and garbage disposal). The following collage of pictures (Figure 16) were taken from the urban village where the elementary school in my study was located.

![Collage of photos illustrating the urban village where the elementary school is located](image)

**Figure 16:** A collage of photos illustrating the urban village where the elementary school is located
In addition, in order to maximize the profit from renting out rooms to migrants and increase the square footage of property under their names for future sales, many villagers have built multi-story apartment buildings with minimal facilities without abiding by building controls such as fire protocols, thus causing problems of overpopulation, high density of buildings and poor lighting. As many landlords also offer flexible leases without verifying the identity of the renters, it is impossible to keep tabs on who is living in the villages. So urban villages are also considered hotbeds for crime (Tian, 2008).

With more and more migrants coming to urban villages, some buildings are rented out for mixed residential and commercial use. One of the migrant students, Yi, described her living experience in such building:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L: 你现在是不是还住在***村是不是？</td>
<td>You are currently living in *** village, right?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yi: 嗯</td>
<td>Yeah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L: 你所以从小就住在这里了？</td>
<td>You’ve been living here since you were very little?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yi: 我出生几个月就</td>
<td>Since a few months after I was born.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L: 就一直都是没有搬到别的城区去？</td>
<td>You’ve never moved to other places?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yi: 没有</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L: 你还应该是蛮喜欢这个村的吧？</td>
<td>So you must like this village, right?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yi: 还可以</td>
<td>So so.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L: 什么叫还可以？为什么还可以？</td>
<td>What do you mean by “so so”? Why “so so”?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yi: 因为这里面有，每天晚上都听，都能听到那些纺织声，在织衣服那些声音</td>
<td>Because there is- every night I can hear the weaving buzzes, the sounds from making clothes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L: 真的啊？</td>
<td>Really?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yi: 对</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L: 很吵，是不是？</td>
<td>Is it quite noisy?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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| Yi: 对，我们楼下那些，每天晚上熬夜施工 | Yes, those (working) downstairs, they work through the night every day. |
| L: 他们晚上都工作啊？ | They work at night time? |
| Yi: 嗯 | Yes. |
| L: 主要做到几点他们都有？ | Until how late? |
| Yi: 我都不知道，我我我听着他们在睡着了当催眠曲 | I don’t know. I listen to noises and use them as my lullaby. |
| L: 你妈不会投诉他们吗？“这么晚还在那里做” | Has your mom made complaints like “Why are you still working at this hour”? |
| Yi: 我妈我妈我妈不理他，也是当催眠曲，然后每天早上……隔六点多钟，隔壁一个栋楼的那些男人，在那说话很吵，吵醒了。 | My mother, my mother just ignores them and also treats them as lullaby. Then every morning around six o’clock, those men in the building next to us would talk loudly and wake me up. |
| L: 他们一早就开始讲话？ | They talk (loud) early in the morning? |
| Yi: 对，洗澡时洗澡水的声音 | Yes, there are sounds of running water from (them) taking showers. |
| L: 哦，你们家隔离隔壁很近就可以听见，是吧？ | I see. Your room is so close to the neighboring building so that you can hear, right? |
| Yi: 只有一米远，大概有一米 | Only one meter away, one meter. |
| L: 那就只有这么远了( (gesturing) )1 米只有这么长诶 | Only this much apart them ((gesturing)). One meter is only this long. |
| Yi: 嗯 | Yeah. |
| L: 就说你们的窗户到这里就是他们的窗户，你可以看到他吗？ | Are you saying your window is so close to their window that you can see them? |
| Yi: 可以看到他们 | I can see them. |
| L: 那他们也可以看到你们诶？ | So they can see you as well? |
| Yi: 可是他们没有看到我们这边，我们是关窗帘的 | But they cannot see our side. We close our curtains. |

(Interview excerpt from IN18066237)
Yi and her family rent an apartment in a building above a garment workshop that runs extended hours into late nights; thus, they had to suffer from the noise hazard. On top of this, the high density of the buildings in urban villages makes the little girl uncomfortably close to private domains of adult men and has to be careful to protect her own privacy.

At the same time, Zhang, Zhao & Tian (2003) found the positive functions of urban villages for cities lie in their capacity to provide affordable housing for migrant workers despite poor living conditions. Many migrants bring families with them when they seek work opportunities in the cities. So urban villages provide convenient and affordable residential choices for migrating families who could not live together in factory dorms provided by their employers (Zhou & Cai, 2008). Urban villages are usually equipped with farmers markets, clinics, schools, banks, and pharmacies. The products and services are relatively cheap, providing additional reasons for migrant families to put up with the many downsides of living in the urban villages.

In addition, the low-cost living allows migrants to start their own business in the village. Li & Wu (2013) found the residential satisfaction of migrants in Guangzhou urban villages are not related to the quality of housing and facilities but to their income. Their arrival and livelihood expand the scales and functions of urban villages. Children I interviewed reported their parents run small manufacturing workshops in the villages and work for one of them. Some open eateries, hardware store, corner store and massage parlor in the village. For example, Mei’s parents, mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, run a workshop making car interior decoration. So the low-cost living and working space enable migrants with few resources to become economically integrated into the village. However, the attachment to the villages for adult migrants is low as they are not culturally integrated into their neighborhood, though they may be economically integrated, as we see in the next section.

5.3.5 Segmented assimilation and spatialized Cantonese exposure

Wissink, Hazelzet & Breitung (2013) investigate the factors that affect migrant’s social network and integration in Guangzhou. They find that migrants' social networks are mostly related to their neighborhood type, source of contact and education level. Migrants’ choice of neighborhood is determined by their budgets. Migrants living in more expensive housing options such as commodity apartments are in general more
educated than migrants settling in urban villages. However, the former is less integrated into the local community compared to the latter and the integration is determined by work and neighborhood, which the researchers find fits a segmented assimilation model.

In other words, the social-economic status of incoming migrants seems to structure the neighborhood they choose, and their work further affects their integration with the local community. As reported by 4th grader Sen (IN18064226), although she did not speak Cantonese, she would like to learn Cantonese in the future as her mom who sold auto parts in an auto market next to her village told her “if you do not know Cantonese, you cannot earn money here!”. Years before getting into the business of trading auto parts, upon arriving in Guangzhou, Sen’s mother had first landed a job as mass production line worker in a shoe manufacturing factory, where the supervisor always yelled at the workers in Cantonese. At that time, she could not understand a word in Cantonese since she was from Szechuan province. Her second job was room cleaning in a hotel. It was less labor intensive and paid more. Moreover, instead of working like a robot, she had more face-to-face interaction, and started to have some opportunities to talk to locals; she slowly developed her Cantonese. She was introduced to her current job by her husband. This sales job gave her more opportunities to practice her Cantonese and brought in more money compared to her previous jobs. Throughout the whole time, she bounced from one urban village to another until she got married and settled in the current one. As an incoming migrant, Sen’s mother had Cantonese speaking supervisors and clients, which pushed her to pick up the language which in turn paved the way for her job upgrade. Her investment in Cantonese is a pragmatic decision since it adds to her cultural capital. When she talked about her experience working in the factory, she was still upset about being scolded by her supervisor incessantly in Cantonese even if she did not understand Cantonese at that time. The language is a reminder of her lower status as a migrant worker compared to the locals.

Similar stories happen to other migrants who establish their business in the villages. Cantonese is crucial to migrants’ economic integration to their neighborhood as the local villagers are likely an important part of their clientele, which prompts them to communicate more and establish a social network involving more locals. In addition, the difference in the social positions of local villagers and migrants is likely to nudge the latter to accommodate the language use of the former.
With the influx of migrants during the economic opening up over the past few decades, local villagers who used to be rural people with limited income become landlords living comfortably with stable and considerable passive incomes from their rental properties. Even if their village may be renovated and their properties demolished in the future, they would receive equivalent compensation for their properties at market value. In other words, the local villagers, although living in slum-like areas, are not urban poor (Wang, 2000). Their wealth accumulation has resulted from the unique economic and land reforms in China which do not involve gaining cultural capital such as educational credentials. This windfall situation makes them less respected outside their villages. However, in the villages, for migrants who can only afford living in them, the local villagers are in a dominant role in their relationship with incoming migrants since the local villagers are their landlords and customers (The following comparison shows the village I stayed before and after a renovation. The before pictures were kindly provided by my landlord and friend Mr. Zhen. The after pictures were taken by me).

Figure 17: Pazhou Village before renovation

Figure 18: Pazhou village after renovation
For adult migrants living in the urban villages, picking up Cantonese is a good investment. Their living space is conflated with their workplace. Both are Cantonese dominant. In contrast, for the teachers and other skilled migrants who start their life in Guangzhou with more resources such as high education and secure white collar jobs and beyond, their workspace, the source of social mobility, is separated from living spaces. Their workspace is getting more Putonghua dominant over the years and life no longer forces them to engage the Cantonese aspects in their living spaces, commodity high-rise apartments. Compared to the unskilled migrants, these migrants who join the middle class in Guangzhou enjoy a higher social status and a more equal power relationship with Cantonese speaking locals working around them. Although their life does not overlap with urban villages much, the school became the nexus where the two crossed paths and provided the researcher a chance to explore how Cantonese dominant urban villages and their residents are perceived by Putonghua dominant middle-class migrants. In other words, how some new Guangzhouers think of some old Guangzhouers.

Mr. F

Mr. F was my liaison in the middle school. He was a biology teacher and took on some administrative duties. That might be why he was put in charge of taking me in. He was very kind to station me in an empty office with an air conditioner where I could take a nap at noon and interview students without being disturbed. I went to his office to greet him every time I visited the school although I did not sit in his class to observe him. Occasionally when I walked in the hallway past his class, I would first hear his energetic voice and then spot his flushed face and moving arms probably because he exerted great energies in addressing his teenage students. From his excitement, it was hard to imagine he was distinguishing veins from arteries for his students until I glimpsed the illustration on the front blackboard.

Mr. F came from a Mandarin speaking northern province. He had been in this school and in Guangzhou for over 10 years. After graduating from college and working for a year in his hometown, he responded to the teachers recruitment advertisement from his current school and was selected after passing all the interviews in 2007. Back then, he was one of the first few pioneering teachers in this school recruited from other provinces. His colleagues were Guangzhou locals or from within the Guangdong province (such as
Mrs. Z above) who were used to using Cantonese as their working language, and most were bilingual. During his first few years in this school, Cantonese was a huge challenge for him. Mr. F was asked to be the homeroom teacher for a class with mostly local students as migrant students were only a handful and the trial initiative to admit more migrant students did not start until early 2010s. Like the homeroom teachers, he needed to communicate with the parents of his students quite often. However, many parents from nearby villages could not speak Putonghua and at that time he did not understand Cantonese at all. The communication was very frustrating. He also revealed that he believed the reason these parents could not speak Putonghua was that they were not very educated. During my fieldwork (2017-18), he by then was also a parent. His daughter was attending kindergarten and he was expecting another daughter the year I was in that school. He observed that most parents in the kindergarten his daughter attended were middle-class and they all spoke perfect Putonghua.

However, this does not mean Mr. F is intolerant of Cantonese despite his unpleasant experience. In fact, by now, he could at least understand Cantonese. One day, a social worker in her 20s came to school to advocate for a student with a grave disease. Mr. F was receiving the social worker in the meeting room where I happened to be nearby. The social worker initiated the conversation in Cantonese and Mr. F was very engaged with a very serious facial expression that I rarely saw. He was listening carefully and answered all the questions and made suggestions in Putonghua. During this meeting, both the social worker and Mr. F stuck to their preferred language until the very end. He did not demand the social worker to switch to Putonghua even though the general policy is to use Putonghua as the working language at school.

Although Mr. F did not mention how he learned Cantonese, he definitely made efforts on his own in other walks in his life. In fact, he might be a fine example of a migrant who “made it” through hard work and skills in a big city. One day, he insisted on treating me at a noodle house near the school. He revealed more about his trajectory after migrating to Guangzhou. He worked very hard and now owned an apartment to house the family and a private sedan in this first-tier city in China. He commented that Guangzhou was indeed an inclusive city that overlooks where you came from. Cantonese was no longer a block for him since he could understand it and even spoke some fragments in it, though with a strong accent. This did not bother him, as unlike ten years ago, everyone nowadays spoke Putonghua.
5.4 Language(s) and social class of the diverging models of Guangzhouer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Migrant Teacher</th>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Time of Arrival at the school</th>
<th>Mother tongue</th>
<th>Level of Cantonese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Z</td>
<td>Another city within Guangdong Province</td>
<td>mid 1990s</td>
<td>Min</td>
<td>Fluent speaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. F</td>
<td>A province in Northern China</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>Receptive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. S</td>
<td>A province in Northern China</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>Non speaker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 18: An overview of the three migrant teachers under discussion

The Language Law that requires Putonghua as the medium of education took effect in 2001. More senior teachers such as Mrs. Z witnessed a transitional period when the proportion of non-Cantonese speaking students was growing and teachers gradually switched their instructional language from Cantonese to Putonghua. Meanwhile, they could still communicate with parents who were dominant or simply monolingual in Cantonese. Their bilingual ability therefore helped them sail smoothly through this period. However, this was not the case for the new arrival Mr. F who could not speak or understand Cantonese well when he came to work at this school.

Compared to Mrs. Z, Mr. F, as a newly minted Guangzhouer (officially sanctioned with a Guangzhou Hukou), was facing two contrasting types of old local Guangzhou residents at work during the rocky beginning years in this school. For one, his local middle-class bilingual colleagues were able to accommodate his preference of Putonghua so that their communication was smooth. For the other, the local village parents who were monolingual in or only comfortable with Cantonese were giving him a hard time.

People from the villages are not necessarily poor economically, but their residing areas, urban villages, which are often left out of municipal urbanization plans due to the land rights issue, are stigmatized for their dilapidated buildings, poor public facilities, and higher crime rates compared to urban commodity housing options (Tian, 2008). Urban villages, 139 in total, are scattered through the urban areas of Guangzhou. Before
they have a chance to be renovated, urban villages are considered urban anomalies or problems as their appearance are out of sync with the modern look of the rest of Guangzhou (Li, 2004).

The visible modernization of the rest of urban areas in Guangzhou over the past few decades is accompanied by a changing demographic with a fast-growing number of migrants from non-Cantonese speaking regions. Skilled migrants all have been educated in Putonghua before their arrival. This also feeds back to a more pronounced role of Putonghua in public domains in Guangzhou. More importantly, with more socioeconomic resources, skilled migrants tend to join the social class higher than unskilled migrants in the first place. For many of them, just like Mr. F, the pressure to pick up the local language Cantonese is low since the status and the use of Putonghua has been rising.

Meanwhile in the urban villages, the dominating role of Cantonese in the language ecology there seems less disturbed by the influx of migrants. Although infrastructures in urban villages are under par, urban villages are like self-sufficient micro cities where one can find markets, clinics, bank, pharmacies, restaurants and housing options with affordable prices below the average in other urban areas in Guangzhou. The work and life of many autochthonous villagers are limited within the close-knit original village network which still functions in Cantonese. The incoming migrants are pressured to learn Cantonese since it is often tied to their livelihood. Therefore, the language practice of local villagers in the urban villages is changing at a slower rate compared with Cantonese speaking residents in other urban areas.

The concurrent lag in urbanization progress and language shift from Cantonese to Putonghua in urban villages has given rise to a model of very localized Guangzhouers who are low in socioeconomic status and characterized with monolingual Cantonese speaking skill. Meanwhile, outside of the urban villages where the social and economic activities are less conducted in Cantonese, the language associated with economic development and upward mobility is replaced with Putonghua. Cantonese is gradually detached from the discourse of profit. This harks back to the doctoral student’s observation (in the opening of this chapter) regarding where elites work in Guangzhou and what language they usually use. Mr. F also shares this image when he characterized the village parents who were unable to speak Putonghua with him as “uneducated”, namely low in their socioeconomic status from his perspective. This negative perception might be due to the
explicit rules at his workplace to adopt Putonghua for education which deepens the assumption that educated people should be able to speak Putonghua. Mr. F himself was living a middle-class life in Guangzhou outside of urban villages. Everyone in his social network (e.g., colleagues, fellow parents in his daughter’s class) is fluent in Putonghua. From his personal experiences, Cantonese is not relevant to have a thriving urban life in Guangzhou.

Nowadays, renovation of urban villages in Guangzhou is still ongoing and many villages continue to be demolished and rebuilt with modern residential buildings. Autochthonous urban villagers have inevitably learned to speak Putonghua to some extent except for some elderly people. Still, the monolingual Cantonese speaking model of the Guangzhouer low in socioeconomic status and living mostly in urban villages has persisted so far.

In contrast, other old quintessential Guangzhouers, those who live in the “old three districts”, the previous urban districts before the urban expansion (now 11 districts) where people associate with local and authentic Guangzhou culture, are not tied with this negative image. These urban districts were traditionally occupied by Guangzhou urban residents with high socioeconomic status, and have now been modernized in their look while boasting its role in passing down local traditions. It is very common for tourists to go there to find the authentic Guangzhou culture by visiting the old streets lined with verandas or museums showcasing traditional Sai Kwan mansions where rich people resided in the past. Tourists would not feel the language barriers as most business are staffed with bilingual workers to accommodate their language needs. Schools there would include Cantonese cultural activities such as nursery rhymes and folkloric storytelling in Cantonese to further confirm their legitimacy to represent the authentic Guangzhou culture. Their effort to preserve traditional Cantonese culture fits the discourse of pride. In comparison, the previously rural Guangzhouers living in urban villages now, however, would not be considered the authentic inheritors of so-called authentic local culture.

In the eyes of Mr. F, his negative evaluation of monolingual Cantonese speakers from urban villages also reflects the longstanding rural-urban and rich-poor divisions among Guangzhou local residents prior to
the urbanization. For his local colleagues and parents from urban villages, bilingual ability and the lack thereof index the social class of the locals.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter examines the evolving models of a Guangzhour and how Cantonese is (dis)associated with some of them over time and space from a migrant perspective. The level of difficulty, investment, and final achievement in picking up Cantonese of the three teachers who joined the school in different decades reflects the changing language ecology in Guangzhou. The model of a Guangzhour does not necessarily feature the ability to speak Cantonese as the life of middle-class migrants in Guangzhou does not depend on this local language in a now Putonghua dominant society. For them, the new model of a Guangzhour reflects a territorial identity and an institutional one as long as they secure a Guangzhou Hukou. The ties between Cantonese and the model of a Guangzhour is only critical for autochthonous Guangzhou residents who deem Cantonese an indispensable cultural aspect of their Guangzhour identity besides the territorial and institutional ones.

However, internal variety among migrants complicates the question under discussion here. A migrant's social class mediates their version of a Guangzhour in relation to Cantonese. The socioeconomic resources that migrants had upon arrival also directed them into different types of neighborhood with varied exposure to Cantonese. Teachers arriving in more recent decades with less success in learning Cantonese can stay in their comfort zone in Putonghua as their life overlaps with Cantonese dominant urban villages only rarely, as shown in the story of Mr. F. Being monolingual in Cantonese is actually a stigmatizing sign of a Guangzhour from a low socioeconomic background whom they associate with slum-like urban villages. For these newly minted Guangzhowers, the autochthonous Guangzhowers who are bilingual in Cantonese and Putonghua such as their fellow colleagues are likely coming from a higher socioeconomic background.

Unskilled migrants, who had no choice but to stay in urban villages, were surrounded by Cantonese speaking local villagers in a relatively higher social position. The learning of Cantonese does not necessarily reflect their social integration to the village life but rather a necessity for their economic integration there. Unlike the teachers' experience, the model of a Guangzhour in unskilled migrants' lived experience is still
mostly Cantonese speaking and coming from a relatively high socioeconomic background compared to their own social positions.

To conclude, whether the ability of speaking Cantonese is a defining feature for the model of a *Guangzhouer* varies. Besides the time of arrival in Guangzhou, the social class of the adult migrants discussed in this chapter is an important factor. The success of migrant parents in Cantonese learning (analyzed in chapter four) and arguments suggesting most elites do not speak Cantonese anymore further confirms the importance of considering social class when explaining why the discourse of profit only speaks to some people but not others.

The next chapters will shift the focus to migrant children and explore why their achievement in learning Cantonese is much lower than their parents through analyzing their encounters with Cantonese and the locals in and outside of schools.
Chapter 6. Migrant children- the *de facto* young Guangzhouers and their Cantonese investment in out-of-school life

Cantonese is a language mastered by almost every Guangzhouer who was born and raised in Guangzhou. Although I am not a Guangzhouer, I also grew up here drinking the same water from the Pearl River.

— Song, 8th grade

This quote was from migrant student Song’s linguistic autobiography where he talked about his Cantonese learning experience. It appeared at the very beginning and was his attempt to provide a rationale for his Cantonese learning. It might not make sense to people who do not understand the tangled feelings of migrant children without local Hukou in Guangzhou. He seemed to have a mixed feeling about the Guangzhouer identity. On the one hand, he acknowledged that he could not be considered a Guangzhouer for lack of government authorized identity, namely a *de jure* one. Yet he was not ready to rest his case as his life so far, entirely spent in this city, could not be simply erased because of that. To buttress his unspoken alignment with the Guangzhouer identity and make up for the lack of *de jure* recognition, he mentioned drinking the same water from the Pearl River just like Hukou-holding locals to emphasize he could at least claim a *de facto* Guangzhouer identity. Pearl River runs through the city of Guangzhou and is affectionately called the *mother river* by locals. Although as analyzed in the previous chapter, the relationship between the language Cantonese and the Guangzhouer identity is not straightforward, Song found it another *de facto* element that he might work on to add to his Guangzhouer-ness. In fact, later in his autobiography, Song mentioned he had been determined to practice Cantonese despite being mocked for his accent and errors by some local peers. By making all these efforts, could Song, a child locally born and raised, be considered a son of Guangzhou city? Is he a Guangzhouer after all? His short quote reflects the multiple lines of thinking that affect a migrant student’s understanding of the identity of Guangzhouer, which could further influence their investment in Cantonese learning.
In this chapter, I will present Cantonese learning and using experiences (or the lack thereof) of four migrant students in their community life and analyze the *de facto* elements revealed in their stories which affect their positioning regarding the *Guangzhouser* identity. In particular, I will discuss the affective and environmental reasons why most migrant children do not develop high proficiency in Cantonese in their community as their parents did.

### 6.1 A spectrum of *Guangzhouser* identification

During the process of interviewing migrant children, I usually asked the question whether they thought they were *Guangzhouser* somewhere during the second half of the interviews, after they shared their language learning experience and family life. As I talked with more of them, I realized that very few were able to give me a clear cut yes or no answer. The majority had developed this “half *Guangzhouser*” (a term adopted by many interviewed students) identity one way or another, depending on their familiarity with the various aspects of the local culture including the food, the language Cantonese, and the ownership of Guangzhou Hukou as well as the extent to which they value these aspects. The stories of the following four 8th grade students who fall at different places on the spectrum of *Guangzhouser* identification illustrate how these aspects have shaped their affiliation to *Guangzhouser* and interact with their investment in Cantonese learning.

#### 6.1.1 Choi: “born and raised” - a bona fide *Guangzhouser*?

At least Choi thought so. He started his autobiography with “Although my Hukou is in Jiangxi province, I am a born and raised *Guangzhouser*. I started learning Putonghua since I was little.”

Choi’s parents were college graduates who had majored in Mathematics in *Jiangxi*, an inland and less developed province compared to *Guangdong*, the province where Guangzhou is the capital city. After they graduated, they moved to Guangzhou for employment. Choi’s dad was a programmer in the past, and he picked up Cantonese when he started working. According to Choi, his dad is more fluent in Cantonese than his mother who speaks slower and with a more marked accent. Right now, his mom works as a copy editor for an English medium journal which provides English exercises compatible with the textbooks used in most primary and secondary schools in Guangzhou. The middle school Choi is at also subscribes to that journal. All the classmates know about his mother’s affiliation and Choi is proud of it.
Choi’s family is a typical middle-class migrant family. They choose to live in high-rise residential buildings instead of urban villages. Choi is the only child in the family and his education is the family’s top priority. So they always rent an apartment within walking distance to Choi’s school. Choi does not interact with people in his community very often. His parents give him a lot of space to develop his own hobbies. He is into programming (thanks to his father), and digital music composition on his computer (his grandpa is also a music composer who taught him some basics). He is also interested in foreign music through which he was briefly exposed to French, Japanese, Hindi, and Russian. However, he does not have a general interest in languages. In particular, he explicitly told me that he disliked Cantonese, a language that constantly frustrates him.

Choi observed that Cantonese speakers in his neighborhood are mostly elderly people. He couldn’t understand them at all. Once Choi tried to hold a door for an old man who was walking into his building after him. That man appreciated his help and said “thank you” in Cantonese 咁该 (m’goi) while he mistakenly thought that man scolded him for being a rowdy boy (不乖 bu guai: not behaving in Mandarin). He felt wronged and went home to complain about it to his grandma who was visiting his family from Jiangxi province. His grandma was quickly able to figure out what happened and comforted her grandson because she had been diligently learning Cantonese during her periodic winter stays in Guangzhou by socializing with other grannies during her morning outdoor exercises. In fact, she kept a Cantonese learning notebook with her. While Choi retold the story to me during the interview, he in fact forgot what 咁该 means again. I had to translate for him so that the story made sense to him again. I was trying to stay composed when I heard the story. But I was shocked that he did not know such a high frequency word after living in Guangzhou for 14 years.

At school, most students in Choi’s class are not Guangzhou Hukou holders. Neither is he. In other words, they are considered migrant students. They were admitted to this school thanks to a special program for students with exceptional academic performance. In fact, the very class Choi is in is fee-free while most non-hukou holders would have to pay over $5000 if their academic achievement is just mediocre. Therefore, the
academic competition in Choi’s class is always fierce. The blackboard in the back of their classroom always lists the rankings of top students in each subject after major exams.

Still, Choi is among the top students in his grade. He is the monitor in his class and takes on many class-wide and grade-wide administrative work. He attends the weekly advanced math class in his school because of his outstanding math ability. Usually, extra-curricular classes take one period each week. But the math class receives special attention and covers 2 periods on Wednesdays. This upsets Choi because the idea that during that extra period, his classmates can finish their homework ahead of him is agonizing to this overachieving teenager. Although I assured him that he could finish his at home in no time, he confessed that he got a sense of achievement when he could do all his homework before the school day ends.

Choi seldom hears Cantonese among his fellow students in the classroom because he knows that students are supposed to speak Putonghua in school and most students’ families migrated here from other language speaking regions. But he does note that some teachers such as his English teacher, gym teacher, political science teacher and geography teacher tend to insert Cantonese to different extents in class. He has no idea what they were saying. Fortunately, sometimes he gets assigned a desk mate who is at least better than him in Cantonese listening and can act as a translator for him. But he is not always this lucky to get by. During the semester I was staying with them, Choi and other students in his class were given the task to visit elderly people in a nearby nursing home. Since this nursing home is located in an old community, all seniors there speak Cantonese. As a student leader, Choi was very nervous because he was supposed to take initiative and coordinate the visit. Although his classmate Chubby, one of a few Cantonese speakers in his class, taught him some daily expressions to greet the seniors. This was still a highly stressful event and almost a blow to his confidence when he recalled this experience during the interview with me.

Most of the time, the lack of Cantonese proficiency doesn’t affect Choi’s schooling and daily life. But the few incidents Choi told me about still haunt him and the idea of learning Cantonese is stressful to him. He could get by in daily life by not interacting with Cantonese-only speaking people. He finds that as he will be moving up to grade 9 and the high school entrance exam is approaching, he probably has no time to learn Cantonese. This might be a very legitimate excuse for not learning. But he never decisively said he would
never try to learn Cantonese. In fact, when I asked him whether he would be willing to join an extra-curricular Cantonese class, he surprisingly said yes if he only needs to attend one period of advanced math class on Wednesdays and then he could spare the other period for Cantonese learning. His lingering interest in learning Cantonese might be related to a visit from some alumni earlier that year who are also migrant students and attending high schools in Guangzhou now. They warned the current students that some senior teachers in their high schools still taught in Cantonese and advised them to learn it if possible.

6.1.2 Ming: “half Guangzhour”

Ming is one of the top students in his class (same class as Choi) from my perspective although he humbly evaluates himself as a mediocre student citing that his academic performance is not very stable. Unlike his peers, he does not succumb to the temptation of video games and only listens to some music in his free time. He is not keen on chitchatting with me in the classroom, but he would walk up to me for some questions in his English homework. On the upper right corner of his desk, he sticks a piece of paper stating his goal explicitly (specific marks he’d like to achieve) for each subject in the final exam in that semester. He also won the competition for being the fastest to restore a Rubik’s cube in his entire school last year. He is also in the advanced extra-curricular math class which convenes every Wednesday afternoon. In a school famous for its math, he feels at home.

Ming lives in an urban village with his families. It takes about 40 minutes to come to school by bus. His family is from Chaoshan (潮汕) region in Guangdong province where Southern Min (闽) is mostly spoken. It’s a region with a patriarchal clan culture according to a teacher who’s also from that region. Male descendants are considered critical to the continuation of the clans. Families usually won’t stop having children until they have at least one boy. It is not rare to find a family with over three children in this region even when the one-child policy was in effect. Ming has two siblings, both boys. The whole family now lives in Guangzhou together. His elder brother is one year above him in the same middle school and his younger brother is in grade 6 in the local public elementary school in his village. His father migrated to work in Guangzhou over a decade ago and runs a hardware store now in the urban village. The rent for the store is climbing every year. But this year in particular, the family is facing a big financial challenge as the eldest and youngest sons are moving up to high school and middle school respectively. Without local Hukou, on
top of getting all the necessary paperwork, the family has to pay “sponsorship” fee in exchange for school admission. When it was Ming’s turn to move up to middle school two years ago, he performed so well in the test that he secured a spot in the exceptional class exempt from fees. But his elder brother did just okay in the test and failed to make the cut-off line for the fee-free class. His father paid $4000 to get an admission. Before all these, the family also paid their way into the public elementary school for the three sons due to the lack of local Hukou. Ming told me that the fee to get into the elementary school has gone up to close to $5000 this year. During our interview, he laughed when I commented that fortunately there were no more children in his family who need to attend that school. However, this financial burden is never a joking matter for this family. Maybe that’s why Ming is so fixated on test scores. He wants to perform well, stably, so that he can save some money for the family again when it is his turn to go to high school.

Ming was born and raised in Guangzhou except for one year when he was supposed to attend preschool. He was sent back to live with his aunt in the hometown because his parents were navigating the potential ways to get his elder brother into a local elementary school without the local Hukou for the first time. During that year, he was exposed to the southern Min language spoken in his hometown to a point he could understand some but was yet to speak it. After that year in his parent’s hometown, he was brought back to attend kindergarten in Guangzhou. By now, his parents finally figured out how to send children to school when they don’t have the local Hukou.

Now he can understand the southern Min language much more but is unable to speak it freely. He finds it difficult to express himself when the topic gets a bit complicated or abstract. He feels guilty and embarrassed when he is not able to answer questions from relatives because of his inadequacy in the heritage language during visits to their hometown every year during the Spring Festival. He revealed that he is a bit timid when he walks around the hometown if his cousins who live there cannot accompany him.

Since Ming was a little kid, he has liked staying in his father’s hardware store whenever he does not have to go to school. Many customers coming to the store speak Cantonese. Sometimes his father’s local friends would visit and chat with his father for hours in Cantonese, a language that was not present at home and school for Ming and piqued his curiosity. He was constantly asking his father to translate what the
customers were saying. With his father’s help, he gradually picked up daily expression and the names of the 
merchandise in Cantonese. By now he can at least maintain daily conversations in Cantonese if necessary 
when he goes out by himself. When it comes to communication with strangers, he is more at home in 
Guangzhou compared to the time he visited his hometown. In school, he occasionally would talk in Cantonese 
with a couple of students close to him in his class. But he rarely speaks Cantonese in public.

When I asked him about how he identified with Guangzhouer, this Cantonese speaking teenager who 
was also locally born and raised, found he could only be called “half Guangzhouer” since his family did not 
have Guangzhou Hukou.

6.1.3 Ann: another “half Guangzhouer”

Ann is in a mixed class with half local students and half migrant students. She is an introvert girl who is 
famous in her class for her self-taught drawing talent. Ann belongs to one of the girl groups in her class, but 
she is not a core member. She has other close friends whom she spends more time with in recess and 
weekends.

Ann’s parents were from the Mandarin-speaking Szechuan region, but Ann was born and raised in 
Guangzhou. In fact, she did not visit her hometown for the first time until she was four years old. Hometown 
visits are both time and money consuming. The family usually do it once a year during the Spring Festival 
long break. The family live in an urban village in Guangzhou. Ann’s mother did not finish elementary school 
and works as a tailor mending clothes for people in the village. Ann’s father finished middle school and 
works as a construction worker in Guangzhou. He is away from the family most of the time because 
construction workers usually stay in the makeshift sheds near construction sites when a construction is in 
progress.

With two working parents and little spare money to send her to any extra-curricular classes, Ann spent a 
lot of time watching TV alone at home as she grew up. Her mother made a signal enhancer out of a soda can 
so that they could receive channels for free. Thanks to her mother’s talent, Ann watched a lot of Cantonese 
speaking movies and news reporting and became receptive in Cantonese. But because the family mostly 
socialize with other Szechuan migrant families living in the same village, Ann did not have many
opportunities to practice her Cantonese speaking even if Cantonese is easily accessible in urban villages. For example, although their landlord was a local villager, whenever he came to collect rent, he would switch to Putonghua to communicate with them. This was the practice of many local villagers when they met “outcomers” (Liang, 2015, p. 72, a term for whoever does not originate from Guangzhou). Although Ann’s parents were not able to make enough money to move out of the urban village in Guangzhou, they managed to pay the down payment of an apartment in their hometown village where Ann’s parents plan to go back eventually. However, this vision for the future is not shared by Ann. She told me she wanted to stay in Guangzhou and attend an art academy there, a goal that her parents were supportive of. In her dad’s time off from the construction site, they had a campus tour in an art academy in Guangzhou which was very motivational for Ann.

In the middle school, Ann occasionally wanted to respond to local friends in Cantonese since she could understand the conversation. However, because of her strong accent, erroneous grammar or word choice, she would also get mocked by those local friends. Ann did not take it well though. Fortunately, she had another close friend who was also a local and fluent Cantonese speaker to correct her mistake and show her the right way. At the same time, Ann sometimes taught her friend how to speak the Szechuan dialect because this friend’s grandma was from Szechuan as well. This language exchange brought them closer. On weekends, Ann would visit her friend’s house, and practice her Cantonese with not only her friend but also some Cantonese-dominant family members. Although she said she was still unconfident in her Cantonese, she felt “a sense of accomplishment” once when she was able to use her “awkward” Cantonese to help an elderly local who couldn’t understand Putonghua.

Ann and her close friend have a common interest in animation and cosplay. Guangzhou is a perfect city to live in for these teenagers as every year this city hosts several comic/animation conventions and there is an entertainment complex called Comic City dedicated for comic/animation fans. In contrast, Ann’s hometown village has little entertainment, unpaved roads and no places to go for her hobby. Although she self-categorized herself as a “half-Guangzhouer”, her qualification is only due to her developing and yet fluent Cantonese. Other than that, she felt she was no different from other urban teenagers in Guangzhou.
6.1.4 Shu: *Guangzhouer wannabe*

Shu is a girl in the same class with Choi and Ming. Like Choi, she also takes up roles of student leader in school. As a teenager, she is also quite popular in her class for her outgoing personality and charming smiles. However, in her interview and her autobiography, she revealed her anxiety about not making enough progress in her academic performance to get her into a good high school. As a migrant student who does not have a local Hukou, the quota for students like her to enter public high schools is extremely low. Public high schools only allocate 8% of their enrollment to students without Guangzhou Hukou while it is not rare to see the percentage of migrant students in middle schools reach two digits. Therefore, in order to make a dash for high school, an outstanding academic performance is a must-have prerequisite. Her parents were also trying their best to make sure all the necessary paperwork was ready. The family was determined to continue their life in Guangzhou. During my year of fieldwork, Shu’s mother was studying for a vocational certificate which could boost their chance to get a Guangzhou Hukou. If she was able to secure Hukou before Shu graduates from middle school, the odds for Shu to attend a high school would shoot up.

Unlike the previous three students, Shu did not arrive in Guangzhou until she was age 7. Her parents were working in factories in Guangzhou and left her to her grandparents in their hometown in Hubei province. Many people in her hometown had left for work in cities and their children were left behind. Shu was one of them. After her grandparents were physically unfit to take care of her, she was sent to a private foster care facility where many left-behind children were temporarily placed. So it was exciting for Shu to finally join her parents in Guangzhou where she could resume a wholesome family life.

In her hometown, most teachers used their dialects in teaching. Once she moved to Guangzhou in the late 2000s, she noted that everything was taught in Putonghua in the private elementary school for migrant children she attended. A slogan “please use Putonghua” was painted on the wall in the school. Many teachers in her school were not Cantonese dominant locals and thus were comfortable with this language policy. So when she moved up to the current middle school where the same language policy was just loosely implemented, she had difficulty following some of her teachers who would switch to Cantonese sometimes. At home she could not get much help with Cantonese as her parents were only receptive at most. So in school she tried to ask Chubby, a Cantonese speaking boy who sat close to her to teach her. But Chubby was not a
very skilled or patient language teacher. His constant negative feedback on her pronunciation quickly extinguished Shu’s passion to learn Cantonese.

Shu’s family live in an old street community where the apartment buildings were built a few decades ago and the rent was relatively affordable. In this type of neighborhood, there is a mix of locals and migrants. Unlike many of her classmates with limited activities outside of school and home, Shu likes getting involved in activities organized by the community center where she could make friends. Getting around in the neighborhood is not always pleasant for her though. She recalled some middle-aged local women would curse in Cantonese when she and her friends were accidentally in their way. Shu understood some Cantonese, but she was not at the level to talk back. She was not sure whether this overreacting hostility was directed at her and her Putonghua speaking friends due to their loudness in the street or their migrant identity as hinted by language choice. But what was clear to me is that this type of incidents bothers Shu quite a lot. In our interview, Shu became a little agitated and raised her voice when she recalled a conflict between her and a neighbor during which the local neighbor accused her of trashing in the public stairwell. The neighbor kept on and on in Cantonese, claimed another neighbor witnessed Shu’s uncivil behavior, and even threatened that she would ask the police to test the DNA on the trash to prove her accusation. Shu felt humiliated but her retort could not be delivered in Cantonese which made her even more furious. She ended up demanding the neighbor to switch to Putonghua first so that she could fully understand her made-up accusation. Fortunately, Shu’s mom came to her rescue in time and reasoned with the neighbor on her behalf.

Although Shu could not fully overlook the hostility and discrimination from her neighbor, living in Guangzhou for almost eight years still provided her with a sense of belonging to offset the unpleasant experiences. She would like to become a Guangzhouer but she found herself not fully acclimated to the local culture. As she put it in her interview “我也想自己是广州人，但是我粤语不会，也不习惯吃早茶这种东西” (I wish I were a Guangzhouer. But I don’t speak Cantonese. Nor do I become accustomed to things like eating dim sum). Interestingly, a lack of Guangzhou Hukou was not her big concern.
6.2 Half Guangzhouers: the “other half” perspective

The variance in how migrant students identify with the term Guangzhouer along with their stories illustrates diverse paths for them to acclimate to a city where the culture and customs might be different from those in their home environment. Choi, Ming, Ann and Shu each placed greater significance on some aspects of their life in Guangzhou but not others. In the following table, I include three elements that emerged through the coding process of a larger dataset so as to examine the life of the four students with an analytical lens. These reflect oft-cited criteria when students evaluated themselves against their understanding of a Guangzhouer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Identification</th>
<th>Acquired GZ Hukou</th>
<th>Born &amp; raised in GZ</th>
<th>Cantonese proficiency</th>
<th>Neighborhood type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Choi</td>
<td>Guangzhouer</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No knowledge</td>
<td>Commodity high-rise apartment building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ming</td>
<td>“Half Guangzhouer”</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>Urban village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>“Half Guangzhouer”</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>Urban village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shu</td>
<td>“Guangzhouer wannabe”</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No (arrived as 7y/o)</td>
<td>beginner</td>
<td>Old street apartment building</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 19: An overview of the four migrant students under discussion

As discussed in the opening of this chapter, I categorize these as de jure or de facto criteria. It should be noted that I have no intention to identify all the building blocks for formulating a Guangzhouer identity. Neither do I strive to find out which criterion trumps others as the most influential one. After all, even if there are some common factors, identity formation is highly individualized, contingent on the macro and micro contexts in which each individual is located. Ultimately, my interest in exploring their identity is to understand how it affects their Cantonese investment.
Among these elements, the *de jure* acquisition of a Guangzhou Hukou, is perhaps least relevant to a migrant student *per se*. After all, these issues are usually handled by parents. Nevertheless, compared to their local peers, migrant students are more sensitive to it and they are constantly reminded of their lack of Guangzhou Hukou throughout their educational experience due to unequal access, the extra paperwork and fees their families need to prepare. For Ming, for example, the financial burden makes the lack of official recognition more salient. Even if he seems to be well adapted to the life in Guangzhou with years of residence and ability to speak Cantonese, he still calls himself a half *Guangzhouer*. In his particular case, this *de jure* requirement seems to overshadow others. However, I cannot help noticing and wondering about the other half, the excitement from interacting with his dad’s friend in their hardware store and the relaxed feeling in Guangzhou after returning from his hometown. He was expressing an unofficially recognized bond with this city, affirming it without directly naming it. Similarly, in this chapter’s opening quote from student Song, he acknowledged up front that he was not a *Guangzhouer*, but this was no surprise for most migrant students and not very demoralizing for him. On the contrary, Song emphasized his emotional and bodily connection with Guangzhou by making the water reference. Therefore, instead of questioning why these students claim to be only half *Guangzhouer*, I was inspired to switch my focus to “the other half” and even why Choi thought he could confidently claim a full ownership of a *Guangzhouer* identity, by examining the *de facto* aspects and the connection between them. Unlike the institutional identity beyond the reach of the students, I believe these intertwined aspects provide a richer understanding of migrant students’ varied investment and achievement in Cantonese learning, and how their lived experience and language learning interest interact and influence their self-identification as *Guangzhouer*.

6.2.1 Born and raised in Guangzhou: the impact of long-term urban residence

As Shown in chapter four, around a third of the migrant students in my study were born in Guangzhou. This seems to be a stable trend among the students in different grades across the two schools surveyed. For the remaining two thirds, in the elementary school, most were brought to stay with parents in Guangzhou at a young age even before preschool. In the middle school, a group of students, like Shu, came to Guangzhou later in their life. They were brought to Guangzhou a few years after they had started elementary schools in their hometowns. Even this group of students, by the time of my study, have lived in Guangzhou for over
five years. What emerged from the coding of my data is migrant students' conscious reflection and contrast between the metropolis where they currently reside and the small hometowns their families were from. In addition, the majority of them, even for migrant children at lower grades in my study, have already shown their preference and a sense of belonging to the former.

Even though 74.5% of them came from rural areas or small towns, migrant students, even those in lower grades, are getting used to urban life. In the elementary schools, sometimes when students met me in the hallway, they would show off their library cards from the city library for children which is a few stops away by subway from the urban village they live in and told me about their adventures there without their parents’ company. During our casual chats in recess, some would perform the latest dance they learned on Tiktok or ask me whether I was as absorbed into the phone game PlayerUnknown’s Battlegrounds as they were. Like their local peers, most migrant students had access to cellphones. Ann and her friend who were interested in animation recalled their trips to Comic City to hunt for costumes for cosplay or other memorabilia. Others shared their family outings to some local landmarks such as the Guangzhou Tower or the experience of cheering for the Guangzhou home soccer team in the stadium on weekends. As far as I could tell, most students enjoyed the resources, entertainment, and modern facilities Guangzhou offers. And the life in Guangzhou has become part of who they are. In comparison, when I asked them about their hometowns, many seem to regard hometowns as a distant place they do like but only to a certain extent.

Among the elementary school students, many mentioned they really enjoyed the trips back to hometowns especially the extended ones during the summer break. The air was fresher, and they could roam around freely without parents’ concern for their safety. In addition, the grandparents would pamper them with delicious food and maximal freedom. There were also outdoor activities such as hiking in the mountains, swimming in lakes, fishing and barbecuing by creeks and even playing with firework that they just cannot have living in the city. Helping out grandparents or uncles with their agricultural fieldwork was also interesting as a novel activity. However, after a while, the more natural and rural environment could lose its appeal. They started to miss the modernity of the city, their parents’ smartphones, and internet access. The excursions to the hometowns are only fun if they can return to their normality in the city after a few weeks.
Besides the difference in lifestyle, the lack of immediate access to new information bored them and the information gap between them and their hometown folks further distanced them from the possibility of living there. During a group interview with second-grade boys, I had a conversation with one of the boys Lian. Lian’s hometown is a rural area in Henan province. His village is half-an-hour drive from the nearest town. However, not many people in the village own a car to drive there. The road is also very narrow and bumpy, not built for cars in the first place. As a second grader, Lian seems to be more articulate and precocious compared to his peers. On the one hand, he likes his time in the rural hometown as a carefree child. On the other, the food and the people there seem to constantly remind him that he is an urbanite and he cannot tolerate being parochial, a seemingly inevitable result of leading a country life from his perspective. On many occasions, Lian in fact expressed that he missed those vacation times in his hometown. However, Guangzhou, where he was born and raised as he repeatedly emphasized, was the place he truly belongs to.

<p>| Lian: 其实其实我在老家嘛，和我的堂妹堂姐和什么堂弟，经常跟你玩，有时候买一些零食在那里吃，因为我爷爷是商店，卖些小零食的，然后然后我们在老家度过很多好玩的事情，比如说我们老家还有一种美食，很流行的，爬叉，烧爬叉，炸爬叉 | Lian: In fact in fact in my hometown, my cousins there often play with me. Sometimes we eat snack together because my grandpa runs a small grocery store and sells those snacks. Then then in my hometown I had a lot of fun. For example, there is a delicacy in my hometown, very popular, called pacha, cooked pacha, or fried pacha. |
| YT: 爬叉什么东西？是动物吗？ | YT: What is Pacha? Is it an animal? |
| Lian: 对 | Lian: Yeah |
| YT: 就是蚱蜢？ | YT: Is it actually grasshopper? |
| Lian: 对，不对，在树上的，然后这里抓来，他是活着，然后抓来炸着吃，不好吃，可是妈妈习惯吃那些东西，我在广州基本上都不吃这些东西 | Lian: Yea-No. It lives on the trees. Then we catch it live. Then we fry them. It’s not tasty. But my mother is used to eating those type of food. I don’t really eat those in Guangzhou. |
| YT: 你不喜欢，所以？ | YT: So you don’t like it? |
| Lian: 嗯 | Lian: No. |
| YT: 你妈妈很喜欢？ | YT: But your mom likes it a lot? |
| Lian: 营养价值很高的！ | Lian: It is quite nutritious! |
| YT: 你妈妈跟你说的是吧？ | YT: Did your mom tell you that? |
| Lian: 我妈妈说过，那个很有营养的 | Lian: My mother did say it was nutritious. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YT: 但是你还不吃？</th>
<th>YT: But you still don’t want to eat it?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lian: 对啊，我在广州待了这么多年，你觉得我吃那个东西吗？</td>
<td>Lian: no way, I’ve been living in Guangzhou for so many years. Do you think I would eat that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YT: 但是你其他的兄弟姐妹他们都可以吃啊？</td>
<td>YT: But your cousins were all willing to eat it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lian: 对，人家还说脆脆的，真的</td>
<td>Lian: yes, they even said it was crunchy, for real.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YT: 那你还吃过，是不是？</td>
<td>YT: so you did try it, didn’t you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lian: 我吃过，就吐掉了，很难吃！</td>
<td>Lian: Yes, then I spit it out. It tasted awful!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YT: 你觉得不好吃啊？味道不好吃？</td>
<td>YT: You don’t like the taste? Does it taste bad?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lian: 对，因为我在广州呆了多年你都不知道吗，我生来就在广州，我在广州几乎都吃在广州，对不对？</td>
<td>Lian: Yes, because I’ve been living in Guangzhou for I don’t know how many years. Don’t you know? I was born in Guangzhou! I was born in Guangzhou. I almost always eat Cantonese cuisine. Right?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YT: 你只你喜欢吃这边的菜是吧？</td>
<td>YT: You only like eating the local cuisine here, right?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lian: 对，有有时候我就吃家乡的菜，在广州吃的</td>
<td>Lian: yes. Sometimes I eat dishes from my hometown, but still in Guangzhou</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YT: 所以你就广州和那个河南，你是不是觉得更加喜欢在广州这边？</td>
<td>YT: So between Guangzhou and Henan ((his hometown province)), do you prefer living in Guangzhou?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lian: 对啊，因为你想一想村子里待着，感觉知识都会不足。有一次我们买了一条鱿鱼，然后他说“这是什么啊？”</td>
<td>Lian: Yeah. Think about it, if you stay in the village, your knowledge will become deficient. Once we bought a squid, then he asked, ”what is this?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YT: 没见过是吧？</td>
<td>YT: They have never seen one?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lian: 对，你觉得他在村子里呆着，是不是那种知识不够</td>
<td>Lian: No. So do you agree that if he keeps living in the village, he would become ignorant?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YT: 你爸妈这么跟你说。还是你自己觉得？</td>
<td>YT: Did your parents tell you this or you figured on your own?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lian: 我觉得</td>
<td>Lian: This is my thought.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Interview Excerpt from IN18062137)

Lian was trying to show how he was different from his village friends and families for having a finer palate, finding eating insects intolerable, which he attributed to his urban life experience. Further on, he made
it clear that living in the village will make a person ignorant, which he detested. Lian was probably more explicit about the urban-rural dichotomy drawing from his trips. Other migrant students, even if they don’t go back as often, noticed the difference through observing their parents, the first-generation migrants from the rural area to make a living in cities. Ann, as one of the four students introduced in the last section, was born and raised in Guangzhou. In the following excerpt, as a self-claimed “half-Guangzhouer”, she explained how she resembled a *Guangzhouer* by contrasting herself with her mother.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YT: 既然你是在广州出生长大，你觉得你算不算广州人？</th>
<th>YT: Since you were born and raised in Guangzhou, do you consider yourself a Guangzhouer?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YT:半个，为什么呀？</td>
<td>YT: half, why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann: 我跟他们的习性都差不多，就是说话不一样。因为像重庆人都是很豪放大方的，然后一点都不内敛。我就比较，就是那种说话的时候比较…</td>
<td>Ann: My manners are similar to theirs, just speaking different languages. People from Chongqing are very outgoing and unconstrained, and not reserved at all. I’m more like, when I speak…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YT:你就觉得你跟普通的重庆人不大一样？</td>
<td>YT: You think you’re just different from a person from Chongqing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann: 对。</td>
<td>Ann: Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YT:可能是比较像城里的这边这里的人？</td>
<td>YT: More like a person in the city here?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann: 对。</td>
<td>Ann: Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YT:爸爸妈妈呢？</td>
<td>YT: What about dad and mom?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann: 我妈说话都很大声的，打电话是吼的那一种。</td>
<td>Ann: My mother always speaks very loudly. When she makes a phone call, she is like roaring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YT:所以你觉得你自己跟他们挺不一样的？</td>
<td>YT: So you think you’re quite different from them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann: 嗯。</td>
<td>Ann: Yes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Interview Excerpt from IN18048528)
Apparently, Ann had her own understanding of how urbanites should behave when they interact with others: withdrawn, level-headed, and composed. As I mentioned before, Ann herself was relatively quiet in school and always talked to people in a gentle manner. As a self-conscious adolescent, I wonder whether she was trying to behave like what she thought was “cool” beyond her introvert personality. In other words, Ann found herself more integrated into the ways of beings as an urbanite than her parents. The description of her mother she gave does not mean she looked down upon her parents. There was no doubt she loved her parents who were supporters of her pursuit of art. However, as a self-recognized urbanite, Ann did not want to act like her parents, whose manners were not urbanized in her eyes.

In addition to the preference for urban infrastructure and resources, and the internalization of urban ways of being, migrant students whose academic performance was not outstanding also worried that they could not keep up with the academic work if they were sent back to study in the high schools in their hometown because the textbooks could be different and the education in smaller places was more test-oriented and thus tedious and intense. Some even claimed that in other provinces science subjects are more advanced. If they move back to be eligible for public high schools but cannot handle the difficulty of those subjects and compete with peers in their hometowns, their chance of entering a college is still slim. The only advantage they would have is probably in English, a subject made more advanced with the resources in big cities. But more importantly, they would be separated from their parents again and the friends they have made in Guangzhou.

Another logistical problem facing these students is their poor command of their hometown dialects. As shown from the survey results in chapter four, Putonghua is the language most used among migrant households and some families purposefully avoid using dialects for fear that it would affect their children’s Putonghua. Quite a few students report, like Ming, that during their trips to hometown their poor dialect is an obstacle for their communication with grandparents if they don’t understand or speak Putonghua. Parents or cousins in the hometown often acted as their translators, which could not be counted on if they have to live and study there long term. Some students also fear that their hometown teachers prefer using their dialects as the instructional language.

Therefore, for these second-generation migrants, the impact of long-term urban life, their de facto lived experience, has provided them with many reasons in day-to-day life and study to identify with Guangzhou.
as a metropolis and distance themselves from their hometowns which they are less familiar with. It should be noted that most students still like their hometowns, but they do not see themselves fitting in there anymore. Their sense of belonging to their hometowns dwindles as their stay and identification with their hosting city grows. I also want to emphasize that this identification with urban life in general is likely to happen if these migrant children spend a long time in other cities such as Beijing or Shanghai. What’s delineated above is the life of an urbanite they prefer. What is unique to Guangzhou and not other cities, however, is their specific experiences interacting with the local people and culture during their long-term stay.

6.2.2 Cantonese investment: a harbinger of migrant students’ experiences with locals

In chapter four, I found local birth and long-term stay do not seem significantly related to students’ Cantonese proficiency. Their proficiency in Cantonese is quite low compared to their parents'. However, most migrant children, due to their long-term stay, have already developed a sense of belonging to the city. So when we look at the individuals in my study, the ability of speak Cantonese is never a reliable indicator in their claim of being a Guangzhou or not or a half. Therefore, from the perspective of migrant children, it makes more sense to rename Guangzhou as a two-part phrase, "urban resident in Guangzhou". Some students such as Choi whose life rarely overlaps with Cantonese speaking locals mainly identify with the part "urban resident" while others take the second part of the phrase, "in Guangzhou," into consideration. Cantonese speaking is perhaps a good indicator of this second part, the willingness to assimilate to and to simply get to know the local group and culture.

In the previous chapter, I discussed the relative significance of the ability to speak Cantonese. For adult migrants with higher socioeconomic status, it is no longer indispensable for the model of Guangzhou. Instead, the de jure Hukou ownership is all they need to affirm their identity of new Guangzhouers. However, the Cantonese speaking skill is still an important feature for migrant workers with few resources since it is crucial for their upward mobility. These differing views are shaped by their social positioning in relation to the autochthonous Guangzhouers they are exposed to in their social circles. The impact of migrant’s social class on their interest in learning Cantonese does not necessarily pass down to their children. The children’s interest in the language is not purely instrumental. Instead, it derives from their emotional belonging and the lived experience discussed in the last section.
None of the four students presented above has to use Cantonese in their daily life, no matter which social class they are in. However, no one claimed Cantonese was irrelevant or refused a chance to learn it, including Choi. But it is very clear their Cantonese proficiency varies a lot and their continued investments in Cantonese learning are also different. If we look closely at their encounters with the language or its speakers, we can find that their identification with the term *Guangzhouer* is in a symbiotic relationship with their lived experience and their language proficiency.

**Positive experiences: a boost for Cantonese learning**

Ming and Ann both find themselves “half *Guangzhouers*” and they are relatively high in their Cantonese command among the four students presented. In their eyes, the model of a Guangzhouer still fits an autochthonous Guangzhou resident, living in Guangzhou, owning a local Hukou and speaking Cantonese.

For Ming, after comparing to this model, he was hesitant to claim this identity due to the lack of Hukou. However, his long-term residence in Guangzhou and the ability of speak the language as the locals do provided him some evidence and confidence to point out the similarities between him and “*Guangzhouers*”. Similar to Song’s water reference, his self-description of “half Guangzhouer” is also his affirmation of the *Guangzhouer*-ness in him. More importantly and fortunately, Ming had the opportunity to access his father’s Cantonese speaking social network, a safe, positive and meaningful environment for him to ease into the language. The ability to speak Cantonese also allowed him to receive customers independently in his father’s hardware store. The pleasure of mastering and the satisfaction from being able to help out his father further motivated him to keep up his language learning.

As for Ann, she is in fact a more representative case. Just like her, a “half *Guangzhouer*”, the reason that many migrant students in my study were hesitant to claim a full Guangzhouer or even deny it altogether was due to their dissatisfaction with their Cantonese proficiency. In Ann’s case, her years of living in Guangzhou provided her with receptive skills in Cantonese. Thanks to her Cantonese speaking friend she met in middle school, her speaking skill could finally take off. Although it is still not satisfactory, she tested it in the real world by successfully helping an elder woman. It boosted her confidence and brought her a sense of achievement.
What’s in common in Ming’s and Ann’s cases is their chance to mingle with Cantonese speaking locals in a supportive and responsive environment, which is not always the case for migrant children.

Negative experiences and the inflaming Cantonese

In contrast, another student Chi, who was from Hubei province and had lived in Guangzhou for six years, ran into a similar situation to Ann but walked away with a sense of loss. On his way to a library, he was asked for direction by a Cantonese speaking elder man. Unlike Ann, Chi only understood a few words in Cantonese. Although he could figure out this person needed help with direction, he just could not extract and understand the name of his destination. Even though it was just a very brief encounter, it had great impact on him and caused a small existential crisis. When I asked him whether he was embarrassed at the moment, he commented that “准确来说，就是白待了，在这里！（to be exact, it feels just like I’ve never lived here!)” (Interview Excerpt from IN18048501). Again, although Cantonese is never a necessity in a pragmatic sense, for Chi, the lack of it is devastating enough to invalidate his years of living in Guangzhou. This also reflects that Chi assumed Cantonese speaking ability is an important feature of a Guangzhouer. Having a command of it is critical to blend in this city for him and more importantly, he has the willingness to mingle with the locals if possible. As the library he went to was out of his normal activity range, namely home and school, later in the interview, he arrived at a conclusion that he would learn Cantonese at some point because he wanted to continue living in Guangzhou, and his activity range would eventually expand and interaction with Cantonese speakers would be inevitable.

Chi, a late arrival in Guangzhou as a primary school student, was more self-conscious of being a newcomer to the city of Guangzhou and his adaptation process. That is why he was more sensitive to some setbacks caused by his lack of knowledge in the local language. In other words, Cantonese constitutes a test for the extent of his adaptation to the local culture, which he desires. Unlike Choi who is not invested in the local culture as much, adaptation to the city of Guangzhou for Chi means both getting used to urban life and mingling with the locals.

The gap caused by Cantonese could be alienating for some migrants interested in assimilating into the local culture. In Shu’s case, it is quite clear she had multiple rough experiences with Cantonese speaking
locals. Although Shu and her family have been proactive in becoming officially recognized *Guangzhouers*, Shu’s investment has been chipped away by those experiences along with a lack of learning opportunities. In her encounters with hostile Cantonese speaking locals, the language has become a discriminating marker, perpetuating the stigma on migrants, and inflaming the local-migrant dichotomy. When there was a conflict or a misunderstanding, the choice of Cantonese by locals to speak ill of Shu in these scenarios is in fact a rejection of genuine communication and reflection of their condescension.

Some may argue there is nothing wrong with *Guangzhouers* speaking their own language and they have every right to choose a preferred language for communication. Based on what I have learned from participants in my study, however, the negative impact goes beyond the breakdown of communication. Yan is a migrant student from another Cantonese speaking area outside of Guangzhou. When I asked about her identification with the term *Guangzhouer*, she also considered herself a half.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YT: 你感觉你在广州生活也靠近要 10 年了,你感觉你算广州人吗?</th>
<th>YT: You have lived in Guangzhou for almost ten years. Do you feel you can be counted as a <em>Guangzhouer</em>?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yan: 广州人?</td>
<td>Yan: A <em>Guangzhouer</em>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YT: 嗯,你可以算嘛?</td>
<td>YT: Yes, do you think you can be counted as one?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yan: 一半一半吧,呵呵</td>
<td>Yan: Maybe half and half ((chuckle))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yan: 呃</td>
<td>Yan: Uh…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YT: 一半是老家的是吧?</td>
<td>YT: Is one half still about your hometown?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yan: 但是又好像,因为有时候广州人的话,我感觉有点不太一样,特别是特别是那些老一辈的人,他们就觉得自己是广州人很了不起那种感觉</td>
<td>Yan: But it is more like… sometimes, because some <em>Guangzhouers</em>, I feel (they) are a bit different, especially those older generations. They act like they are better than you because they are <em>Guangzhouers</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YT: 你有碰到过他们,比如说鄙视别人之类 的嘛?</td>
<td>YT: Have you seen any situations that they looked down upon others?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yan: 有有有,有一次坐公交车嘛,,然后那两个夫妻,他们是广州人嘛,然后然后司机他是一个湖北的人</td>
<td>Yan: yes yes yes. One time on a bus, then there are a couple. They were <em>Guangzhouers</em>. Then the driver was from Hubei Province.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YT: 你能这么清楚知道?</td>
<td>YT: How did you know so clearly?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Yan: It’s because the Guangzhouers were swearing in Cantonese at the driver about his driving. Then all the passengers on the bus reacted and challenged them by saying “how dare you to feel superior just for being a Guangzhouer?”

YT: Others were angry at them right?

Yan: Yes yes yes, ((people on)) the bus feel this behavior disgraced Guangzhouers.

YT: I see. So among them, there are also some local Guangzhouers right?

Yan: Yes.

(Yan later explained that the incident was because the couple were tipped off balance due to an emergency brake the driver made. She cited this incident to explain why she could not comfortably align with all local Guangzhouers as she did not see herself becoming like some of them who look down upon others. She was being fair to acknowledge that there were also local Guangzhouers who were indignant about this type of behavior. However, this does not offset the negative impression and the sting she took away from this incident. In her case, there is no need for her to learn Cantonese since she speaks it already, but it gave her a reason to distance herself from the local group by claiming herself a half-Guangzhouer. Her story also illustrates how migrants are sensitive to this local-migrant dichotomy and how easily they could get offended by the disrespect some locals showed by summoning a language they assumed not fully available to migrants.

There could be many more encounters during which those migrant students are treated in a friendly manner by Cantonese-speaking locals, but the occasional manifestation of hostility could ruin those good experiences. In other recounts of the conflicts between locals and migrants shared by my participants, very often the local language which is in an urgent need to recruit more speakers, was used as a weapon to show their hostility and as a wall to accentuate the boundary between the local and migrant groups. It is not difficult to imagine this kind of emotional response also occurred to Shu, whose investment in Cantonese could be negatively affected by her rough encounters with locals.)
6.3 The erratic Cantonese learning opportunity in migrant students’ life

In previous sections, I discussed several de facto aspects that make migrant students identify with or distance themselves from the term *Guangzhoner*, which in fact has two layers to it. In addition, how their positive and negative lived experiences in Guangzhou affect their investment in Cantonese. In fact, despite the negative impact, my survey data suggests there was a strong interest or at least willingness in learning Cantonese. Among the 220 migrant students surveyed, 76.8% (169) could not speak Cantonese and 69.9% (153) said they would like to join an elective Cantonese language class if it is available in school. This is an encouraging result but at the same time makes me wonder why most of them could not learn it in their communities. As discussed in the preceding chapter, most students live in urban villages where Cantonese is more widely used than in the urban areas outside the villages. However, in chapter four, I also reported based on the survey results that students were less familiar with Cantonese than English. Upon a closer look, the residential choice associated with different social class might not be a useful explanation for migrant children compared to their parents. Based on both survey and ethnographic data, I found two reasons: lack of community integration and erratic parental help in Cantonese exposure and learning.

6.3.1 Lack of community integration rather than residential choice for the current generation of migrant students

In the preceding chapter, I contrasted how residential choice could impact the necessity and the opportunity to learn and use Cantonese for adult migrants. I also cited other studies that find migrants living in high-rise apartment buildings are less integrated to their community compared to their peers in urban villages. However, for migrant students, the general low proficiency across the board suggests residential choice might not be a strong factor here. As I analyzed before, even for the migrant parents in urban villages, their integration to the villages is in an economic sense but not necessarily social and emotional.

Migrant children, who are shielded from hardship in life, are not motivated to learn Cantonese for their instrumental value in the villages. Some of my participants directly told me that their disinterest in Cantonese was exactly because they did not see any instrumental value of learning Cantonese for them even if their parents learned it. Although they might emotionally identify more with the city compared with their parents, their socialization with Cantonese speaking locals is less, not to mention integrating into their communities.
For one thing, many of them do not play with peers in person as much as they do online nowadays. Most of their waking hours are spent in school where they are supposed to use Putonghua. When they return from schools, their parents may not allow them to play with other children outside for safety reason. Mei, the girl whose sleep was bothered by a garment workshop set up in her building (as appeared in the preceding chapter) told me that there were other families with children living in the same building, but they did not play together.

For most migrant students, like their urban peers, their free time under their own control is more likely spent on computers or smartphones nowadays. On weekends, some of them were taken to different extra-curricular classes to develop hobbies or have academic reinforcement. In other words, the lack of in-person communication with peers in their communities decreased and discouraged their integration to their communities. Many of them were raised the way just like other urban middle-class children are, busy with study and enrichment and left with little time to play and know their neighbors.

For another, urban villages, due to their affordability and flexibility, become migrant enclaves with less Cantonese language environment. One of my participants, Chubby observed that in his village locals had already been outnumbered by migrants (Interview data from IN18048613). Therefore, the locals are getting used to switching to Putonghua first when dealing with migrants. In Ann’s case, her learning of Cantonese was mostly from the television programs she watched. Although her landlord was a local, the family and the landlord never reached an affinity to catch up with him in Cantonese on friendly terms. Rent collection was just a transaction for the landlord to be done efficiently in Putonghua. In other words, although the landlord accommodated the language of his renters, Ann had no opportunity to establish a supportive connection with locals to incentivize her Cantonese speaking until she made close friends who happened to be local.

This phenomenon also applies to many students with higher socio-economic status whose parents can choose to live in better housing. For example, in Choi’s case, the fact that his grandmother was able to learn Cantonese through socializing with other Cantonese speaking seniors suggests that there are Cantonese speakers living in the same neighborhood as well. Unlike his grandmother, Choi was not interested in interacting with strangers in his residential area. His activity range is limited to mostly home and school. He does not have a Cantonese speaking local peer as a friend from his neighborhood, not to mention his befriending local adults. However, Choi is not a loner. Just like other teenagers who crave attention, Choi
finds joy and satisfaction through showing off his talent and interacting with audiences online. He maintains a channel on Bilibili (similar to YouTube but targeting young people in China) and his videos have been so well received that it creates a revenue for him. In other words, the generation of migrants are less integrated to their physical residing community and are less likely to get language learning opportunities regardless whether they have locals as their neighbors or not.

6.3.2 Erratic parental help in Cantonese learning

In Ming’s case, he received help from his father in Cantonese learning. Unfortunately, this is not the usual case among my participants. In some cases, the parents did not speak Cantonese themselves or were only receptive because their work did not provide many opportunities. For example, Ann’s parents are a construction worker and a seamstress. They socialize with other migrants mostly. Shu’s parents held manufacturing jobs in factories where they worked along mass production lines. In these cases, even if the parents might want their children to have a command in Cantonese, they could not help their children.

In other cases, unlike Ming’s father, parents may not want their children to get involved in their small business and would like them to focus on their study instead. Even in families where one parent is a native speaker of Cantonese from a place outside of Guangzhou, the child might not pick it up in daily life. Jessi was also an 8th grader in Choi’s class (Data from her linguistic autobiography). Her dad is from a Cantonese speaking northern city within Guangdong province and her mom is from Hunan province. Although they live in Guangzhou, she only picked up her mom’s Hunan dialect. She reported in her autobiography that she was only receptive in Cantonese as her dad rarely talked with her in Cantonese even though her dad’s friend would remind him about socializing her into Cantonese speaking. However, by the time she was in 8th grade, her dad had only taught her one word, “to eat,” in Cantonese. Jessi did not expect much from her dad in Cantonese learning anymore. She revealed she was learning it through listening to Cantonese songs. Similarly, for other families with bidialectal parents where neither speaks Cantonese, the family would opt to speak Putonghua for logistical reasons, especially as the child approached schooling age since Putonghua is the instructional language at school. In these cases, even if the child acquired their parents’ dialects, they would tend to lose them later on. As for Cantonese, the priority would be quite low, and the child may not have the time and energy to learn it.
In other families where migrant parents learned Cantonese and would like to help their children, it might not work out as they hoped. In Choi’s case, as mentioned in his story, both parents learned Cantonese, but they never used it at home. He later reported in our interview that his mother tried to watch some Cantonese drama with him. It was the way she had learned Cantonese. But Choi just read the subtitles in Mandarin, and he was reluctant to do it very often due to his disinterest in those drama plots. Instead, he would rather watch American dramas with his mother to practice his English. In other words, the Cantonese input was not interesting enough to motivate Choi to kick start the Cantonese learning process. Neither his parents nor his social network provided a strong incentive for him to learn Cantonese even if the parents found it might be helpful for him in the future.

6.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, through presenting and analyzing de facto elements that motivate migrant students to align with or distance themselves from the Guangzhouer identity, I hope to have highlighted how accumulated affective values acquired during their long-term stay in Guangzhou, rather than the instrumental value of Cantonese or their social class, directs migrant children’s identification with their urbanite identity and interacts with their investment in Cantonese, which is quite different from their parents'. Specifically, their understanding of the term Guangzhouer includes two dimensions, one related to being an urbanite in contrast to their hometown folks, and the other specific to the local Cantonese speaking group who came to live in Guangzhou generations earlier and associated their language and culture with this regional identity. This deeply rooted local image has been influential and accepted by most migrants. After the nudges and frustrations he experienced in his occasional interaction with Cantonese speakers, even Choi, whose life rarely overlaps with Cantonese speaking locals, probably subconsciously agrees with this connection since he is willing to learn it in school.

From the experiences of other students, I also want to demonstrate that the reaction to their encounters with locals could significantly affect their alignment with locals, acting either a boost or a barrier to migrant children’s investment in Cantonese. Tension between locals and migrants may arise and intensify into aggressive use of Cantonese by the locals, and these negative experiences can be very off-putting for migrant students even if they only happen occasionally. To wrap up the chapter, I also presented some objective
reasons why many children could not learn Cantonese even after living years in Guangzhou. For these students, in their daily life outside of school, their limited integration to their physical community of residence and the unreliable help from their parents may not provide them with enough input and incentives in learn Cantonese. In the next chapter, I will move to the school environment where Putonghua was the de jure language and analyze the potential spaces and barriers there for Cantonese learning.
Chapter 7. The mitigation of enforcing Putonghua-only policy and the implementational spaces for Cantonese in schools

Although I am not a Guangzhouer, I have been living in Guangzhou for over a decade. But I cannot speak Cantonese. Just like my hometown dialect (Leizhou dialect), I rarely use Cantonese to communicate with others. Because I do not use it very often, my command of my hometown dialect and Cantonese is mostly passive and I will not be able to maintain a conversation in Cantonese. In daily life, except for school, I rarely come in contact with locals and there is not much need to communicate with them anyway. So it is fine as long as I can understand what they are saying. Same applies to my hometown dialect. I only go back to my hometown once a year during the Spring Festival. I can talk with my peers there in Putonghua. Only the older generations talk in our hometown dialect. So I just need to understand their conversations to some extent. In the school, both teachers and students communicate in class and outside the class in Putonghua. Don’t we learn the standard Putonghua in our Chinese language and literature class?

- Excerpt from the linguistic autobiography by Fey, 8th grader from Min-speaking area in Southern Guangdong Province

Fey was a little defensive in her autobiography to explain why she was poor in Cantonese and her hometown dialect and her low investment in them, citing a lack of practical use of them and the common practice of speaking Putonghua in school. She further supported her legitimacy of being a monolingual Putonghua speaker by tagging a rhetorical question pointing out the fact that both the learning target and instructional language of the Chinese curriculum is Putonghua. It was also interesting that she drew my attention to a piece of trivia she mentioned that as a long-term resident in Guangzhou, most locals she came in contact with were her schoolmates. After talking to scores of migrant students, I realize that perhaps this is a common and unique feature of this population. Their interactions with Cantonese speaking adult locals are very limited compared to their parents in their out-of-school life as described in the previous chapter.
Most interaction with local peers takes place in school. But in Fey’s experience, the use of Cantonese seems to be rare in her social circle and thus unnecessary for her day-to-day life.

However, this does not mean there is little presence of Cantonese at school. Picking up from the last chapter, this chapter will continue with a migrant student lens and shift to Cantonese use, learning and the spatialized lack thereof in school contexts. I will start with the *de jure* language policy in schools and its ramifications. Then the rest of the chapter will focus on the use of Cantonese among students and teachers and discuss how it affects migrant students’ investment in Cantonese.

### 7.1 Language for formal talk and the *de jure* language policy

As mentioned in previous chapters, the language policy to use Putonghua as the instructional language is stipulated in law in 2000 and has been vigorously implemented during the past two decades. By the time of my fieldwork, even without any external observation or inspection present in schools, most teachers and students use it regularly as described by Fey. Every year since 1998, the third week in September marks the week of Putonghua promotion, which has been quite successful. In 2014, nationwide, 73% of the population in China speaks Putonghua (as cited in Chinanews, 2014). This number is over 80% by 2020 (as cited in Liu, 2020).

As discussed in previous chapters, the popularization of Putonghua is overwhelmingly successful in big cities due to the necessity for communication among people with diverse linguistic backgrounds and the resources and institutions that the promotion campaign was able to mobilize. In public domains such as schools and government service delivery organizations, the awareness raising effort has passed its peak and pulled back in recent years. Still even gentle nudges without any substance could touch a nerve among locals who are upset about the ever-influential Putonghua. In September of 2018, to observe the Putonghua promotion week, quite a few elementary schools in Guangzhou went through the motions and sent a notice to parents to remind them of using Putonghua with their children at home. Contrary to the schools’ expectation, the letter which was supposed to be lip service triggered backlash from local parents who complained about it to the education bureau and asked the school to stay out of their family language practice since it was not intended by the national language policy in the first place.
Indeed, the national language law never stipulated language use in the family domain and the pushback is perhaps the local parents’ gesture to vent their accumulated dissatisfaction with the decline of their mother tongue Cantonese. Although migrant parents did not participate in this complaint, they too experienced the spread of Putonghua firsthand, especially via participating in their children’s education in cities. Compared to elementary school students, this is more pronounced with migrant families in the middle school in my study who started their schooling in Guangzhou almost a decade ago.

7.1.1 Loose implementation of the de jure language policy by now

By the time of my fieldwork in 2017 and 2018, schools had dialed down their efforts to promote Putonghua. In chapter four, the survey results for the perception of the Putonghua-only school policy showed that 79.1% of the students from the participating elementary school did not think there was such a rule in their school. When I was in their school, I tried hard to look for any public signage about this policy but could not find any. Instead, the school, which was located in an urban village, put up signages or created promotional bulletins on pressing issues in the community such as striking down organized crimes and drug use. In Figure 19, the blue signage hanging down from the ceiling reads “love life, stay away from illegal drugs”. For recent cohorts entering the elementary school, they have acquired enough spoken Putonghua in their preschools or kindergartens and are “school-ready” for more advanced literacy and numeracy taught in Putonghua. So it is not surprising that the school no longer needs to emphasize this policy explicitly. Both teachers and students are fully aware the working language during instruction time is Putonghua as nobody slipped into other languages when the school received teachers or district leaders to observe their classes. However, it should be noted that the switch to Cantonese from Putonghua is not rare in this school which will be talked about in more details later in this chapter.
In the participating middle school, 82.9% were not aware of the imposition of such a rule. I also made a search for any signage for the language policy in this school and found two as shown below. The first one was a small metal plaque placed on an external wall of a teaching building near the flagpole. This plaque was not devoted exclusively to the language policy. The first row says, “love the national flag and sing the national anthem”, while the second row reads “Putonghua is the language used on campus” suggesting use of Putonghua in school. Instead of strict rules, this seems a gentle reminder of manners for students at best. As for the second one, I did not notice it until I talked about the signages with one of the migrant students. He pointed me to this discolored signage (reading “promote Putonghua”) on top of a covered corridor between two teaching buildings. If I did not look up on purpose, I would have missed this remnant of past campaigns of Putonghua promotion in this school.
Figure 20: The plaque promoting the use of Putonghua on campus in the middle school

Figure 21: A discolored signage promoting Putonghua in the middle school

With the fading color, small font size, and inconspicuous location, these signages were probably not very effective in reminding students of the language policy. Apparently, the school was not counting on them. Nevertheless, the students were fully aware of the rule. Jun was an 8th grader, who told me that during the first semester in the middle school, the Chinese teacher slipped into Cantonese when he was explaining a word. Immediately, some students around him said “赶紧录下来给校长，扣钱。 (let’s record this and send it to the headmaster. Give him a financial penalty)” (IN1804080508). This kind of seemingly righteous but in fact performative rebellious chatter among teenagers reappeared very often when some teachers said something in Cantonese. Though I’ve seen many cases of Cantonese use among teachers and students, none
of these rule breaches incurred any punishment. In other words, the language policy was not strictly implemented. Based on the interview data with middle school students, students’ sensitivity to the Putonghua-only rule might be derived from their experiences with Putonghua promotion campaigns and active Putonghua learning before they entered the middle school.

7.1.2 Explicit Policy implementation in the past

Also in the survey for language use, when asked about their perception of Putonghua-only policy in their elementary schools, 59.5% of the participating middle school students reported there was explicit implementation of the Putonghua-only rule. This means the campaign to promote Putonghua was a priority for schools a few years earlier. In later interviews or linguistic autobiographies, many middle school participants recalled that back in elementary schools, there were big signages on campus such as:

“说普通话，写规范字 - Speak Putonghua (standard Mandarin), Write standardized characters”
(IN1805080639)

“说好普通话 - Speak Putonghua well”
(IN1804080522)

“文明用语，请讲普通话 - Use civil language, speak Putonghua”
(IA080537)

During the past two decades, although the themes\textsuperscript{14} for the Putonghua promotion week vary to some extent each year, the recurring emphasis on adopting this standardized form of Mandarin but not any other variety or dialect has trickled down and been taken up by students who did not speak it as their home language. Besides the lofty ideological association with wealth, development, patriotism and so forth, the expectation for children’s command of Putonghua on the school level seems more practical: adopting the standard. However, when the standard is not readily available to some children yet they are expected to

\textsuperscript{14} See appendix C for a list of themes of Putonghua Promotion Week from 1998 to 2020
function in it at school, this expectation could impact how children perceive what their peers and they themselves can or cannot do.

*Pride and shame - the supremacy of standard Putonghua*

The initial encounters with Putonghua for migrant students tend to be unpleasant if they were not exposed to it much before coming to Guangzhou. The expectation of being functional in at least spoken Putonghua before starting elementary schools in the city was likely an adaptation they needed to make to study in urban schools. Several students reported their embarrassment when they could not talk to classmates in Putonghua or were being mocked for their heavy accent as shown below.

在家乡住了六七年后, 到了该上小学的年龄。父母决定让我在城市念书, 于是就到了广州。初来乍到的我像个土包子, 在新学期报道的时候, 新同学都觉在一起用普通话自我介绍, 而我只能在一旁一脸懵逼地看。母亲决定教我说普通话。毕竟母亲也出生在乡村, 所以会带口音, 久而久之, 我说普通话也自带潮汕口音。在校讲话都会被同学一下识穿, 被大家起外号“土包子”。

After living in the hometown for six to seven years, I reached the age to attend elementary school. My parents decided to have me attend schools in the city so I came to Guangzhou. Upon first arrival, I acted like a country bumpkin. During the new semester orientation, the classmates gathered and introduced themselves in Putonghua while I was standing aside baffled. My mother decided to teach me to speak Putonghua. However, since she was born in the rural area, she had an accent. As time went by, I also spoke Putonghua with a Chaoshan (Min) accent. My accent could never escape the attention of my classmates. So they gave me the nickname “country bumpkin”.

- Excerpt from the linguistic autobiography by Man, 8th grader from Min speaking Chaoshan region in Guangdong Province (LA080521)

Man perhaps had the most difficulties since she had to learn Putonghua from scratch at the age of seven. She was raised by her grandparents in rural Min speaking area where she mostly played outdoors with her peers. Teachers in her preschool there spoke their hometown dialect as well. The unexpected language prerequisite for schools in Guangzhou was part of her journey to transition into an urbanite. Although she was bitter about the accent, at least she could receive some help from her mother and later private tutoring from a sympathetic teacher in her school who originated from Man’s hometown (IN18048522). For some students, help from the family might not be available.
Hui is another 8th grader (IN18058634; LA080634). Although born and raised in Guangzhou, she was surrounded by her dialect and did not learn to speak Putonghua until she started to attend kindergarten. Her parents were learners of Putonghua with her at the same time as they could not speak it well, either. Her parents came to Guangzhou from Hunan province for job opportunities introduced by their hometown folks who preceded their migration. They lived near other hometown folks and socialized with them using their hometown dialects mostly. The parents worked as janitor and water deliveryman, for which they did not need to talk to people much. After realizing Hui had communication problems with other children in her kindergarten, the whole family started to watch Putonghua-dubbed cartoons together and proactively practice Putonghua speaking at home. Hui was very grateful for her elementary school because this school hired external Putonghua trainers to help students to improve their pronunciation. The school she attended was a private school for mostly migrant children who could not access public schools. The need to enlist external help suggests Hui’s problem was shared by many more migrant students in her school. However, due to the language transfer from her hometown dialect, till this day, Hui still had trouble distinguishing and correctly deploying certain sounds such as /l/ and /n/ which occasionally made her the butt of a joke in school.

Compared to the elementary cohorts in my study who more or less naturally acquired Putonghua through talking to parents and getting exposure to Putonghua mediated media, a good proportion of the middle school cohorts recalled their active learning of Putonghua and how their whole families needed to take measures to help them. Sometimes they even went as far as switching their home language from dialects to Putonghua in case the former will interfere the learning of the latter.

Students who excelled in speaking standard Putonghua could not hold back their pride in themselves and their contempt for those who deviate from the standard.

当我 3 岁来广州时，就接触了这门被称为“国内万金油”的语言，我怕讲普通话时有口音被人笑话，于是便对自己的咬字发音非常苛刻，也许是那时的努力，我现在才能说一口流利的普通话。不知怎的，我表弟来了广州以后，对我们就开始讲普通话了。但是，他把土语和普通话混在一起了，这样听起来不仅怪，而且傻，为了不像表弟那样走火入魔，我坚持上学就讲普通话，放学就讲家乡话。进入初中后，我因为一口流利的普通话，让我在同学之间“脱颖而出”，我同时也兼职配音演员（有点儿小骄傲）。

I came to Guangzhou at age three and started to learn about this universal language in China. I was afraid I would be laughed at when I spoke Putonghua with an accent. So I was very strict
with my own pronunciation. Perhaps with the effort at that time, now I can speak very fluent Putonghua. For some reason, after my cousin came to Guangzhou, he started to speak Putonghua with us. However, he mixed our dialect and Putonghua, which sounds weird and silly. In order not to go down the same “devil-possessed” path as my cousin did, I insisted on using Putonghua in school and only switch to our hometown dialect after school. Since I entered the middle school, due to my fluent Putonghua, I have stood out among my classmates and at the same time I am a part-time dubbing actor (I’m a bit proud).

- Excerpt from the linguistic autobiography by Ken, an 8th grader from Hubei Province (LA080614)

Although Ken only described how fluent his Putonghua was, the comparison with his cousin revealed that he valued the accuracy of his Putonghua pronunciation, especially his ability to resist the influence from his hometown dialect. He also accentuated his accomplishment in Putonghua by bringing up his part time job in dubbing since this type of job normally requires the ability to deploy the Beijing pronunciation adopted as the gold standard for Putonghua. In other words, compared to his peers, his pronunciation is so close to the standard that he could be a role model.

No matter whether migrant students are proud of their achievement in Putonghua or unconfident in their unshakable accents, their Putonghua learning experiences are manifestation of the decade-long promotion of Putonghua, a standard variety of Mandarin and the national language. Admittedly, Cantonese-speaking local families who had always lived in the city had similar experience since the promotion campaign is nationwide and they used to speak their dialects solely as well. What differs and is unique to migrant families is perhaps that the urban-rural dichotomy is mapped onto the Putonghua-hometown dialect contrast, especially for the second generation who had lived experiences in both places. The change of the dominant language in their life happens to coincide with their life transition from rural areas to urban environment. Their hometown dialect, which is also their home language sometimes, is more likely dwarfed by the high status of Putonghua and the supremacy of mastering the standard. The signages in school constantly reminded them to pursue the standard pronunciation. Many became overly self-conscious of the difference between their dialects and standard Putonghua which in turn made them more sensitive to others’ accents. The effort parents put in to ensure their children speak Putonghua as well as their urban peers also made their children appreciate even more the standard version of Putonghua they painstakingly reach.
In addition, from the themes of the Putonghua Promotion Week over the years, it is not difficult to notice that Putonghua is associated with the proper way to spread Chinese cultural practices, express patriotism, and a means to reach communication and wealth. Compared to other Chinese varieties, Putonghua’s symbolic and pragmatic status has been elevated to the highest, which increased the stakes and shame of the inability to master the standard version. By the time I visited the two schools, the supremacy of Putonghua and the pursuit of a standard pronunciation had been internalized. Some students told me even if their family language is still their hometown dialect, the whole family will automatically switch to Putonghua if the topic shifts to important matters such as their school performance.

Then what does it mean for Cantonese? After all, Cantonese is widely considered a regional dialect instead of a language by most people in China, which has left some people unconvinced that there is a necessity to learn or maintain it. Meanwhile, for migrant students, Cantonese is frequently associated with Guangzhou local residents which may attract them as a way to assimilate although the language is no longer a necessary survival tool in Guangzhou. If we only look at the outcome of their Cantonese learning achievement, Cantonese seems to have lost its appeal to migrant children compared to their parents. However, migrant children’s investment in Cantonese could not be completely defined by what they can do with the language. In the next sections, I will transition into their school life and analyze how the immediate school contexts, language users and their relationships in instances of Cantonese use - in the backdrop of the dominance in Putonghua in schools- could impact their Cantonese learning investment and outcome. In general, I find the implementational space for the local language Cantonese is opening up to some extent, but not without impediments.

7.2 Locating Cantonese in schools

When I visited both schools, the use of Cantonese is quite spatialized, though in different ways. As described above, the stable use of Putonghua predominates in formal spaces such as instruction time in class. Cantonese use usually takes place in informal spaces such as recess time in the hallway, the teachers’ office, the playground and so forth. Occasionally it spills over to formal spaces. In this section, I will describe and analyze the use of Cantonese and the lack thereof in the heavily tracked middle school and the integrated elementary school among students and then between students and teachers.
7.2.1 Spatialized Cantonese use in the middle school

During my fieldwork in the middle school, I got to know that there were some efforts to introduce Cantonese culture to the students though Cantonese language instruction was not included as an option. Students were allowed to sign up for school organized extra-curricular activities which includes Cantonese embroidery and lion dancing during their first year in the middle school (7th grade). In higher grades, academic study takes precedence and the time for fun activities were replaced by extra science subject instruction. Unlike elementary schools, there is testing pressure for middle school students since the compulsory education ends after grade 9. The chance to move up to high school is not guaranteed and students (especially migrant students) need to compete for limited capacity.

As mentioned in the study context, academic performance is only used as an admission criterion for migrant students without Guangzhou Hukou in this school. Then based on their test scores, they are further divided into fee-exempted students (higher performing ones) and fee-paying students. For the local students with Hukou, as long as they live within the school catchment, they are guaranteed a spot in the school. However, since this school has been mediocre in academic performance, top local students are siphoned into better schools. The majority of the local students who are left in this school lag far behind in their academic performance compared to their migrant cohorts who are able to attend this school exactly because of their academic potential. Most of the local students in this school aim for vocational schools after they finish their three years here while a good number of the migrant students expect to attend high school.

With these two student populations, academic tracking was used as a principal criterion to determine the classes in each grade with a consideration of Hukou status. Eventually there are three types of classes in each grade: local student only class, mixed class, and academically advanced class with mostly migrant students (fee-exempted class). Occasionally, a small number of high performing local students would be assigned to the academically advanced class as well. I fortunately spent time with each type of class though I devoted most of my fieldwork time to the latter two with more migrant students’ presence. Partly due to the fixed grouping and daily schedule, I rarely saw students mingle with members from other classes, unless it was school organized activities such as streamed math/physics extra classes (remedial / advanced), math festival and sports meetings. Students spent most of their days in their homerooms studying and bantering with the
same classmates for three years. This grouping arrangement then has fostered different atmospheres for language practice in each type of classroom.

*Local student-only class: Cantonese dominant space*

There are three local student-only classes in each grade. I spent some days sitting in an 8th grade class. All the students in this class have local Guangzhou hukou. Among them, there were a few whose families did not originate here but secured a local Hukou before they registered their children for middle school. Therefore, these students are classified as “locals” in paperwork though their families may not have lived in Guangzhou for long nor speak Cantonese.

In classes, most teaching and learning, especially those tied to high-stakes testing, were conducted in Putonghua, interlaced with students' active and sometimes irrelevant questions and comments in both Putonghua and Cantonese. Teachers, if they happen to speak Cantonese, would not dismiss anything in Cantonese and responded naturally in the same language and then smoothly continued teaching by switching back to Putonghua. In fact, by 8th grade, all students knew which teachers were Cantonese speakers and would avoid unintentionally embarrassing a non-Cantonese speaking teacher. In some classes, such as PE (Gym class) or music, the teachers who enjoyed initiating teaching or joking with students in Cantonese were usually warmly received by the students.

In recess, Cantonese was fully released. Students mostly conversed in Cantonese with their friends and even teachers about both study and trivial matters such as attendance, homework submission, and seat assignment. At lunch break, some mischievous boys turned on the music player in the computer in front of the classroom and played some popular Cantonese songs that many sang along loudly. I fortunately witnessed this lunch-time karaoke a few times until it was shut down because students were not allowed to operate the computer reserved for classroom instruction.

The homeroom teacher and also the Chinese subject teacher Mrs. Z told me that she was aware there were a few students who did not fully understand Cantonese, so she kept her teaching content in Putonghua. But she did enjoy responding to students in Cantonese if prompted as it built rapport between her and most of her students in this class. As she observed, the dominant language and perhaps the most comfortable language
for people to speak was Cantonese, though the rule that classroom instruction should be conducted in Putonghua was still more or less abided by with some social-bonding interludes in Cantonese.

Mixed class: Cantonese conducive space

The mixed class was composed of around 20 local students and 20 migrant students. When I first arrived in this class and did not know the students, I was not able to tell the difference. After I had access to their student records regarding their Hukou status, I found that friend groups were not contingent on their Hukou. In other words, local and migrant students got along. The lunch break gave me a good opportunity to understand their relationship and how it stimulated some migrant students to invest more in their Cantonese learning.

Every day, the students on duty would carry back a plastic crate full of lunchboxes with hot food from the school canteen. Some local students who live nearby might go home for lunch. But most students had their lunchboxes in their classrooms to save time. So did I. They were free to choose their own lunch spot in the classroom with their friends. I was fortunately accepted by a big girl group with 6-7 female students. Among them, two girls, Lynn and Ann\textsuperscript{15} later became my focal students. Both were migrant students. Meanwhile, in the group, there were also three local girls, and one of them was Lynn’s desk-mate. Like most teenage girls, they would discuss their idols, new developments in dramas, plans for the weekend, gossip about girls in other groups, and tease each other for any embarrassing moment they had earlier that day. Most of their conversations were in Putonghua though some might curse from time to time in Cantonese. One of the local girls Yin told me that they used Putonghua because Lynn did not understand Cantonese which Lynn immediately denied, claiming she understood some even though she could not speak it (FN170427).

Lynn came to Guangzhou after she finished first grade in her hometown in Hunan province. Her parents were doing clothing wholesale business in a market for mostly overseas buyers although the parents did not speak English. By the time Lynn came to Guangzhou, her parents were still living in a small apartment in an urban village and were not financially ready to have Lynn to join them. But they decided to reunite with Lynn

\textsuperscript{15} Introduced in the preceding chapter. Ann was gifted in drawing and interested in Cartoon.
anyway because they wanted her to receive education in Guangzhou sooner than later. In fact, her parents were so busy working that they left Lynn in the care of her then homeroom teacher who happened to come from the same hometown and was kind enough to help out. So even after arriving in Guangzhou, Lynn was not living with her parents for several years. Before Lynn graduated from elementary school, her parents’ business was growing and they were able to afford renting a much bigger apartment in a high-rise residential building, a ten-minute walk away from the middle school she later attended.

Lynn had been busy learning languages. Everything was taught in her hometown dialect before she came to Guangzhou. So when she first started school in Guangzhou, she learned about Putonghua and developed the sense that she needed to speak it in school, which she found was the norm of schools in big cities (LA080522). When she was living with her homeroom teacher during the first few years after arrival, she was also informed by her teacher that in order to integrate into the society in Guangzhou, she should learn Cantonese. But the interest to learn Cantonese quickly abated after Lynn made little progress by reading aloud the newspaper after her teacher. This has changed after she developed her friendship with local girls in her middle school class. Lynn jokingly told me that they would “欺负我不会听，欺负我不会说” (bully her for her lack of command in Cantonese listening and speaking) (IN18038522). But the friendly tease did not frustrate her. Instead, she was motivated to learn Cantonese in order to follow the conversations if her friends want to switch between Putonghua and Cantonese. Her desk-mate, who was a local and a member in this friend group, was helping her in this regard. By the time I joined their group, she could understand more Cantonese even though she was not ready to speak. The other focal student Ann in this girl friend group had a similar language learning boost from her friend as described in the preceding chapter.

It should be noted that there were other migrant students who never became invested in learning Cantonese or made desired progress in this class. Also the teasing among teenagers could be so disheartening for some students that they lost their interest in learning more Cantonese. After all, in the day-to-day school life here, students can get by because lecturing from the teachers in core subjects (e.g., Chinese, math, physics) was conducted in Putonghua. For migrants who did not come from a Cantonese speaking region, learning this language is as optional as adopting a hobby for practical considerations. But their teenage life is not only about studying and is far from being “pragmatic”. Depending on who they hang out with, some could see the
value of Cantonese in their friendship and potentially in their adult life in this city while others could not. In other words, the linguistic capital of Cantonese is contingent on their social circles and their imagination of the future.

Song, the student appeared in the opening quote of the preceding chapter and expressed his identification with Guangzhou by using the water reference, was also in this type of class. As shown in that quote, he was very much invested in learning Cantonese and looked for opportunities to use it. Song was not shy and swore loudly in Cantonese in recess sometimes. However, almost all the boys (even some girls) did that quite often, which makes swearing words less an indicator of one’s proficiency in Cantonese among these teenage students but potentially a chance to announce their willingness to engage in Cantonese. In his linguistic autobiography (IA080507), he reported an embarrassing but apparently not too frustrating incident of his mispronouncing “hing1 dai6” (brothers) as “han6 dai6” (“hate the brothers” based on his mandarin transcription) when he was talking to other boys in the class. His chance to showcase his virility and index his Guangzhouer-ness turned into his Waterloo for which other teenage boys ruthlessly mocked him for a long time. However, this did not stop him from learning and saying more in Cantonese. The ability to speak Cantonese is associated with local Guangzhouers for him and can provide a validation of his lived experience in this city. We kept in touch after he graduated from this middle school. He was not able to make the high schools in Guangzhou and attended a satellite campus of a top Guangzhou high school in a nearby city which was costly for his parents. He explained to me that he was just not ready to go back to his hometown and plant orange trees with his families in Guangxi province. He was still determined to make a comeback by applying for universities in Guangzhou in a few years.

Just as in the local student only class, in mixed classes, students are more likely to be exposed to Cantonese in class. For example, in their music class, students were asked to form groups with others and perform something related to music. Quite a few groups opted to sing Cantonese songs. For some non-Cantonese speaking students, this is one of a few instances in school when they feel pressured into speaking

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16 Romanized transcription for Cantonese pronunciation is based on the Multi-function Chinese Character Database developed by Chinese University of Hong Kong: http://humanum.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/Lexis/lexi-mf/
Cantonese (FN 170927). During recess and lunch breaks, I could hear both languages used in students’ conversations with their friends sporadically in the classroom. Some engaged in the conversation while others were bystanders as I was. Although there were risks for being teased and mocked for poor Cantonese pronunciation, the overall atmosphere for the use of Cantonese is relaxing.

I find that the life in the mixed class closely resembles population distribution and language use in the wider social context in Guangzhou: migrants and Cantonese speaking locals share the city, and migrants can get by with Putonghua; Cantonese learning is more likely to happen for migrants who see value in it. Just like the life in urban villages, cohabitation with Cantonese speakers in the same physical spaces does not guarantee non-speakers would become interested or fluent in that language unless the language shows some market value. By the same token, just being in the same classroom with local students does not guarantee that migrant students will learn Cantonese. But for some, the social capital of Cantonese has emerged, which could be considered pragmatic and useful enough in teenager’s world. In other words, the friendship with local students, a more intrinsic reason, seems to incentivize migrant children to invest in Cantonese in a classroom where the language practice is mixed and fluid.

*Academically advanced migrant class: Cantonese suppressed space*

As mentioned above, because of the special enrollment policy in this school, the academically advanced class was almost solely composed of high-achieving migrant students. In the particular class I visited, there was only one local student who made the academic cut-off line. Their homeroom teacher was a very experienced math teacher recruited from a non-Cantonese speaking region. The majority of this class was assigned into advanced science classes. Their rankings (top ten students) and scores for each subject in major exams were listed in public on the back blackboard in the classroom. On the wall as shown in the picture below, the Chinese calligraphy piece was written by a former student using the classroom, and the current class decided to keep it. The sentence means “At this very moment, your rival is flipping pages of a book.” This reminder in my opinion is not necessary as students in this class were quite self-disciplined. Many of them would spend recess time on writing homework instead of taking a break. They could get quite competitive in class. However, although the atmosphere in this class was more intense and test-oriented compared to others,
teenage students still act their age. They would like to show their best moments in spotlight and avoid being caught in their worst moment.

![Image of academically advanced classroom](image)

**Figure 22: Calligraphy on the wall of the academically advanced classroom**

In this class, there were only very few students like Choi\(^{17}\) who had no knowledge of Cantonese. The majority were receptive to some extent. My focal student Chubby (a nickname fondly used by teachers and students in this class and responded to by him), was perhaps the only student who felt comfortable speaking Cantonese in class. He was the Cantonese authority in this class but also unfortunately the language police at the same time.

Chubby was born and raised in Guangzhou. His mother was from another Cantonese speaking city in Guangdong province while his father was from a Hakka speaking region. Although it was a bi-dialectal

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\(^{17}\) Choi was introduced in the preceding chapter. He was born and raised in Guangzhou but could not understand basic vocabulary such as “Thank you” in Cantonese.
family, his father had no intention to pass down Hakka to Chubby. The whole family mostly used Cantonese and occasionally Putonghua as their home language.

Since Cantonese was rarely used in this class, the appearance of the language would immediately get attention. Once during a Chinese class, the teacher asked groups of students to stand in front of the classroom near his podium and recite some classic Chinese passage since it was their oral homework. Some students in a group apparently did not do this homework and were planning to take a free ride by mumbling along with others. Although the teacher did not ask the rest of the class to be the judge, Chubby called out the free riders’ names and hailed “Hello! Hello!” in Cantonese to draw the teacher’s attention to those named students. This righteous and funny snitch was warmly responded to by others as some applauded and most laughed. From the smirk on his face, I knew that Chubby enjoyed this kind of moment as he showcased his smooth multilingual skills and occupied the moral high ground in a subtle way.

Chubby informed me that there were two other Cantonese speakers in his class besides him. One was the only local student in this class and the other was Yan who I wrote about in the preceding chapter. When I wondered how he knew Yan spoke Cantonese since she was not as outspoken as Chubby was with Cantonese, Chubby told me he had a brief conversation with her and made the evaluation that her Cantonese was not bad. Although there were two other speakers in the class, Chubby was the unofficially recognized Cantonese ambassador. During their first semester, an infamously strict teacher who was also the dean for discipline and behavior management suddenly slipped into Cantonese in class. Although later it turned out this teacher was quite fond of inserting Cantonese comments in class, the whole class froze when it happened for the first time. Chubby broke the silence by responding to the teacher in Cantonese as he thought the other speakers (girls) were too shy or too scared of the teacher to do it in public.

Chubby was the English teacher’s assistant in his class. He cared about the accuracy of English pronunciation. Since he knew I have studied in the US, he would always deny if I made compliments on his English and become very self-aware when speaking English in front of me. When it came to Cantonese though, his obsession with so-called proper or accurate pronunciation continued and he would hold others to his highest standard. He used to teach Cantonese to a few interested students (such as Shu reported in the
preceding chapter). However, since they could not reach the standard pronunciation after a few attempts, Chubby soon became impatient and complained about their bad pronunciation, which turned his students away. There was another student who tried to talk to him in Cantonese but was immediately shut down by Chubby’s public evaluation of his below-par pronunciation. Although Chubby was a scarce resource for most of the students in this class to learn Cantonese, he was probably not a motivational figure for Cantonese learning. He made the stakes of trial and error in speaking Cantonese very high. Admittedly, in the mixed class, Cantonese learning students who failed to deploy standard pronunciation received negative feedback such as mockery as well. But it did not seem to discourage them as much. I wonder whether the high achieving students in this class were more reluctant to show their vulnerability in Cantonese speaking. As Choi mentioned in his interview in the last chapter, the fact he could not imitate the sounds in Cantonese caused too much pressure on him.

Also it should be noted that the fear of looking inferior as a Cantonese learner or the ideology of the superior native speakers’ pronunciation were also shared by other students in this class. Peng was another boy in this class. He was relatively shy. During his interview (IN18058621), he revealed that he could understand Cantonese, but his speaking was still at a high beginner level. Although he was in a Putonghua dominant class, he still had some Cantonese exposure from his local friends with whom he had gone to the same elementary school. They played basketball together after school or on weekends though they were in different middle schools by then.

| YT: 就他们之间都是讲白话哦，那碰到你怎么办，他们也跟你直接讲白话？ | YT: So they speak Cantonese amongst themselves. What if they need to talk to you? Do they speak Cantonese to you? |
|——|——|
| Peng: 他们讲白话，我讲普通话 | Peng: They speak Cantonese. I respond in Putonghua. |
| YT: 呵呵，会不会有点怪？ | YT: ((chuckle)). Won’t it be a bit weird? |
| Peng: 有一点怪 | Peng: yes, it is a bit weird. |
| YT: 你不是会讲一点吗？你干嘛不讲？ | YT: Don’t you speak some Cantonese? Why don’t you just use it? |
Although almost all of his basketball playmates spoke Cantonese, Peng stuck to Putonghua. He was concerned about embarrassing himself in front of Cantonese native speakers even if they were his friends. Based on our conversation, I could not determine whether Peng’s hesitancy to practice his Cantonese was due to a teenage boy’s fear of making mistakes and looking lame in front of his friends, but what was certain from the interview is that Peng also cared about and desired standard and accuracy. He might have measured himself against a native like speaking standard and was stuck with his poor speaking because of this unrealistic comparison group.

Compared to the mixed class, the resources for sustainable Cantonese learning in the academically advanced class is impoverished and Cantonese does not carry much social capital among the students since there was only one local student and students who were able to speak it well constituted also a sliver of the class. In addition, the intense academic atmosphere and the pursuit of accuracy and standard-like proficiency make sub-par performance in many things high stakes, including speaking Cantonese.

7.2.2 Fertile ground for the sprouting Cantonese speakers in the integrated elementary school

The elementary school where I did my fieldwork evenly split local students and migrant students to each class and there was no academic tracking in any grade. Therefore, the class composition in this school resembles the mixed class in the middle school. Interestingly, I find the atmosphere for using Cantonese is also similar. As I described earlier in this chapter, there was no explicit implementation of the Putonghua-
only policy on campus as by the time of their entry into the elementary school, all of them were fully functional in Putonghua despite some accents. Because of the lack of necessity to stress the use of Putonghua, both teachers and students had much freedom to use Cantonese.

Unlike the middle school where there was a good proportion of teachers from other provinces, most teachers in this elementary schools were locals. However, all of them spoke Putonghua well. In particular, the principal spoke Putonghua with no detectable Cantonese accent. I was surprised when she revealed that she was born and raised in the urban village where the elementary school was. Besides giving lessons in classrooms, most teachers would fluidly mix Putonghua and Cantonese in their offices. For some students who regularly went to teacher’s office for errands such as getting their graded homework back, they even had the impression that the teachers mostly used Cantonese in this space. Indeed, Cantonese was used much more often among teachers in this school. During one closed-door meeting I was invited to, we were mostly using Cantonese to discuss the job talk performance of new teacher candidates. When the candidates came back in the room, the principal took the lead and switched back to Putonghua.

When I was in the school, I usually had lunch with teachers in a teacher exclusive canteen where six or seven teachers sat around big round tables. The canteen was in a separate building and a more informal social space for teachers from different grades where they would converse in Cantonese mostly since even teachers who are not from Guangzhou were at least receptive in Cantonese. The principal who usually talked to me in Putonghua in her office explained to me in the canteen once (during my first lunch there) she was going to chat in Cantonese around the table since I could understand it. The warning that she was going to bend the rule means she was aware of the policy and decided it was acceptable or even preferable to make an exception. From my observation, the use of Cantonese was also spatialized for teachers. When they were in the classrooms or communicated with new visitors to their schools, they relied mostly on Putonghua. When they were working and socializing with their colleagues in teacher-only spaces, they adopted Cantonese to bond with each other whether it was formal or informal talk. So it was understandable that they were not enforcing the Putonghua only policy on students.
For students, even though there was no strict restriction on using Cantonese, as reported in results on students’ language use in different domains in chapter four, both local and migrant students prefer using Putonghua to communicate with peers in a school setting. This does reflect what I saw in the school. But what it fails to capture how tolerant the school atmosphere was for the use of Cantonese as illustrated by the teachers’ language use above, and how sincere, spontaneous and playful students were when they used Cantonese among their peers to help each other out, exhibit their multilingual skills, and flaunt their personality.

Lower grades: Low-stakes learning environment

In lower grades, most migrant students from non-Cantonese speaking families were still developing their receptive skills in Cantonese. Many of them could not fully understand what teachers said in Cantonese. They could only capture a few high frequency words. What happened very often was that their local peers sitting close to them would translate for them upon request. I had a group interview with three girls from a second-grade class (IN1806383940). Xian and Yi were both migrant students from other non-Cantonese speaking provinces. Huan was from the local village. Her dad was a villager while her mother was also from a northern Mandarin speaking province. Huan spoke Cantonese at home and since her mother was a learner of Cantonese, she was quite sensitive and sympathetic to others like her mother. So she was the one who translated for others quite often.

Xian and Yi were both confident learners of Cantonese, especially Xian. She would demonstrate saying a few words in Cantonese for me and did not get frustrated by Huan’s frequent correction at all. Xian claimed she has been learning a lot of Cantonese as she was paying attention when teachers scolded the rascals in her class. In lower graders, teachers did spend much time on behavioral management since some lower graders were not good at controlling themselves yet. During one Cantonese quiz administered by Huan during our group interview, both Xian and Yi were able to recognize their classmates’ names in Cantonese because they heard from their teachers’ discipline episodes quite often. However, both Xian’s and Yi’s Cantonese proficiencies were lower than they thought. In another quiz, when Huan tried a simple sentence 我哋食嘅水果 (I am eating fruits). Neither Xian nor Yi could get the meaning right. Based on their guesses, I could tell that they also had trouble parsing the sentence’s syntactic structure. After the quiz, Yi blamed Huan for not
enunciating every word though Huan did repeat multiple times for them. It was interesting that Huan did not immediately launch a rebuttal but agreed with Yi that it might be her fault as Yi said. After witnessing the dynamic between the authoritative Chubby and overly self-conscious learners of Cantonese in his class, I was surprised by the equal footings held by native speaker Huan and her migrant peers, and how assertive and confident the latter were. Huan was not trying to be an arbiter of Cantonese use. Nor did she mock the low proficiency of her peers. Instead, she provided her translation and even teaching service in time of need, which was important to maintain her friendship with others. At the same time, it provided a tolerant and conducive environment for the learners to have more confidence in themselves.

In this second-grade class, I asked one local boy to be my Cantonese speaking coach and he took his job seriously by consulting another local boy first before his lesson. Some migrant students sitting close to use were drawn by this and were practicing in a low voice with me in parallel. Although I could see the curiosity and interest from migrant students, I rarely saw these teaching and learning episodes among students. Instead, local students who simply talked with each other in Cantonese and others could eavesdrop just as Xian did with the teachers’ discipline talk. In other words, there were some chances for migrant students to naturally acquire Cantonese though the exposure was far from enough.
Higher grades: using the language skill to shine

In higher grades, students also reported similar translation activities among students. I find the development of migrant students’ Cantonese could vary a lot. Some still did not understand simple instruction such as “sit down” in Cantonese from their teacher and stood there until others translated for them, while some were able to quarrel with local students in Cantonese. Lee was the monitor in the 4th grade class I often went to. He was a Cantonese speaking local student. He knew I was interested in observing the language use in his class. So sometimes he would announce the homework in front of the classroom in both languages to show off his language skills. During his individual interview (IN18064220), he told me when he squabbled with other boys, he would switch to Cantonese in order to get an upper hand because he knew some of them could not understand Cantonese and thus would not be able to immediately talk back at him. Other friendly exchanges in Cantonese also happened such as sharing learning tips to kill extra time during group discussions in class. In general, migrant students would have opportunities to experience Cantonese used in various social occasions in the integrated class setting.

Similar to the mixed class in the middle school, even learners of Cantonese might seek chance to use Cantonese to engage other students. Da was a student with Guangzhou Hukou. But he did not speak Cantonese. Da’s mother was from Guangzhou and his father was from a non-Cantonese speaking area in Jiangxi province. The family used Putonghua as their lingua franca at home. And the parents did not push Da to pick up their mother tongues. Da was receptive in Cantonese and understood some of his father’s dialect. In school, Da was one of the class clowns. He looked for opportunities to get attention. Once in class, he volunteered to answer a question by calling out in a multilingual sentence:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Excuse me,”</th>
<th>Lao sì, (teacher)</th>
<th>Wo /fei!/ (I know the answer)”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Correct English</strong></td>
<td><strong>Accented Cantonese</strong></td>
<td><strong>Accented Putonghua</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A mixture of “teacher” in Mandarin (“lǎo3 shí1”) and Cantonese (“lòu5 sì1”)</td>
<td><em>Know</em> in Mandarin is pronounced as /huei/. But in his father’s regional dialect, /h/ is often replaced with /f/</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(FN18031342)
As analyzed in the second line of the above table, Da jam-packed this sentence with multiple languages and presented two accented speeches with jumbled phonetic features from different language varieties. It was difficult to distinguish the accents or say whether errors were an accident or a purposeful performance to entertain his classmates. If it was the former case, I applaud his courage to deploy languages that he had not fully mastered in public. If it was the latter case, he might be showing off his knowledge of the nuanced difference in multiple languages present in his life. In either case, I find his playful attitude with language use reflects the overall tolerant language environment in this school.

7.2.3 Communication between teachers and students in Cantonese: precarious signals

Besides the class arrangement in school, how teachers used language with students could affect how students gauge the benefits and risks of speaking Cantonese.

In both schools, teachers occasionally used Cantonese to facilitate their teaching. Mrs. H, a Chinese teacher for 4th grade in the elementary school would use her Cantonese knowledge to help students with Putonghua learning. For example, “de” as a function word in Mandarin corresponds to three characters (的，得，地) used in different grammatical contexts respectively. Many students mixed them up in written Mandarin since they sound the same in spoken Mandarin. However, these three characters had completely different pronunciation in Cantonese shown in the table below. She made this cross-language reference to make it less difficult for students to differentiate them. Although this learning tip might not work very well for non-Cantonese speaking students, she made the language relevant to their day-to-day life in school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>的</th>
<th>得</th>
<th>地</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mandarin pronunciation</strong></td>
<td>de</td>
<td>de</td>
<td>de</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cantonese pronunciation</strong></td>
<td>dik1</td>
<td>dak1</td>
<td>dei6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 20: A pronunciation comparison of three “de” in Mandarin and Cantonese

Once during a reading activity in a Chinese class, Mrs. H was circling in the classroom to check students’ process. The two boys sitting close to me were giggling and pointed to a Mandarin word (“吃毛“, eating
hairs) in the textbook. The structure of this word (but not the exact form) reminded them of many swearing words in Cantonese. Mrs. H immediately understood why it was amusing to them and gently put a stop to this by asking the boys in Cantonese why they were being so silly, with a smile on her face. The brief switch to Cantonese in the formal instruction time flagged an informal and warm interaction between the Cantonese speakers in the classroom. However, at the same time, as mentioned above, Mrs. H was one of the teachers who would scold students sternly in Cantonese which potentially makes the language appalling to students. For some migrant students who had little knowledge of Cantonese, the talk was not even comprehensible. What they could get was the anger and frustration behind her words.

This happened often in the elementary schools with teachers whose mother tongue was Cantonese. Their emotions were preferably and perhaps irresistibly released in Cantonese. Another Chinese teacher in the 6th grade, Mr. S, was famous for using Cantonese idiomatic expressions to tease or scold students. When he was really upset by some students, he would comment that “生旧叉烧好过生你!” (It’s better to give life to a piece of roasted pork than you!, an example provided by a student in IN18066222). It is a common idiom used by Cantonese speaking parents to express their disappointment that their children did not live up to their expectation and they were not likely to bring a good life to the parents. The reference of roasted pork is not to compare the recipients of this insulting idiom to pigs. Instead, in the old days when living conditions were not as good, roasted pork used to be an expensive delicacy signifying a good life. When the student talked about this quote with me, instead of feeling for Mr. S’s emotional response, he mainly found the use of the idiom was interesting. However, sometimes, his use of idioms was too difficult for many migrant students to follow. Another student shared an incident when Mr. S compared lazy students to horses in need of whipping in order to work hard. Although the student thought the analogy was very witty, he could not recount the exact expression used by Mr. S since he could not make out all the words in the idiom (IN1806621320). It should be noted that although Mr. S was strict with his students, he was respected and well liked. On teachers’ day, students left many small gifts and cards on his desk.

Although teachers could channel their negative emotions to students in Cantonese, that does not mean students will necessarily distance themselves from the language. By the same token, sometimes, when the language was used in a positive way, it did not necessarily engage more learners. In the academically
advanced class in the middle school, the English teacher Mrs. C had sometimes used Cantonese in class, a legacy from her experiences as a homeroom teacher for a locals-only class. But as her current students complained they could not understand, Mrs. C stuck to Putonghua mostly. However, with Chubby, her student assistant, she still used Cantonese after she found out Chubby spoke Cantonese. The first time I observed Mrs. C using Cantonese in class time was during a quiz. Mrs. C was making rounds in the classroom. She stopped at Chubby’s desk, which happened to be close to me, and pointed at the mistakes in his quiz book and asked him in a low voice in Cantonese whether he was sure about this. Chubby chuckled at her and started to erase his answer. Later Mrs. C told me that Chubby was one of her favorite students in the class and she liked speaking Cantonese with Cantonese speakers among students. Shu, another student, also told me Mrs. C and Chubby worked in pairs to record the class's English test marks by announcing them in public in class in Cantonese. Unfortunately, most migrant students were receptive in at least numbers and names in Cantonese, so the language failed to be a privacy protector and immediately made many agitated although the test was not a critical one. In this competitive class with highly self-conscious teenagers, the language illustrating a bond between Chubby and Mrs. C could become annoying for the non-speakers as it hinted a special treatment, one they could not reach anytime soon.

Compared to language use among students, the language use between teachers and students was inevitably affected by their unequal positions in a power relationship. In schools in China, teachers enjoyed higher authority. Their emotional expression, no matter positive or negative, could potentially raise the bar and stakes for students to try out with the language.

7.3 Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed the wax and wane of the Putonghua-only language policy implementation in schools and highlighted how students embraced the supremacy of standard language which was transferred to the learning and use of Cantonese by some students. In addition, I presented data on students’ and teachers’ use of Cantonese in both schools to reflect potential factors that boost or impede migrant students’ investment in Cantonese learning.
The first and foremost factor is perhaps the class assignment plan adopted by schools. By comparing the occurrences and corresponding contexts of language use in two schools, I find the decision to integrate or segregate local and migrant students affects not only the chance for migrant students to be exposed to Cantonese use in natural settings, but also creates rather different atmospheres for students to engage the language in the first place. Academic tracking and Hukou status in the middle school gave me a unique opportunity to see how these factors play out with in the same school. Compared to mixed class, in the academically advanced class with a lot of non-Cantonese speaking migrant students, there is more pressure to maintain the image of a high achiever. The lack of natural use of the language heightened the perceived stakes of messing up the pronunciation in front of their peers and reduced the pragmatic incentives for migrant students to learn Cantonese.

Research on ability group or tracking has found both positive and negative effects on high achieving students regarding their academic performance and socio-emotional development (Cheung & Rudowicz, 2003; Wong & Watkins, 2001; Özelçi et al, 2016; Chmielewski, Dumont & Trautwein, 2013). While they can receive customized instruction and collaboratively create a conducive learning atmosphere, the class atmosphere composed of gifted students tends to be highly competitive, disconnected from other classes, and students in this environment have more test anxiety. In addition, students tend to have lower evaluation of themselves as their reference group is not the entire age cohort but only the gifted ones. In the class in my study, through talking to the migrant students in private, I did notice quite a few were not very confident in themselves and lamented the dip in their academic performance compared to that in elementary school. Considering their admission to this school was made possible by their exceptional academic achievement, and they had to keep it up and even better it in order to have a chance with high school due to their migrant Hukou status, the testing pressure was doubled. Meanwhile, when they interact with each other in the classroom, they seize chances to shine and subtly put down others. For most migrant students in the class, their speaking Cantonese was underdeveloped and this vulnerability was not something they were willing to show. The stakes of incurring parodies by speaking poorly in public were just too high and thus inhibited them from trying. In addition, they rarely socialized with other classes and there was no peer pressure for learning Cantonese in their immediate context.
Whereas in the mixed class, the fluid use of Putonghua and Cantonese pushed some migrant students to actively learn it since the social capital of Cantonese is relatively high. A similar pattern was found in the elementary school where students were integrated and the practice of translanguaging was much more common and accepted. The more Cantonese was used among students and teachers, the higher its pragmatic value got. More informal communication with local students also provided low-stakes opportunity for them to learn and try out the language. This gave rise to playful language use as shown in the case of Da. In other words, integrated classrooms seemed more likely to become a language learner-friendly environment.

The second factor is age-specific social dynamics which might impact children’s investment and learning behaviors in Cantonese. As shown in my data above, students in elementary schools were less self-conscious and did not closely compare their Cantonese performance and knowledge with native speakers’. Their Cantonese speaking local peers did not find their language skill was something that made them superior and they generously provided their translation service. The relationship between the potential language “teachers” and learners were more equal, in which, migrant students became more confident learners. Whereas, in the middle school, teenage students, especially boys, tended to compete with each other, show off their skills or portray an image of effortless high achievers. Low speaking ability in Cantonese was likely to ruin their previous effort and bring them unpleasant teasing which in turn lowered their interest in Cantonese learning. After all, not all teenage students could take insults well like Song.

In addition, years of schooling could have intensified and rationalized their pursuit of standard language and accuracy. On the one hand, the education in China still rewards obedience which includes acknowledging and meeting standards in their behavior management and academic studies. This culture which does not encourage critical thinking could lead students to embrace existing standards unreflectingly even if the standards might not be tenable. On the other hand, as students grew older, peer comparison grew as well. Teenagers became more sensitive to and annoyed by their pronunciation deviating from that of native speakers. As shown above, Peng gave up opportunities to practice speaking Cantonese with his basketball playmates due to his self-censorship. Chubby, the only vocal Cantonese authority in his class deterred the language learning attempts of other migrant students. In other words, the impact of age-specific socio-emotional development on language learning is illustrated in my study.
The last factor emerging from my data is the ambiguous social capital of Cantonese, shown in teachers’ privileged, and emotion-laden Cantonese use with students. Does more use of Cantonese by teachers increase students’ interest in learning Cantonese? Not necessarily.

For Cantonese speaking teachers, the language is clearly a valuable social tool. When speaking with Cantonese dominant parents or colleagues outside the classrooms, this language choice perhaps is optimal for the sake of communication efficiency and social bonding. Occasionally, teachers use Cantonese to assist their students’ learning in their teaching, but other times, their use in front of students was not justifiable by the circumstance. From students’ perspective, this flexibility to use Cantonese makes it look like teachers were not subject to the Putonghua policy. They could initiate Cantonese speaking even when they were supposed to use Putonghua, even when some students could not understand what they were saying. Their modeling of language use sends arbitrary signals to students. Some students might see that as a green light and be encouraged to invest in Cantonese learning if this language is also relevant to their peer social. Others might ascribe this behavior to the gap between teachers and students in terms of their status in schools. In other words, teachers’ use of Cantonese is their privilege. If the students do not see any other value in learning Cantonese, their teachers’ language practice, which contradicts the formal language policy in school, would be treated as exception instead of a reason to invest in Cantonese. In either case, a statement or a discussion to clarify the school’s stance on this matter could potentially turn these ambiguous signals into clear guidance for campus language use and confirm the social capital of Cantonese for hesitant students.

In addition to the exceptional freedom teachers had, their use of Cantonese to channel their emotions could raise the stakes and mental burden for sensitive students. As shown in previous sections, in both schools, I’ve seen teachers making use of Cantonese to show their affection for particular students or channel their disapproval of students’ unsatisfactory behaviors. Compared to daily transactions, the social and emotional functions of Cantonese were foregrounded in these exchanges for Cantonese speaking teachers and students. The caring - be it praise or rebuke - from a teacher delivered in students’ home language, shifted the framework of school communication to that of parent-child communication, which is likely to bring them closer. At the same time, however, it inadvertently excluded students who did not have this language in their repertoire, and potentially alienated learners when the language was used to harshly reprimand them, or the
stakes of using the language are perceived very high in their social context such as the competitive academically advanced class. To sum up, the emotion-laden use of Cantonese by teachers could be a two-edged sword in shaping how students perceive Cantonese.
Chapter 8. Discussion and Conclusions

Informed by the language investment model (Darvin & Norton, 2015), with its overlapping tripartite identity, ideology and capital, the previous chapters have presented mostly ethnographic data on migrant adults’ and children’s investment in Cantonese language learning and use, and their encounters with Guangzhou autochthonous residents or fluent Cantonese speakers. I curated stories from migrants who came to Guangzhou in different decades and social positions to show the changing appeal of Cantonese in Guangzhou to newcomers. Although these are by no means comprehensive recounts of this ongoing process co-shaped by sociopolitical and economic forces, I believe their experiences gave me a unique opportunity to reflect upon the issue of decreasing Cantonese vitality in a locally and historically grounded approach. Bazeley (2013) says, “Each singular person or event embraces a degree of universality, reflecting dimensions of the social structures and order of their time” (p. 411). I am inspired by her eloquent statement of the strengths of ethnographic portraits of individuals and would add to it that the examination of the experiences of those unprivileged would shed light on some potential solutions to the issues at hand.

In this final chapter, I’ll answer my study's research questions by summarizing the previous data analysis chapters. Then I’ll discuss the ideologies of language emerging from my data and talk about the implications for efforts to maintain the vitality of Cantonese, engaging scholarly discussions in language endangerment and language policies. Lastly, I will review the scholarly contributions of this study and sketch out some future directions departing from it.

8.1 Migrants in the looming Cantonese Crisis

My research questions highlight one issue and indicate my entry point to this dissertation inquiry: the role of migrants in the so-called Cantonese crisis. My investigation involving migrants of different generations provides evidence contradicting the accusation faulting migrants for decreased Cantonese vitality that has stung many Guangzhou locals. The results of my questionnaire to both migrant parents and children revealed that the majority of migrant parents were active and successful learners of Cantonese while the children did not attain the same high level. This generational difference is intriguing as it first negates blanket statements claiming the influx of migrant workers and their families caused the Cantonese crisis. More
importantly, it indicates there is more internal diversity and nuance to this population which could complicate their relationship with Cantonese.

Among adults, drawing from interviews, observation, field-notes, and family visits, I find the investment in learning Cantonese is dependent on their social positions and the resources they had when they came to this city. The contrast between migrant teachers arriving in Guangzhou in different decades, who occupy higher socioeconomic positions (with professional skills and good jobs) compared to most parents of migrant students reveal two issues:

a) There has been a change in the language ecology in Guangzhou during the past three decades. Migrant arriving in the 1990s entered a Guangzhou with a very strong Cantonese presence. Regardless of their social positions, they tended to blend in by picking up the language. In contrast, more recent arrivals in the 2000s and 2010s faced a Guangzhou with more speakers of Putonghua. Migrants’ communication with many Guangzhou locals who were bilingual in Cantonese and Putonghua did not rely on Cantonese anymore. So there was less communicative urgency, and more learning difficulties for migrants to pick up Cantonese as they were likely to live or work in a Cantonese impoverished environment.

b) the social positions of migrants affected their investment in learning Cantonese. When coming to Guangzhou, the social position and resources, or capitals in Bourdieu’s (1977) terms, that migrants brought with them landed them in different social circles and physical neighborhoods which exposed them to Cantonese to different degrees. More importantly, different sorts of capital positioned them differently in relation to Cantonese speaking locals. For migrants who had to live in urban villages, their livelihood, economic integration, and upward mobility were more likely related to and boosted by their command in Cantonese. Therefore, the inclusion of this language into their linguistic repertoire was a pragmatic choice to accommodate the locals' communicative preference. In other words, the high proficiency in Cantonese for many migrant parents in my study is economically incentivized, similarly to their initial motivation to migrate to cities for work opportunities. Moreover, they were in less powerful positions in their relationships with locals. In contrast, for migrants with more socioeconomic resources to begin with such as the teachers from other provinces in my study, their communicative preference, namely Putonghua, was accommodated by
their bilingual local colleagues and others in their social network. An inability to do so could even look stigmatizing (i.e., a sign of being uneducated). If these migrants are interested in learning Cantonese, it is less likely motivated by the same economic reasons since their upward mobility is less dependent on their ability to speak Cantonese. Therefore, the model of a Guangzhouer, the language they speak, and the appeal of becoming one could be different to migrants with varied social positions.

For migrant students, two data analysis chapters focusing on both structural arrangements and discursive practices were dedicated to describing their learning experiences with Cantonese in and outside of schools. These chapters reflect on how the discourses, ideologies, and discursive practices in the wider social context in Guangzhou and in the school environment mediate their investment in Cantonese learning.

As mentioned above, their attainment in Cantonese was much lower than their parents, especially in speaking. Their self-reported language use in different domains in questionnaires also indicated they live in a Putonghua dominant environment. However, the reported interest in learning Cantonese was high. Since they did not need to use Cantonese in their daily life and schools, their interest was not a pragmatic choice like their parents’. Rather, the ethnographic data suggested their Cantonese language learning interest derived from affect, namely their socializing needs with peers and a sense of belonging to the city of Guangzhou.

Among participating migrant students across the two schools, two thirds were not born in Guangzhou. Among them, the middle school students who were raised in their parents’ hometowns for several years and arrived in Guangzhou later in their life have been exposed to contrasting rural and urban experiences. Though their presence in Guangzhou is not institutionally recognized (i.e., Hukou), the rural-to-urban transition and the urban ways of living that they have been gradually accustomed to have given rise to a de facto Guangzhouer identity, which is an illustration of their sense of belonging to this particular city and likely underlies their interest in Cantonese. Moreover, their identification with Guangzhou and interest in learning Cantonese was also a barometer for their encounters with and receptions by Cantonese speaking locals. Although Guangzhou has been famed for its inclusiveness, students occasionally experienced discrimination against their migrant identity reflected in the locals’ choice of language during some confrontational incidents. In addition, as children with limited activity range, their social integration to their own
communities was also insufficient to expose them to enough meaningful Cantonese learning opportunities, and their parents did not have the awareness of passing down this linguistic capital, or apply the right approaches to help them with Cantonese speaking.

In schools, an important factor frequently cited by locals as the damning cause for children to speak less Cantonese, was the Putonghua-only language policy in school. Indeed, there were years of vigorous promotion of Putonghua use in school, not only as the medium of instruction but also as the legitimate language on campus. However, in the more recent decades, following the height of Putonghua promotion campaign, the implementation of Putonghua-only policy has been mitigated, and Putonghua-only practice has been internalized. The legacy of the campaign can still be felt perhaps in the supremacy of standard language use, which impeded some learners from fully engaging Cantonese precisely because they are ashamed of their sub-par competence.

Despite the policy, in both schools, I saw many cases of Cantonese use in formal and informal spaces by both local and migrant students and teachers during my fieldwork. Instead of the policy, I find what impacted students’ Cantonese learning interest and learning behaviors most was the institutional arrangement. Tracking students by their Hukou status and academic achievement essentially segregated some migrant students from Cantonese speaking local peers, which created drastically different social environment and language environment. It both reduced their exposure to Cantonese and increased the stakes of trial-and-error with the language in front of their peers. In the academically advanced class where migrant students were isolated from local peers, academic excellence was prioritized and tolerance for errors was low, including language errors learners inevitably make. In contrast, the mixed class where local and migrant students were integrated presented a counter-example where there was a less competitive, more tolerant and conducive language learning environment.

In addition, the way Cantonese was used by teachers could affect how children perceive the benefits and risks of learning and speaking the language. Teachers hold a powerful position in their relationship with students. Instead of a sign that Cantonese was welcome, the use of Cantonese in their day-to-day educational practice could be at best an ambiguous signal to students since the right to speak Cantonese might be
considered a teacher’s privilege. What got my attention more is the contingent use of Cantonese for informal side talks. Some teachers’ affective and exclusive communication with selected Cantonese speaking students but not others could alienate non-speakers and frustrate developing learners.

To sum up, my study finds that it is unfair to blame migrants for the declining Cantonese vitality. In fact, categorizing people as locals or migrants based on their Hukou status and assuming the latter do not speak Cantonese is inaccurate and fails to capture Cantonese learning efforts by those migrants from a humble socioeconomic background. This alienating dichotomy is far from helpful in organizing Cantonese promotion initiatives. In contrast, an optimistic finding is that, though their current proficiency is low, many migrant children are invested in learning Cantonese due to their sense of belonging to Guangzhou and the extra effort they would like to make to engage their Cantonese speaking local peers. However, as summarized above, there are still ideological and implementational obstacles we need to overcome and avoid in order to pry open the spaces for either natural acquisition or formal instruction of Cantonese in school settings.

8.2 Trekking the ideological landscape and reflecting on the maintenance of Cantonese

Upon finishing the writing of this dissertation, I find it is necessary to reflect upon the ideologies which emerged from my data and which also undergird many public discourses either demanding or dismissing Cantonese maintenance. From that vantage point, I also provide my take on some policy directions which celebrate a sustainable and multilingual society.

8.2.1 The repercussions of monoglot policy making

As reviewed in the study context, the Language Law (2000) in China essentially follows a one ethnicity-one language ideology which fails to recognize other Chinese varieties spoken by Southern ethnic Han people as languages. It suffers the same ramifications as the one nation-one language link delineated by Blommaert (2006) such as creating a superior form, dwarfing others, and regulating identities. In this case, Putonghua is associated with national identity. As Blackledge and Creese (2010) observe, “When a language is symbolically linked to national identity, the bureaucratic nation-state faced with a multilingual population may exhibit ‘monolingualising tendencies’” (p. 27). This description of ideological process might explain the chaos I see in the interpretation and implementation of the Language Law.
With the current language policy in China, the “unchosen” Chinese varieties such as Cantonese and Shanghainese are going through a double jeopardy since, for one, as dialects, their use and maintenance is left to private domains and, for another, if the variety is in danger of language shift or declining vitality, there is no legal support for its maintenance with the help of school. Instead, the practice to promote local varieties could be considered an attempt to promote sectionalism and become a threat to the national unity. This was the exact excuse used by an anonymous letter to report the use of a Cantonese textbook for an extracurricular class in an elementary school in Guangzhou (Lao, 2017).

This kind of discourse was not born out of a vacuum. Chapter 1 article 5 of the Language Law (2000) specifies “the use of the standardized writing and Putonghua is conducive to the national sovereignty, national dignity, national unity and the unity of different ethnicities.” Although there are no articles claiming the use of dialects in schools will be considered a disruption of national unity, this does not stop people from making this inference. In other words, monoglot ideological processes shaped people's developing monolingualizing perceptions.

The designation of language or dialect per se is also quite arbitrary and even futile. The non-Chinese language varieties used by ethnic minorities in China are fortunate enough to be called languages, but they could be considered a dialect by their neighbors across borders. For example, Dai language spoken by ethnic Dai people (傣族) in Yunnan province is intelligible for people living in northern Thailand. They all speak varieties of the Tai Dam language, but the variety used by people located in China enjoys a status boost because it is officially associated with an ethnic identity. In contrast, for Cantonese, trapped in the role of a dialect, the lack of legal and institutional support might be a reason why local policy makers are reluctant to directly address locals’ concern for the decreasing language vitality by promoting the language per se, instead focusing on folkloric Cantonese culture such as Cantonese opera, embroidery and lion dancing. In chapter 5, the response from the Education Commissioner to the concern for a Cantonese language crisis in a local family was rated unsatisfactory as it circumvented the focal concern on language continuation by stating the legal requirement to use Putonghua in school. And the cited official solution to introduce local opera among young students is not a functional and age-appropriate approach to encourage Cantonese learning and using.
The gap between top-down policy implementation and the needs and concerns on the ground remains an unsolved problem.

In 2015, a project to protect languages in China (语保项目) started under the guidance of 2012-2020 mid-long term language planning (2012) released by the Ministry of Education and the National Committee for languages (国家语言文字工作委员会). Many Linguists (including many dialectologists), language activists, and technological experts were mobilized to survey, document, and collect multi-modal linguistic data of threatened ethnic languages and Chinese varieties / dialects. Their work has been focused on corpus planning, which is very foundational for future applications. However, how these corpus data will be used and under which conditions schools-powerhouses for producing language speakers-are allowed to formally introduce dialect learning is still unknown. Namely, I am concerned about the acquisition planning and status planning for those unchosen varieties of Chinese or those found not threatened enough (Cooper, 1989).

In fact, whether a language is called a dialect or a language does not matter as long as there is inclusive and multilingual ideological space and implementational space (Hornberger, 2002) for local practitioners to manage their own language varieties. However, it would be naive to be oblivious of the inferior identity associated with dialects and the monoglot language policies relegating this identity to the language varieties. If there is no way to avoid naming non-Mandarin Chinese varieties as dialects, I find it is critical to have concrete planning for these so-called dialects for their continuation instead of a permissive attitude and absence of substantial legal support. After all, compared to languages, dialects are equally worthwhile for linguists and for their speakers. We need to prevent sociopolitical and ideological processes that position them as inferior.

Fortunately, as shown in my ethnographic data, multilingual practice is very much alive, though in a backstage fashion since formal school language policy is still very much monoglot. In order to boost the linguistic capital of Cantonese, a more explicit policy to celebrate Cantonese is needed to promote the use of the language at school. When language practice involving local language varieties is officially sanctioned and brought to front stage, a linguistic market for it will grow naturally. Following Bourdieu’s (1977)
analogies, in order to save the language, you need to save the market or perhaps grow a market for it so that
the use of Cantonese in school is no longer hiding in the unlicensed black market.

8.2.2 The problematic supremacy of standard form

In the literature on language ideology, the complications ensuing from choosing and promoting a standard
language or variety have been illustrated with examples of both majority and minority languages (e.g., Gal,
2006 & 2012; Jaffe, 1999; Heller, 2006). On the one hand, standardization tends to overlook or reduce
multilingual and translanguaging practice in reality, and attempts to create linguistic homogeneity which
eventually causes symbolic domination over unchosen varieties. In other words, a linguistic hierarchy is
created in this process. On the other hand, the standardized form which is associated with universality and
economic interests tends to pit those learning and using it against those using unchosen vernaculars associated
with authenticity and regional pride. The common thread seems to be the conflicts caused by the inequitable
relationship between the language varieties and between their speakers.

In my study, the way this ideology is substantiated entangles with other issues and stunts Cantonese
maintenance at a macro and micro level rather differently. In the second opening vignette in chapter 5, the
opposer dismissed the proposal to include Cantonese speaking capacity as a Hukou application criteria
because he claimed it lacked standardization, and this language planning step was logistically unlikely due
to the multiple varieties spoken by people in the Pearl River delta. This opposer might not be aware there
have been multiple Cantonese dictionaries available for years, making a Cantonese standardization project
quite feasible, technically, and there has been ongoing effort on this front in Hong Kong as well (Chen, 2018).
But what is reflected in his argument is perhaps the supremacy of a so-called standard form. The lack of it in
his mind makes Cantonese inferior or at least unfit as an evaluative criterion for an institutional local identity,
Guangzhou Hukou. However, for locals who drafted and applauded this proposal, it had nothing to do with
the technicality but was more about an official recognition of Cantonese’s association with the regional
identity. After all, what they want to pass down is whichever variety is used in their community not a
standardized one.
The opposer and the supporters seem to focus on either the technicality aspect or the identity aspect, respectively. This mismatch, rather than opposing priorities, will be an obstacle facing future efforts to maintain Cantonese in Guangzhou, a city with huge number of Putonghua dominant migrants who might outnumber the autochthonomous residents soon. Similar problems are reflected in the discourses against a language-as-human-rights approach to advocate for the languages of ethnic minorities. There are voices against the unproblemazied tie between languages and ethnic identities. In this case, although Cantonese is not a language associated with ethnic minorities in China, it is about to become a socially minoritized one compared to Putonghua. Resorting to how the language is integral to the regional identity and culture is a common argument used by advocates worrying about a potential language shift.

As mentioned above, these are not mutually exclusive aspects of a language. In fact, May (2004) frames them as intertwining political and cultural dimensions (and I would add technical dimension in this case) of language. Each dimension could have varied weight and appeal to different social groups. If social policymaking involving a language with strong regional culture underlying it or connecting language proficiency to access to social resources for newcomers is undertaken without addressing the concerns and challenges it might incur to different social groups, the policies are unlikely to be implemented smoothly. If we reflect on the advocate’s proposal, the intention is to increase the speakers of Cantonese. However, when it is imposed on migrants as one more barrier to their access to Hukou, it antagonizes migrants and insinuates their presence in Guangzhou as a threat to Cantonese’s vitality, which is likely to invite defensive pushback such as pointing out lack of standardization, a seemingly credible but ultimately rather untenable excuse.

At a more micro level in the school, Chubby shut down conversations or learning attempts by novice learners in his class. Peng passed up practicing opportunities because he was not confident to speak Cantonese with his basketball playmates even though it was the main language used in that situation. However, what is the desired standard form they were referring to? For Chubby, the Cantonese spoken he was socialized to speak was a variety used in his mother’s hometown. As a native speaker of a Cantonese variety, his own regional speech was used as the standard. As for Peng, he was also intimidated by native speaking local peers. The standard he compared himself against was the fluent Cantonese spoken by them. Neither of them was adopting the standard listed in Cantonese dictionaries. After all, the dictionary standard very often does not
correspond to language practice in daily life. Even the selection of the standard form for dictionaries and
corpus is not a totally neutral technical process (Moore, 2016). A standard language, and the idea of having
one, regulate not language use *per se* but people’s evaluation of it. So Chubby’s and Peng’s arbitrary standard
form was never a recognized universal standard form, but indeed a cover for the supremacy of so-called
nativeness or native like performance.

If we apply the lens of *legitimate language* (Bourdieu, 1977) to these discursive practices, it is clear that
the *legitimate proficiency* recognized by Peng and Chubby prevented their own or others’ full participation
in the learning and using of Cantonese. This ideology also creates a hierarchy based on students’ proficiency
and an unfriendly environment for beginners. If future policies open up the implementational space for daily
interaction in Cantonese in school, it is important to remind fluent speakers that they are interacting with
learners who still need meaningful input, modeling, helpful correction and encouragement that they could
provide. The demand for accurate and standard form should be moderated and critically examined as it might
not be about the standard form after all, and criticizing learners in the name of a supposed standard likely
frustrates and deters them from engaging fluent speakers.

To sum up, language policies and planning based on a monoglot language ideology (i.e., one ethnicity-
one language in this case) are ultimately detrimental to unprivileged language varieties in a multilingual
language ecology because its adverse ripple effect cuts across both macro and micro levels. For one thing,
varieties such as Cantonese which is not the language associated with the Han ethnicity and thus only
recognized as a dialect lacks the legal support to mobilize different institutions and resources to help maintain
the language variety. For another, the depreciation of their perceived market values in the eyes of people
further diminish the possibility and raise the difficulty for these varieties to be maintained within their native
speaking community, or to expand language use domains and recruit new speakers. On top of this, the
unreflecting embracing of the supremacy of standard form also runs the risk of devaluing regional variants
and vernaculars or any sub-par form such as those produced by developing language learners. When
translated into everyday language learning and use, it may suppress a tolerant learning environment that
would encourage learners’ investment in language practice.
8.3 Scholarly contributions

In this section I will present the empirical, theoretical and methodological contributions of my dissertation study.

My research questions asked an empirical question regarding the role of migrants in the alleged Cantonese crisis. Through extended fieldwork, my study has brought some clarity to the complexity of this question. Instead of a sweeping conclusion that migrants either worsen or alleviate the declining vitality of Cantonese, I find that social class is at play for adult migrants who were mobilized to come to Guangzhou for work opportunities. Migrants possessing fewer resources were more likely to learn Cantonese if the language is tied to their upward mobility. Meanwhile, for the second generation, i.e., the migrant children in my study, the relevance of Cantonese lies in its use in accessing friendship and validating their identity as urban youths in Guangzhou. By delineating these generational and class differences, my study provides concrete evidence to refute the defamation of migrants’ role in an emerging language issue in an urban environment in an era of high mobility. In addition, these findings suggest implications for local language policy makers to engage interested learners of Cantonese besides the local residents. The interest in Cantonese among migrant students points to potential implementational spaces for Cantonese instruction in schools and the urgent need for legislative efforts clarifying that language maintenance enlisting language education in schools will not constitute a threat to the spread and status of Putonghua. Analysis of discursive practice and the effects of class arrangement in schools also suggest that integration of local and migrant students increases the occurrence of natural Cantonese input and acquisition among students, and contributes to a Cantonese learner-friendly environment.

This study also contributes to the growing research taking a poststructuralist approach to language, identity and social positioning (Pavlenko, 2002; Norton & Morgan, 2013; Norton 2014). In terms of language learning motivation, in particular, my comparison of the difference in achieved Cantonese proficiencies between migrant parents and children provides counter-evidence for the traditional dichotomous psychological account of language learning motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1959) in which integrative motivations are considered better than instrumental ones. In addition, consistent with more recent developments in psychological approaches to language learning motivation, my analyses of the
impoverished Cantonese learning environment in schools and communities for migrant children confirm
the importance of learning context, a key factor in Dornyei’s L2 Motivational Self System (2005, 2009).
More importantly, the analyses of migrants’ investment in Cantonese learning and using, i.e., both the
social class difference and the high interest but low engagement and proficiency among migrant students,
proves the explanatory power of the concept of investment vis-à-vis motivation (Norton Pierce, 1996) and
the analytical model of language investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015). My findings also illustrate the
strengths of the poststructuralist approach in analyzing language learning motivation for which the factor of
social context is prominent and inseparable from psychological factors when studying learners holding
peripheral social positions (Pavlenco, 2002).

This study also suggests the importance of new speakers unrelated to the “native” groups in future
research on so-called endangered languages. In many language maintenance campaigns for smaller
languages, what appears front and center is the pride discourse emphasizing local authenticity, ethnic identity,
and heritage maintenance (Duchêne & Heller, 2012). However, in an era of high mobility, these emotional
attachments to a language and the presumption that only the traditionally recognized ethnic or regional
“locals” are responsible for the survival of a language could become untenable and even counterproductive.
A case in point would be the migrant children in my study. They are not recognized as locals in Guangzhou
but their lived experience in the city has provided them with attachment and belonging strong enough to
motivate them to contribute to the maintenance of Cantonese by becoming a speaker. Therefore, instead of
studying speakers and advocates taking pride in a language by heritage, I find future research could focus
more on delineating the favorable conditions that give rise to emerging non-native speakers of smaller
languages.

A corollary to the poststructuralist approach in my examination of language learning motivation is the
methodological choice of qualitative methods to operationalize the investigation. Instead of relying on
questionnaires to quantify learners’ attitudes and interests, this study used questionnaire as an initial cursory
tool to gain a general understanding of students’ language learning interest, while the bulk of the study was
an in-depth exploration with a variety of qualitative methods such as linguistic autobiography, interviews
and participant observation. Qualitative methods provide researchers the chance to identify both localized
and macro social contextual factors that influence students’ language learning interest and practice. The diversity of methods also ensures data can be triangulated and therefore more trustworthy. However, there are caveats for the use of autobiography (Sharkey, 2004). What is included or left out in the written texts purposefully or unconsciously by participants could jeopardize the analysis if they were the sole source of data from participants. To address this issue in my study, the interviews were sequenced after the collection of linguistic autobiographies so that I was able to follow up with the participants, making elaboration and clarification requests, asking probing questions, and negotiating conflicting texts and behaviors observed.

8.4 Future Directions

It was a treat for me to conduct a dissertation on language maintenance through a migrant lens. I thoroughly enjoyed the process interacting with people in a social group I had crossed paths with before but did not fully understand. I think there is still plenty more that I can write about with the data gleaned from my fieldwork. In addition, I would like to follow up on the topic and continue this line of research with some different focus. Below, I briefly talk about ideas for future research projects I have been mulling over which are rooted in my fieldwork and data analysis process.

Since concerns about the vitality of Cantonese in China are still ongoing and there are no top-down policies that affirmatively provide guidance for dialect protection in action, I will continue monitoring the future unfolding of this issue on different fronts. In particular, I will expand my attention to online activism for Cantonese maintenance as I have been following several activists who run Cantonese speaking video channels on youth-oriented social media platforms (a public domain where dialect use is not regulated). Instead of formal language teaching, they simply use Cantonese as their working language with Chinese subtitles. In addition, they are very strategic in engaging their young audience by making humorous skits and stand-up comedies about online gaming, college life, work, relationship, and very local living experiences (e.g., complaining about the humid monsoon season in Guangzhou) which both local and new residents in Guangzhou can relate to. These actual grassroots efforts to increase the use and potential instrumental value of Cantonese for the new generations would be an interesting topic to explore. On a related note, I will also closely follow the evolution of the aforementioned language protection project that has government
endorsement. Whether the technical results of corpus planning will be reserved for scholar use or translated into actual language maintenance efforts on the ground is something I look forward to investigating.

Comparative studies are also meaningful projects that I would like to conduct if possible. For example, I can explore the declining vitality of Shanghainese with a migrant perspective since Shanghainese is also a southern Chinese language variety distinct from Mandarin. And there is a very strong local culture to the extent that Shanghai locals are stigmatized for being ‘arrogant.’ A migrant perspective could be very robust to uncover the identities and ideologies underlying the difficulties in maintaining Shanghainese. And a comparison with the case in Guangzhou could reveal more bottom-up insights for the ideological and implementational spaces of these languages. In addition, I would also explore medium-sized cities with smaller populations of migrants and unique local languages to examine how the local variety is impacted by the influx of migrants and hopefully find out whether the declining vitality of the local language is a problem unique to metropolitan areas or a common issue affecting even smaller cities with a considerable population of migrants. If the local language is thriving and embraced by migrants, it would be quite meaningful and exciting to learn about its success.

In my fieldwork, I had a bi-racial participant (half-Chinese and half-Malian) who did not have a chance to debut in the data chapters even though her multilingual repertoire was fascinating due to her unique upbringing. This inspires me to plan for further projects in two directions. For one, I would like to examine the heritage language maintenance and family language policy within migrant families. This topic was touched upon during my fieldwork but was not systematically explored yet during the writeup of this dissertation. I expect to read and write more on this topic and make a contribution to an already vibrant body of research. For another, I am also enticed to do case studies with foreigners in China who are interested learning non-Mandarin Chinese varieties and inquire about their motivation. This is also an opportunity to examine how social class plays a role in this process since among the foreigners living and working in China, there are both elite migrants and less privileged ones.

To conclude, I will keep an eye on unprivileged languages and people, and write their stories in my scholarly capacity. Much social progress has been made possible by good policies and incentives. However,
no policy or system is perfect and there are always people falling through the cracks when their needs go unnoticed or simply sacrificed. As scholars, I think it is our job to identify and evaluate the cracks, give voice to those neglected and propose more equitable solutions.
Appendix A

Student Questionnaire

Dear Students,

Many of you came to Guangzhou, a city boasts for its linguistic diversity, at a young age or were even born here. Thanks to your contribution, the linguistic ecology of this city has been evolving as many of you come from regions of China where drastic different languages are spoken. Meanwhile, the language spoken by you and your families has also been affected by your family’s relocation to Guangzhou to some extent. This study departs from children’s language learning interest, examines how it is shaping and shaped by the language ecology in Guangzhou, and reflects on the long-term and short-term effects of language planning and policy in our country. This survey, as part of the study, is to understand your language proficiency, use and learning motivation. Thanks for your participation.

Yeting Liu
PhD Candidate
University of Pennsylvania

Part I (Personal information & Language proficiency)

1. Age: __________
2. Sex (please circle): Male       Female
3. Place of birth __________
4. Have you transferred between schools in Guangzhou? (Please circle)
   Yes             No
5. Have you attended schools outside of Guangzhou? (Please circle)
   Yes (location: )            No
6. How would you describe your own proficiency in Cantonese? (please put a “/” in the cell of your choice)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cantonese</th>
<th>No proficiency</th>
<th>poor</th>
<th>average</th>
<th>good</th>
<th>Native / native like</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
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<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
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7. How would you describe your own proficiency in Putonghua? (please put a “/” in the cell of your choice)
8. How would you describe your proficiency in **English**? (please put a “√” in the cell of your choice)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>No proficiency</th>
<th>poor</th>
<th>average</th>
<th>good</th>
<th>Native / native like</th>
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<td>Writing</td>
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</table>

9. How would you describe your own oral proficiency in **parents’ mother tongues** (namely their hometown dialects)?
   a. Mother’s home town dialect is ________:  
      My proficiency:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother’s dialect</th>
<th>No proficiency</th>
<th>poor</th>
<th>average</th>
<th>good</th>
<th>Native / native like</th>
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<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
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<td>Speaking</td>
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   b. Father’s home town dialect is ________:  
      My proficiency:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Father’s dialect</th>
<th>No proficiency</th>
<th>poor</th>
<th>average</th>
<th>good</th>
<th>Native / native like</th>
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<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
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<td>Speaking</td>
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10. Could you put the following languages in order based on your ability to speak these languages?  
    Please fill the table below using their corresponding alphabet letters.  
    A. Putonghua      B. Cantonese       C. Mother’s dialect   D. Father’s dialect  
    E. English       F. Others (…)

| I’m best at       | I’m least at    |                               |
|-------------------|-----------------|
|                   |                 |                               |
|                   |                 |                               |
|                   |                 |                               |

F is optional. Only use it if needed. When you use it, please specify the name of the language in parentheses.

Part II (Language use)

11. In the following occasions, please choose the language you tend to use. Please note in some occasions, you use a mixture of different languages. OR with some people, you talk in one language sometimes while talk in others other times. In these occasions, you can choose multiple
languages accordingly.
A. Putonghua       B. Cantonese       C. Mother’s dialect   D. Father’s dialect
E. English            F. Others (please specify the name of the language if you choose F)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Use Occasions</th>
<th>Language choice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11.1 When I talk to my mother at home, I tend to use</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.2 When I talk to my father at home, I tend to use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.3 When I talk to my siblings at home, I tend to use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.4 When I talk to my grandparents, I tend to use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.5 With my very close friends outside of school, I tend to use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.6 During small group discussion in class (please exclude English class for this question), I tend to use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.7 When I need to talk to some student with whom I’m not acquainted on campus, I tend to use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.8 When I talk to my teachers at school, I tend to use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.9 During small group discussion in English class, I tend to use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.10 When I’m with my classmates at recess in school, I tend to use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.11 When I answer questions in non-English class, I tend to use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.12 When I need to talk to some stranger in the street in Guangzhou, I tend to first choose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. In the elementary school you attended, have you ever been told to use Putonghua only for study and daily communication on campus?
   A. Yes
   B. No

13. In your current school, have you ever been told to use Putonghua only for study and daily communication on campus?
   A. Yes
   B. No

14. If the school is going to open a Cantonese language class, would you like to be involved?
   A. I’m interested in assisting teaching and practice with the learners in that class voluntarily.
   B. I’m interested in enrolling in that class and improve my Cantonese.
   C. I’m not interested (because: _______________________________)

15. What do you think is the language(s) you parent prefer you to speak at home? (multiple answers allowed):
   A. Putonghua
   B. Cantonese
   C. My parent’s dialect
   D. English
   E. Others (________)

16. Right now, which language would you like to improve the most?
   A. Putonghua
   B. Cantonese
   C. My parent’s dialect
17. In the future, I would like to become a person who can speak (multiple answers allowed):
   A. Putonghua
   B. Cantonese
   C. My parent’s dialect
   D. English
   E. Others (_______________________) You can list more than one language here.

18. Have you ever been laughed at because of your language, or the way you speak? If yes, what language were you speaking when it happened?

   A. Putonghua   B. Cantonese   C. Mother’s dialect   D. Father’s dialect
   E. English     F. Others (________)

Please briefly describe the situation (and the reason) in which you were laughed at.

~~ This is the end of the survey. Thanks for your participation! ~
Appendix B

Parental Questionnaire

Dear Parents,

Guangzhou is a diverse and open city. It has received people from different parts of China in pursuit of work and study. Quiet a few of you came from regions with different languages spoken. You brought your hometown dialect and probably Putonghua while many residents in Guangzhou speak Cantonese and even foreign languages. Your presence has been contributing to the dynamics of language ecology in Guangzhou. Meanwhile, the language use at your home might be reshaped by the broader linguistic environment unique to this city both directly and indirectly. With a growing number of migrant children in our public school system, this study departs from children’s language learning interest, examines how it is shaping and shaped by the language ecology in Guangzhou, and reflects on the long-term and short-term effects of language planning and policy in our country. This survey, which is part of this study, is to understand your language repertoire, your language use at home with your children and your expectation of your children’s language development. Thanks for your participation.

Yeting Liu
PhD Candidate
University of Pennsylvania

1. How many years have you been in Guangzhou? ______ years
   Tick this box if you were born and raised in Guangzhou

2. Was your child born in Guangzhou?
   A. Yes
   B. No (he/she was born in _____ and came to Guangzhou in the year of _____)

3. Does your family hold a Guangzhou Hukou?
   A. Yes
   B. No.

4. The type of your hukou:
   A. Agricultural
   B. Non-agricultural

5. Your family’s annual income falls under:
   A. below 50K Yuan
   B. 50-100k Yuan
   C. 100-150k Yuan
   D. 150k-200k Yuan
   E. 200k-250k Yuan
   F. above 250k Yuan
6. Is your child currently enrolled in the following tutoring classes outside of school? (You can choose more than one if it applies)
   A. Chinese
   B. English
   C. Math
   D. Physics
   E. Political Science
   How much does the tutoring cost in total? _____ Yuan/week

7. Are you satisfied with your child’s proficiency in Putonghua?
   A. Yes
   B. No.
   If your choice is “No”, what is your expectation of your child’s proficiency in Putonghua? Please specify briefly.

8. Are you satisfied with your child’s performance in English study?
   C. Yes
   D. No.
   If your choice is “No”, what is your expectation of your child’s proficiency in English? Please specify briefly.

9. Your mother tongue:__________ You spouse’s mother tongue:__________

10. To what extent do you and your spouse use the following languages with your children at home?
    Please circle the languages used, and mark the percentage based on the frequency of use (you can choose more than one item; the total sum of the percentage should be 100)
    A. Our dialects (not Cantonese) (___ %)
    B. Cantonese (___ %)
    C. Putonghua (___ %)
    D. Others (please specify): ________ (___ %)

11. a. Are you satisfied with your child’s command of your mother tongue(s)?
    A. Yes
    B. No.
    b. If your choice is “No”, based on your observation/recollection, which of the following best describes your children’s language proficiency in your mother tongue(s)?
       A. No problem for daily communication, but there are words or sentences he/she was not able to produce sometimes.

18 Mother tongue refers to the language you learned from a very young age at home and you can function fluently in this language in communication. For many of you, it could be your hometown dialect, such as Hakka.
B. He/she used to speak and understand the language at an younger age. But as he/she grew up, the proficiency deteriorated to the extent that he/she could barely speak it. But he/she could still understand the language.

C. He/she does not speak but understand our mother tongue(s) since he/she was little.

D. He/she neither understand nor speak our mother tongue(s).

E. Others (Please specify:_______)

c. what is your expectation of your child’s proficiency in your mother tongue(s)/dialect(s)?

A. he/she should both understand and speak it.

B. As long as he/she can understand it, it’s fine.

C. It doesn’t matter if he/she does not understand or speak the language.

D. There is no need to learn our mother tongues.

12. How would you describe your spouse’s and your Cantonese proficiency for oral interaction? (please put a “✓” in the cell of your choice)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cantonese</th>
<th>No proficiency</th>
<th>poor</th>
<th>average</th>
<th>good</th>
<th>Native or native like</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Me (listening)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Me (Speaking)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My spouse (listening)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My spouse (speaking)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13. How would you describe your spouse’s and your Putonghua proficiency for oral interaction? (please put a “✓” in the cell of your choice)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Putonghua</th>
<th>No proficiency</th>
<th>poor</th>
<th>average</th>
<th>good</th>
<th>Native or native like</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Me (listening)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Me (Speaking)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My spouse (listening)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
14. How would you describe your spouse’s and your English proficiency for oral interaction? (please put a “\" in the cell of your choice)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>No proficiency</th>
<th>poor</th>
<th>average</th>
<th>good</th>
<th>Native or native like</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Me (listening)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Me (Speaking)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My spouse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(listening)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My spouse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(speaking)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15. To what extent do you need to use the following language at work? (please input a number for each language. If the language is not used at all, please input “0”. If your hometown dialect is Cantonese, please mark the percentage for “Cantonese” and mark “0” for “my hometown dialect”).

- Putonghua: ______ %
- Cantonese: ______ %
- English: ______ %
- My hometown dialect: ______ %
- Others (please specify): ______ %

Is there a language brought your inconvenience or bad experience/memories while living and working in Guangzhou? _____________ (please write down the name of the language(s))

Is there a language (including those listed above) that you would like to improve or learn to speak for your work or life in Guangzhou? _____________ (please write down the name of the language(s))

16. Besides at home and workplace, to what extent do you use the following language in daily life? (please input a number for each language. If the language is not used at all, please input “0”. If your hometown dialect is Cantonese, please mark the percentage for “Cantonese” and mark “0” for “my hometown dialect”).

- My hometown dialect: ______ %
- Cantonese: ______ %
- Putonghua: ______ %
- English: ______ %
- Others (please specify): ______ %

17. In the future, I hope my child will become a fluent speaker of (multiple answers allowed):
   A. Putonghua
   B. Cantonese
   C. English
D. Dialects used in our family
E. Others (please specify: _____)

18. Currently, I’m most concerned about my child’s language development in (choose one only):
   A. Putonghua
   B. Cantonese
   C. English
   D. Dialects used in our family

~~This is the end of this survey. Thank you very much for your participation! ~~
### Appendix C

#### Themes of annual Putonghua Promotion Week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Theme of the Putonghua Promotion Week (Chinese)</th>
<th>Theme of the Putonghua Promotion Week (English)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>推广普通话,促进语言文字规范化</td>
<td>Promote PTH, push forward the standardization of the spoken and written language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>推广普通话，迎接新世纪</td>
<td>Promote PTH, welcome the new century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>推广普通话，迈向新世纪</td>
<td>Promote PTH, enter the new century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>宣传贯彻《中华人民共和国国家通用语言文字法》，大力推广普通话，促进语言文字规范化</td>
<td>Promote and implement the Language Law(^{21}), vigorously promote PTH, push forward the standardization of the spoken and written language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>宣传贯彻《中华人民共和国国家通用语言文字法》，大力推广普通话，促进语言文字规范化，迎接党的十六大召开</td>
<td>Promote and implement the Language Law, vigorously promote PTH, push forward the standardization of the spoken and written language, prepare for the 16(^{th}) CCP’s National Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>大力推广普通话，齐心协力奔小康</td>
<td>Promote PTH vigorously, aim for moderate prosperity together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>普通话——情感的纽带，沟通的桥梁</td>
<td>PTH- the emotional bond, the bridge for communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>实现顺畅交流，构建和谐社会</td>
<td>Reach smooth communication, construct a harmonious society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>普通话——五十年推广，新世纪普及</td>
<td>PTH- 50(^{th}) anniversary of promotion, widespread in the new century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>构建和谐语言生活 弘扬中华优秀文化</td>
<td>Construct harmonious language life, promote outstanding Chinese culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>构建和谐语言生活，营造共有精神家园</td>
<td>Construct harmonious language life, build a shared spiritual home</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^{19}\) The themes in Chinese are retrieved from: [https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%85%A8%E5%9B%BD%E6%8E%A8%E5%AE%A4%E9%80%9A%E8%AF%9D%E5%AE%A3%E4%BC%A0%E5%91%A8/4754788](https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%85%A8%E5%9B%BD%E6%8E%A8%E5%AE%A4%E9%80%9A%E8%AF%9D%E5%AE%A3%E4%BC%A0%E5%91%A8/4754788)

\(^{20}\) PTH stands for Putonghua in this table

\(^{21}\) The Language Law refers to the Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Standard Spoken and Written Chinese Language) passed in 2000 at the 9\(^{th}\) People’s Congress.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Chinese Main Message</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>热爱中国语言文字，构建和谐语言生活</td>
<td>Love Chinese spoken and written language, construct a harmonious language life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>规范使用国家通用语言文字，弘扬中华优秀文化传统</td>
<td>Use standardized national spoken and written language, promote outstanding Chinese cultures and traditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>提升国家通用语言文字应用能力，弘扬中华优秀文化传统</td>
<td>Improve the ability to use standard national spoken and written language, promote outstanding Chinese cultures and traditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>大力推广和规范使用国家通用语言文字</td>
<td>Vigorously promote and correctly use standard national spoken and written language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>推广普通话，共筑中国梦</td>
<td>Promote PTH, construct a Chinese dream together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>说好普通话，圆梦你我他</td>
<td>Speak good PTH, reach everyone’s dream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>依法推广普通话，提升国家软实力</td>
<td>Promote PTH per law, promote national soft power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>大力推行和规范使用国家通用语言文字，助力建成全面小康社会</td>
<td>Vigorously promote and correctly use standard national spoken and written language, contribute to the construction of a society of moderate prosperity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>大力推广和规范使用国家通用语言文字，自觉传承弘扬中华优秀传统文化</td>
<td>Vigorously promote and correctly use standard national spoken and written language, take initiative in inheriting and promoting outstanding Chinese cultures and traditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>说好普通话，迈进新时代</td>
<td>Speak good PTH, enter a new era</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>普通话诵七十华诞，规范字写爱国情怀</td>
<td>Praise the 70th anniversary of independence in PTH, use standardized written language to express your patriotism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>同讲普通话，携手进小康</td>
<td>Speak PTH together, reach moderate prosperity hand-in-hand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Lao, Z. (2017). 萬件校本教材被實名举报？除了呵呵呵，我想重申三点常识 [On the incident in which the Cantonese textbook was reported with a real-name “whistleblower”: restating three common senses]. Retrieved from: http://www.gznf.net/column/19806.html


Liu, Y. (2020). 全国推普周开幕：我国普通话普及率超过 80% [*National Putonghua Promotion week has started: over 80% of people in China can speak Putonghua*]. Retrieved from: http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2020-09/14/content_5543334.htm


