The Future of Cantonese: Current trends

John Whelpton
Baptist Lui Ming Choi Secondary School

Abstract

This article gives a brief account of the distinguishing characteristics of Cantonese and of the socio-linguistic circumstances in Hong Kong which have left it with a stronger role than that of regional dialects elsewhere in China. Possible changes in that role after reunification with China are discussed. The main factors influencing the dialect's own development are seen as contact with English and of Putonghua, as well as the internal dynamic of language change. It is suggested that the tendency to converge with Putonghua norms might be offset by the wish to preserve a distinctive Hong Kong linguistic identity. Questionnaire data are presented to illustrate the extent to which certain features of pronunciation are seen as typical of Hong Kong rather than mainland speakers.

The speech patterns of any community are always the result of a complex inter-play of different influences. Language is primarily transmitted in the home and among peer groups, yet it is continually influenced by the needs of communication beyond the individual speaker's circle of intimates and particularly by the demands of school and workplace which in turn are shaped by political and economic factors. Two years after the reversion of Hong Kong to China, Cantonese remains the primary means of spoken communication for most of the population. However, whilst English retains in a key place in commercial life and in the education system, the role of China's national language, Putonghua, is also expected to grow. The Hong Kong government is therefore officially committed to producing citizens competent in *léuhng mahn sàam yúh* - written Chinese and English, and spoken Cantonese, Putonghua and English. This raises the two questions of how the roles of each language will be determined and of how the evolution of Cantonese itself will be affected.

The term "Cantonese" is slightly ambiguous since it is applied both to the Yue dialects as a whole and also to the regional standard based originally on the speech of Guangzhou, which, with some special local features, is what is spoken by the majority of educated Hong Kong residents. It is with Cantonese in Hong Kong that this discussion is principally concerned.

Hong Kong Journal of Applied Linguistics 4,1 (1999); pp.43–60

Like the Min dialects further to the east, Cantonese, whether broadly or narrowly defined, preserves many archaic feature lost by the northern dialects, including the division into upper and lower tone registers, the final non-released stop consonants and older syntactic patterns.[1] The vocabulary and phonology also appear to include a Miao and Tai substratum and the word "Yue" itself, whilst written with a different Chinese character, is probably connected with the "one hundred Yue" tribes who inhabited the region before the arrival of Han settlers (Yue-Hashimoto, 1991).

Cantonese in Hong Kong is a reflection of an older Chinese pattern in another sense. Before 1932, when the central government began promotion of a national spoken code (*guoyu*, "national speech") based on the Beijing standard, it was normal for children all over China to learn to pronounce Chinese characters according to a regional standard (Barnes, 1982). Local dialects, which differed from county to county, thus contrasted not only with Mandarin (*guanhua*), which served as a pan-China lingua franca, but also with a regional norm for formal speech; there was thus a form of diglossia with two "high" varieties (T'sou, 1994). In contrast, after 1949 *guoyu*, under the new label of *putonghua* was promoted on the mainland with renewed vigour and from 1957 it became the official medium of instruction in all schools (Lam, 1993, p. 167). As parallel measures were taken by the Nationalist government on Taiwan, it is only in Hong Kong that the traditional link between characters and regional speech has survived with full educational support.

The first question to ask about the future of the language is, therefore, whether this situation can continue now that Hong Kong is again politically united with the mainland. One possibility, aided by the ambiguity of the Basic Law's references only to "Chinese', is that Putonghua will progressively erode the role of "High Cantonese" in education, and in formal contexts such as Legislative Council debates and radio and TV journalism, as foreshadowed in many recent analyses (e.g. Lam, 1993; T'sou, 1994; Bauer & Benedict, 1997, p. 429-34; Bruche-Shulz, 1997). Another scenario is that Cantonese, at all levels of

---

[1] The use of *guo/gwo* (=surpass) to express comparison has often been cited as an example of this and Sun (1996, p. 38) claims that it is common in literature from the Old and Middle Chinese periods (i.e. before around 1000 A.D.). Interestingly, such a construction is similar to that normally found in Creoles (Smith & Matthews, 1996. p. 153). Although some critics have recently argued that there is only one unambiguous example of *guo/gwo* in this sense, the syntactic conservatism of Cantonese is not in doubt, an unchallenged example being the pretransitive construction with *jèung* corresponding to archaic Mandarin *jiang* (personal communication from an anonymous *HKJAL* reviewer). In fact the generally archaic nature of the language is as well-established as anything in historical linguistics and it is rather strange that Pierson (1998, p. 108) refers to it as only as a "suggested" hypothesis.

formality, might be so heavily influenced by contact with Putonghua that the difference between them would virtually disappear -a case of "language suicide".

There is at present no sign that the central government will exercise direct political pressure to promote the first scenario, displacement of Cantonese by Putonghua in various domains. Tolerance for Cantonese was clearly illustrated by the Chief Executive's use of it when making his inaugural speech as Chief Executive of the SAR on 1 July 1997 in the presence of President Jiang Ze Min and other senior Chinese leaders. This laissez-faire attitude is likely to continue, at any rate so long as Beijing's objective of reunification with Taiwan is still seen as attainable but has not actually been attained. This is because of the politically sensitive nature of the language question on the island, where *guoyu* still has connotations of domination by mainland immigrants. Although younger Taiwanese are now generally fluent in the standard language, attachment to Minnanhua remains strong and there has recently been some encouragement of its use in primary education (Yip, 1997, p. 7)[2] Consequently, any linguistic high-handedness by the mainland government in Hong Kong would only serve to strengthen resistance on Taiwan to any kind of accommodation with the PRC.

A shift from Cantonese to Putonghua in Hong Kong could therefore be brought about only by strong sentiment in its favour in the SAR itself. Apart from its obvious instrumental value in the commercial and political spheres, Putonghua is presented by its advocates as a badge of "Chineseness" and this factor emerged strongly in Pierson's (1992) analysis of a corpus of student essays. However, Yau (1992) has suggested that examination candidates express support for Putonghua mainly because they believe that is what the examiners want and her own research, carried out in 1985/6, showed a sample of secondary and tertiary students and of secondary school principals endorsing a proposal that Cantonese should have the status of "legal vernacular" after 1997. Such an attitude would be particularly natural in those who feel that it is their Hong Kong Chinese identity, rather than a more general Chinese one, which is the more important, and some surveys, including one of Pierson's own, suggest the

[2] The question of language loyalty on the island is a complex one. The military and civilian personnel who fled with Chiang Kai-shek to the island in 1949 were speakers of divergent dialects but generally took to *guoyu* readily as a *lingua franca* as well as a symbol of national identity. Native Taiwanese, originally speakers of Minnanhua (similar to Fujian), had no choice but to use it when they entered the educational system. According to Yip (1997, p. 7) some (presumably indigenous) Taiwanese parents began therefore to use it themselves to their children. However, Minnanhua remains vigorous:my sister-in-law, who lived for some years on the island and spoke *guoyu* well enough to be taken for a native speaker, was once ordered out of a taxi when the driver found that she could not speak the local dialect.

majority of young people come in this category (Pierson, 1994). The picture is further complicated by Lung's 1994 research (Lung, 1997), based on a stratified sample of 103 subjects. This suggested a split in attitudes between the sexes, with women more likely to have an integrative orientation towards Putonghua whilst men took a more instrumental attitude. The same survey also provided evidence that the overt prestige of Putonghua was offset to some degree by covert prestige for Cantonese. Whilst questionnaire and interview results predictably showed the national standard as the language of status and the regional one as the language of intimacy, matched guise tests showed Cantonese as slightly higher than Putonghua on the status dimension.

Even in Guangdong, feelings seem to be similarly ambiguous. Robert Bauer, himself a fluent speaker of Cantonese, experienced difficulty in getting youngsters to speak to him in that language rather than in Putonghua (Bauer & Benedict, 1997, p. 434), yet Edward Friedman was told by one northern Chinese visitor to the province that he felt he might as well be in Hanoi as in Canton, whilst a well-known 1992 *New York Times* report quoted a Cantonese as saying, "China's like Europe and we want to speak our own language just as in France people speak French" (Friedman, 1994, p. 78). My own limited experience, as a far-from-fluent speaker, is that Guangdong people, including both strangers and my wife's relatives, are surprised that my Cantonese is better than my Putonghua but are happy to speak it with me and certainly prefer to speak it amongst themselves. In Guangzhou schools, Putonghua is certainly used to some extent in formal lessons but it is the language of school administration only in the elite, "key-point" institutions (Kwo, 1992, p. 210-11).

Education will obviously be a key factor in Hong Kong, too. In the past there have been some experiments with Putonghua as teaching medium and one or two primary schools seem to have implemented it successfully. Recently Professor Ruth Hayhoe, Director of the Hong Kong Institute of Education, a Canadian fluent in both Cantonese and Putonghua, was reported as calling for local children to be taught to read and write Chinese using Putonghua (South China Morning Post, 10/12/98); this would certainly involve the use of a Putonghua reading pronunciation and might also imply use of the language in teacher-student exchanges. However, efforts to establish Putonghua as the main medium of communication in the early days of a secondary school where I myself once taught were frustrated by the attachment to Cantonese of both staff and students (Whelpton, 1998). Even if they themselves have a reasonable command of Putonghua, local teachers generally are much more comfortable in Cantonese, whilst some of those who teach Chinese language and literature are apprehensive that any switch to widespread use of Putonghua might lead to calls to bring in native speakers to teach it -as if life were not bad enough already with

all the imported *gwailou* English teachers![3] Despite ideological support in some places for Putonghua, the local education profession is likely to resist any attempt to give it a wider role in the system than that of one (relatively minor) subject on the curriculum. The government might, of course, choose to override local teachers" wishes on the matter but this is probably unlikely unless there is a major change in the political climate or unless, as in the case of English, it were felt that low Putonghua standards were a serious threat to Hong Kong's economic competitiveness.

The present practice of establishing literacy through Cantonese rather than Putonghua is therefore likely to continue and, as long it does, the position of the language will be further buttressed by a certain amount of written use. As elsewhere in China, the standard written language, which basically reflects the grammar and lexis of Putonghua, is the normal choice for most texts but colloquial Cantonese is used in some popular journalism and advertising and also in a few fictional works such as *Sáu làahmyàhn jau-gei* ("Diary of a Yuppie") and the "John and Mary" sketches (Snow, 1994). Since the standard Chinese characters are all paired with Cantonese pronunciations, the characters can readily be adopted to represent purely Cantonese words; for example, the character 地 (*deih*, "earth") is modified by adding the "mouth" radical to represent the Cantonese plural-marker, also pronounced *deih* (𠸄). In contrast, on Taiwan, where only the Putonghua reading pronunciation is taught, those who wish to write in dialect generally need to revive obsolete Chinese characters and explain their meaning in a glossary (Snow, 1993).

If Cantonese is thus likely to continue in a wide range of uses and styles, there is also the possibility of the language losing much of its distinctive character through the gradual absorption of more and more Putonghua elements. In fact, of course, in aspects other than pronunciation, formal Cantonese is already very like Putonghua since it contains a large proportion of standard, literary words. Snow analysed the text of two Cantonese radio news broad casts and found that only 10-15% of the words used were distinctly Cantonese and that half of those were accounted for by three function words *haih* (copula), *hái* ("in" or "at") and *ge* (possessive marker). In contrast, purely Cantonese words in ordinary

[3] A friend who lectures in the Chinese department of the Institute of Education seemed greatly alarmed on this score after a visit to a Guangdong school which employed many teachers from northern China. If the 17-year-olds I taught in 1998/99 are any guide, opposition to introducing Putonghua as the medium of instruction is also strong amongst local students; out of twenty who wrote a reaction to the advocacy of such a change by a visiting Chinese-Australian academic, nineteen strongly rejected the idea.

conversation will normally be at the 30-50% level (Snow, 1994, p. 129). In addition, "High Cantonese" is also marked by syntactic patterns typical of the written language, such as the use of *yíh ... wàih* ("take/have ... as") construction (e.g. *yíh Yìngyúh wàih móuh yúh ge gaausì*, "native-English-speaking teacher") (Luke, 1998, p. 148).

This kind of influence is natural, given the preferred use of standard Chinese for writing, but it is also part of a general pattern of diffusion of features between different varieties of Chinese, which has been facilitated by large-scale internal migration throughout Chinese history (Zhou, 1991; Lee & Wong, 1991). For example a shift in preferred question structure from VP-not-V to V-not-VP in both Beijing speech and standard Cantonese seems to have been the result of influence from other southern dialects, diffusing gradually across different classes of verb (Yue-Hashimoto, 1993). Cantonese itself has contributed some vocabulary to colloquial Putonghua and may be responsible for the tendency of the adverb *sìn* ("first") to shift in Beijing speech to clause-final position.[4] Of course, the predominant direction of influence will probably continue to be from Putonghua to Cantonese, and one such change in progress is the increasing use of the Putonghua *béi* construction for the comparative instead of the Cantonese (and Old Chinese) *gwo* structure. This is characteristic of educated speakers and employed generally with standard Chinese rather than colloquial Cantonese vocabulary (Yue-Hashimoto, 1993, p. 239-41).[5]

Whilst continuing "Putonghuaization" of educated speech is likely to continue, with female speakers perhaps playing a key role, the vitality of Cantonese popular culture will probably ensure that changes spread upwards through the stylistic continuum as well as downwards. Very good examples of such influence are the use of *lóuhgùng* and *lóuhpòh* (literally, "old man" and "old woman") for "husband" and "wife". This usage used to be regarded by middle class speakers as rather vulgar but is now generally accepted outside formal

---

[4] This shift is usually attributed to influence from English but Lee Siu Lun (personal communication) has pointed out that Cantonese may well be the source.

[5] A third alternative given in some sources is to use the term *béigaau* (compare); e.g. *Kéuih béigaau kèihtà hohksàang kàhnlihkdì* ("He/she is harder-working than the other students"). I was myself taught this structure, not the use of *béi* alone, on a Cantonese course some years ago. I am not sure how common it is and have only noticed native speakers using it directly before an adjective without a standard of comparison (*Kéuih béigaau kàhnlihk*, "He is comparatively hard-working).

contexts. The terms are also used by spouses to address one another and usually translated as "darling" or "dear" in English film subtitles.

We turn now to the role of English, which is still a more important factor than Putonghua in the linguistic environment of the average Hong Konger. In the early years of contact between Chinese and Europeans, the influence on Cantonese itself was fairly slight because contact remained quite restricted. Pidgin English emerged as the key means of inter-ethnic communication precisely because both sides, in particular the Chinese, did not want to give the other full access to their own language (Baker, 1994, p. 11; Baker & Mühlhäusler, 1990, p. 108). Later, however, a number of English words were borrowed and became fully naturalised. Many Hong Kong inhabitants must use terms such as *bàsí* ("bus") and *sihdò* ("store") without even being aware that they are English in origin. Particularly at a formal level, the number of such loans has remained fairly limited (Chan & Kwok, 1982), in line with the general tendency for Chinese to prefer calquing to borrowing, but educated Hong Kongers have come to employ a great deal of English vocabulary whilst speaking to one another in Cantonese. The resulting "mixed code" has long been the object of censure but seems to enjoy a fair degree of "covert prestige" and, given the intensity of exposure to (at least written) English in the Hong Kong working environment, seems ineradicable. In an essay entitled "The plight of the purist", David Li gives an illustration from a conference discussion of code-mixing in higher education:

> The dominant view was to stop, or at least find ways to discourage, code-mixing by students and teachers alike. However, there was a bit of irony when the speakers making this appeal could not help mixing English words in their own otherwise Cantonese speech, behaviour which was greeted with friendly laughter and understanding by the participants the first time it occurred. (Li, 1998, p. 184).

Whilst this mixing is predominantly a lexical phenomenon, it also results in some modification of the Cantonese grammatical framework to more readily accommodate English content words (Pennington, 1998, p. 10-11). Such "syntactic integration", reminiscent of what has occurred in more extreme form between different Indian languages (Gumperz & Wilson, 1991), includes the avoidance of literary Chinese constructions which differ markedly from English. Li (1998, p. 178-9) contrasts two translation equivalents for "to modernize China":

Standard Chinese/"High" Cantonese:	*bà/jèung*	*Jùnggwok*	*yihndoih*	*fa*[6]
	MARKER	China	present	-ize
Mixed-code:	*heui*	modernize	*Jùnggwok*	
	[go]	modernize	China	

The use of mixed code naturally "deselects" the "marked" OV construction and one might expect that this would eventually influence the speaker's choice of construction even in sentences where he or she was not employing English lexical items.

As already explained, this type of mixing is typical of speech rather than writing, but English words in Roman script are sometimes inserted in Chinese text, particularly in informal or technical writing. In writing colloquial Cantonese, Roman letters may also be called into service to represent Cantonese morphemes as an alternative to the use of modified standard Chinese characters. A particularly common example is the use of the letter D to represent the plural and comparative marker *dì* (Bauer, 1982), as in the title of ATV's regular newsmagazine programme *Gàmyaht Tái Jàn-D* ("Get a Truer View of Today").

So long as English retains its present international role and Hong Kong its high dependence on international trade and finance, one would expect this kind of influence from English to persist alongside the increasing influence of Putonghua and standard Chinese. How the balance will be struck between the two is much more difficult to predict.

We turn finally to a set of developments which seem primarily internal in nature though external factors have some influence on them also. These are a series of sound changes currently in progress, which have been studied in detail by Robert Bauer (Bauer, 1983 & 1986; Bauer & Benedict, 1997). The principal ones are:

A. Loss of the distinction between *l* and *n*

B. Loss of initial velar nasal (with accompanying "hypercorrection" sometimes also inserting the sound where it was never etymologically justified)

---

[6] The *jèung* construction is much more common than that with *bà* in Cantonese, the latter particle being used mostly by second-language speakers.

C. Confusion between, or reduction to a glottal stop of final non-released consonants (*sàt chè* ("missing vehicle") thus becomes homophonous with *sàk chè* ("traffic jam"))

D. Replacement of syllabic *ng* (as in "five" and the surname "Ng") with syllabic *m*; Bauer's (1979-81) research showed a complete merger of the sounds for 18% of his subjects).'[7]

E. Loss of the w of *kw* and *gw* before rounded, back vowels (50% of Bauer's subjects showed complete merger; this change is an example of labial dissimilation which appears to be a long-term general tendency in the language)

Bauer himself (1997, p. 430-1) believes that increasing exposure to Putonghua will tend to accelerate changes, such as C, which make Cantonese more similar to Putonghua and to retard or even reverse those that make it less similar (viz. A and E). This is possible, but it is also feasible that determination to maintain a distinct Hong Kong identity might favour the retention of distinctive features, at least in informal speech. Pronouncing *gwok* ("country") identically to *gok* ("corner") might conceivably come to separate "insiders" from "outsiders" in the same way as does the centring of /*au*/ on Martha's Vineyard (Labov, 1972).

Besides possible tendencies to converge with or to diverge from Putonghua, prescriptivist attitudes towards language may also retard change generally. Unlike the case of languages written with an alphabetic script, the standard orthography cannot serve as a brake on phonetic change. However, school students do use monolingual dictionaries which include representation of pronunciation in some form of Romanisation, whilst teachers of Chinese language are generally aware of the changes underway and may attempt to stem the tide (or, as they would themselves mostly see it, "correct the mistakes"). Whilst their practice may be very different, my own experience as a teacher suggests that many local school students may, in fact, accept at a theoretical level the equation of language change with language decay. A few years ago, I produced some materials on language change in Indo-European and Sino-Tibetan and used them with a secondary Form 4 class (15-16 year-olds). I then briefly discussed with them some of the current changes in Cantonese (educationalists' concern about these had recently been featured on TVB's Chinese evening news)

[7] Bauer, a former student of William Wang's, sees a key role for lexical diffusion in this change. It apparently began with labial assimilation in the context of phrases such as *ngh màn* > *mh màn* ("five dollars") and spread later to other words.

and asked them to write a short comment. I had naively expected that a few of them, having read my materials, would conclude that language change was a perfectly natural phenomenon but without exception they saw the new pronunciations as evidence of laziness and degeneracy.

To obtain a fuller picture of the importance both of prescriptivist attitudes and of the possible linking of particular pronunciations with an outside/insider dichotomy, the ideal instrument would probably be elaborate matched guise experiments. A questionnaire survey can easily miss cases where a particular feature of pronunciation does contribute to listeners" perception of an accent but listeners are not explicitly aware of that feature. Because of time constraints, however, I employed the questionnaire format in the hope that it could provide preliminary indications. Those included in the survey were two classes of 14-15-year-old students and a small number of teachers at my current school, a co-educational establishment drawing its intake from the top twenty per cent of the ability range.[8] To allow for the suggestion-effect of the wording, the questionnaire, which was in English, was administered in two different versions. In Version A respondents were invited to express agreement or disagreement with statements associating the newer pronunciations with the less educated and with Hong Kong speakers, and in Version B with statements suggesting an association with the more highly educated and with mainlanders. The forms, and the brief oral introduction provided to them, did not label one particular pronunciation as an innovation but simply presented them as variants. The results are set out in summary form in the tables below. The actual questionnaire texts are given in the Appendix.

[8] In their final year at primary school, Hong Kong students are assigned through tests of their proficiency in Chinese and maths to one of five "bands", with the highest scorers placed in Band 1. Parents of children in the higher bands are given priority over those in lower bands in choosing secondary school places and this results in most schools containing students only from one (in some cases two) of the bands.

Table 1: Class 1 (Version A – 40 Subjects[9])

	Agree Strongly	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Disagree Strongly
A. No distinction between *l/n*:					
(i) Commoner among less educated	1	5	5	10	1
(ii) Commoner among HK people	1	7	11	3	0
B. Loss of initial *ng*:					
(i) Commoner among less educated	3	9	9	6	3
(ii) Commoner among HK people	3	3	17	6	1
C. No distinction of final *k/p/t*					
(i) Commoner among less educated	2	9	3	6	1
(ii) Commoner among HK people	0	9	8	4	1
D. No distinction between *ng* and *m*					
(i) Commoner among less educated	0	5	5	8	0
(ii) Commoner among HK people	0	6	10	2	0
E. *gw/kw* > *g/k* before back vowels					
(i) Commoner among less educated	4	11	5	6	3
(ii) Commoner among HK people	1	11	11	4	2

Table 2: Class 2 (Version B - 42 Subjects)

	Agree Strongly	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Disagree Strongly
A. No distinction between *l/n*:					
(i) Commoner among more educated	0	9	7	4	1
(ii) Commoner among immigrants	0	11	4	6	0
B. Loss of initial *ng*:					
(i) Commoner among more educated	0	11	8	11	1
(ii) Commoner among immigrants	0	12	10	7	2
C. No distinction of final *k/p/t*					
(i) Commoner among more educated	1	11	6	9	1
(ii) Commoner among immigrants	0	15	6	7	0
D. No distinction between *ng* and *m*					
(i) Commoner among more educated	1	8	3	10	1
(ii) Commoner among immigrants	0	7	5	11	0
E. *gw/kw* > *g/k* before back vowels					
(i) Commoner among more educated	1	13	5	17	3
(ii) Commoner among immigrants	0	10	14	14	0

[9] For both classes the number of responses recorded for each item is well below the total number of subjects because of the exclusion of those who reported inability to hear the relevant distinction and of the smaller number who failed to answer the question about their own perception of the sounds. The failure of many native speakers of Cantonese to discriminate between the final non-released stop consonants is particularly well-known (Aitchison, 1991, p. 127). When, as a limited second-language speaker, I "hear" these sound myself it is because my exposure to Romanized Cantonese tells me what to expect.

Table 3: Teachers of Chinese (Version A - 4 Subjects)

	Agree Strongly	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Disagree Strongly
A. No distinction between *l/n*:					
(i) Commoner among less educated	0	2	0	2	0
(ii) Commoner among HK people	0	2	0	2	0
B. Loss of initial *ng*:					
(i) Commoner among less educated	0	2	0	2	0
(ii) Commoner among HK people	0	2	1	1	0
C. No distinction of final *k/p/t*					
(i) Commoner among less educated	0	1	0	2	0
(ii) Commoner among HK people	0	0	2	1	0
D. No distinction between *ng* and m					
(i) Commoner among less educated	0	0	1	3	0
(ii) Commoner among HK people	0	2	0	2	0
E. *gw/kw* > *g/k* before back vowels					
(i) Commoner among less educated	0	1	0	3	0
(ii) Commoner among HK people	0	2	0	2	0

These results indicate a wide variation in perception between different native speakers and it is particularly striking that teachers of Chinese are in disagreement with one another on many items whilst the results from Version A are often contradicted by those from Version B. There are just four cases in which a definite result from one of the two classes is consistent with that from the other:

(1) Respondents expressing an opinion usually rejected any association between confusion of *l* and *n* and a low level of education (Version A -50% disagree or strongly disagree, 17% agreeing or strongly agreeing; Version B -43% accepting the suggestion that those without the distinc tion were more educated and only 24% rejecting it).

(2) There was a tendency to see the loss of a distinction between *m̀h* (not) and *ńgh* (surname)[10] as more typical of Hong Kong people than immigrants (Version A -33% accepting against 11% rejecting the proposition; Version B -contrary suggestion rejected by 48% to 30%).

[10] The questionnaire used the surname as this has the same tone (low falling) as the negative particle and thus provides a minimal pair contrast. The numeral five (with low rising tone) was probably in fact the starting point for the sound change through assimilation in common collocations such as *ńgh màn* (five dollars)..

(3) The delabialisation of *gw/kw* before back vowels tends to be seen as a less educated variety (Version A -accepted by 52% to 31%; Version B -converse association rejected by 41% to 29%).

(4) The change in (3) is also more often seen as typically Hong Kong (Version A -association accepted by 41% to 21%; Version B -converse association rejected by 41% to 26%).

For reasons already indicated, any general conclusions from this small-scale survey must be very tentative. However, the failure in most cases of respondents to see any association between newer pronunciations and lack of education suggests that, in spontaneous, informal speech, they have become so much the norm that, even though many speakers would probably express sympathy for prescriptivist principles, stemming the tide would be very difficult. Responses on the shift of *ng* to *m* and of *gw/kw* to *g/k* suggest that there is indeed at least a possibility of a perceived insider/outsider distinction also strengthening change away from mainland norms. The Putonghua influence that Bauer focusses on, together with prescriptivist attitudes, might ensure that the pace of change remains very slow in formal speech but the natural dynamic of informal speech will continue to go its own way, and the gap between the ends of the stylistic continuum will remain particularly wide for the average speaker of Hong Kong Cantonese.

To sum up, the development of Cantonese in the next century will be influenced by contact with Putonghua and English and by the language's own dynamic. The exact shape of the language in 100 years' time is impossible to predict but it is unlikely to lose its distinctive character. The best evidence of its present vitality is the apparent concern of some in China that Cantonese presents a threat to Putonghua rather than the other way round; in 1992, *Ming Pao* reported that the use of Cantonese in radio and TV advertisements was to be banned outside Guangdong province itself (Bruche-Schulz, 1997, p. 312.) The outlook for the language is probably brighter than many of its academic supporters seem to fear.

References

Aitchison, J. (1991). *Language change: Progress or decay* (2nd Ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Baker, H. (1994). *The chop suey connection - Hong Kong*. London: School of Oriental and African Studies.

Baker, P. & P. Mühlhäusler. (1990). From Business to Pidgin. *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication,* 1(1):87-115.

Barnes, D. (1982). Nationalism and the Mandarin movement: the first half-century. In R.L. Cooper (Ed.), *Language spread: Studies in diffusion and social change.* Bloomington: Indiana Press.

Bauer, R.S. (1982). D for two in Cantonese. *Journal of Chinese Linguistics,* 10(2):277-81.

Bauer, R.S. (1983). Cantonese sound change across subgroups of the Hong Kong speech community. *Journal of Chinese Linguistics,* 11(2):303-54.

Bauer, R.S. (1986). The microhistory of a sound change in progress in Hong Kong Cantonese. *Journal of Chinese Linguistics* 14(1):1-42.

Bauer, R. S. & Benedict, P. K. (1997). *Modern Cantonese phonology*. Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Bruche-Schulz, G. (1997). "Fuzzy" Chinese: The status of Cantonese in Hong Kong. *Journal of Pragmatics,* 27:259-314.

Chan, M. & H. Kwok. (1982). *A study of lexical borrowing from English in Hong Kong Chinese.* Hong Kong: HKU Centre for Asian Studies

Friedman, E. (1994). Reconstructing China's national identity: A southern alternative to Mao-era anti-imperialist nationalism. *Journal of Asian Studies,* 53(1):67-91.

Gumperz, J. J. & Wilson, R. (1971). Convergence and creolization: A case from the Indo-Aryan/Dravidian border. In D. Hymes (Ed.), *Pidginization and creolization of languages.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kwo, Ora W. Y. (1992). The teaching of Putonghua in Hong Kong schools: language education in a changing economic and political context. In G. A. Postiglione (Ed.), *Education and society in Hong Kong: Toward one country two systems.* Hong Kong: HKU Press

Labov, W. (1972). *Sociolinguistic patterns*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Lam, A. (1993). Language education in Hong Kong: Cantonese as an endangered dialect. *Actes de XVe Congrés International des Linguistes*, Sainte-Foy: Les Presses de l'Université Laval.

Lee, J. & Wong, R.B. (1991). Population movements in Qing China and their linguistic legacy. *Journal of Chinese Linguistics*, Monograph Series No.3: 52-77.

Li, D. C. S. (1998). The plight of the purist. In: M. C. Pennington (Ed.), *Language in Hong Kong at century's end*, Hong Kong: HKU Press.

Lung, R. (1997). Language attitudes and sex-based differences in Hong Kong. *Linguistische Berichte*, 171:396-414.

Luke, K.K.. (1998). Why two languages might be better than one. In M.C. Pennington (Ed.), *Language in Hong Kong at century's end*. Hong Kong: HKU Press.

Pennington, M. C. (1998). Introduction: Perspectives on language in Hong Kong at century's end. In: M. C. Pennington (Ed.), *Language in Hong Kong at century's end.* Hong Kong: HKU Press.

Pierson, H. D. (1992). Cantonese, English or Putonghua -unresolved communicative issue in Hong Kong's future. In G. A. Postiglione (Ed.), *Education and society in Hong Kong: Toward one country and two systems.* Hong Kong: HKU Press.

Pierson, H. D. (1994). Ethnolinguistic dialect vitality during a period of de-colonization without independence: Perceived vitality in Hong Kong. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 108:43-61.

Pierson, H. D. (1998). Societal accommodation to English and Putonghua in Cantonese-speaking Hong Kong. In M. C. Pennington (Ed.), *Language in Hong Kong at century's end,* Hong Kong: HKU Press.

Smith, G. & S. Matthews. (1996). Pidgin and creole languages. In B. Comrie, S. Matthews & M. Polinsky (Eds.), *Atlas of languages*. New York: Facts-on-File.

Snow, D. (1993). Chinese dialect as written language: the cases of Taiwanese and Cantonese. *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication*, 4(1):15-30.

Snow, D. (1994). A short history of published Cantonese: What is a dialect literature? *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication*, 4(3):127-48.

Sun, C.F. (1996). *Word-order change and grammaticalization in the history of Chinese*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

T'sou, B.K. (1994). Language planning issues raised by English in Hong Kong: Pre- and post-1997. In T. Kandiah & J. Kwan-Tery (Eds.), *English and language planning: A Southeast Asian contribution.* Singapore: Singapore Times Academic Press.

Whelpton, J. (1998). Cantonese, English and Putonghua in a Hong Kong secondary school: Language use and language attitudes. Unpublished MS.

Yau, S.C. (1992). Language policies in post-1997 Hong Kong. In K. K. Luke (Ed.), *Into the twenty-first century: Issues of language in education in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Linguistic Society of Hong Kong.

Yip, King Wan. (1997). *Cong mu yu dao jing xiu* [From mother tongue to further training]. *Hong Kong Teachers Centre Bulletin* 25.

Yue-Hashimoto. (1993). The lexicon in syntactic change: Lexical diffusion in Chinese syntax. *Journal of Chinese Linguistics*, 21(2):213-54.

Zhou, Z.H. (1991). Migrations in Chinese history and their legacy on Chinese dialects. *Journal of Chinese Linguistics*, Monograph series No.3:29-49.

Appendix: Text of Questionnaire

(The text given below is that of Version A with variant wording for Version B given in italics)

Survey Questionnaire

I am doing some research into different ways of pronouncing Cantonese and into people's attitudes towards these differences. I would be very grateful if you could spare the time to answer the questions below. Thank you for your help.

John Whelpton

1. Some people pronounce the words 你 (you) and 李 (a surname) in exactly the same way. Others pronounce them differently, with a sound like the English "n" at the start of the first and one like an English "l" at the start of the second.					
Do you yourself ever hear any difference between the two words? Yes/No					
If you have answered yes, please indicate if you agree or disagree with the following statements:					
	Agree Strongly	**Agree**	**No opinion**	**Disagree**	**Disagree Strongly**
a. People who pronounce both words the same way are less [more] educated than those who pronounce them differently.					
b. People who pronounce both words the same way are more [less] likely to be Hong Kong people than to be immigrants from the mainland.					

2. Some people pronounce the words 我 (I) and 牛 (cow) with a sound like the English "ng" at the beginning (*ngóh, ngàuh*). Others pronounce them without this sound (as oh and auh)					
Have you yourself ever noticed these two different ways of pronouncing the words? Yes/No					
If you have answered yes, please indicate if you agree or disagree with the following statements:					
	Agree Strongly	**Agree**	**No opinion**	**Disagree**	**Disagree Strongly**
a. People who pronounce the words without the "ng" sound p73 are less [more] educated than those who pronounce them with the "ng" sound.					
b. People who pronounce both words without the "ng" sound are more [less] likely to be Hong Kong people than to be immigrants from the mainland.					

3. Some people pronounce the words 塞 (*sàk*, congested) and 失 (*sàt*, lost) in exactly the same way. Others make a difference between them.					
Do you yourself ever hear any difference between the two words? Yes/No					
If you have answered yes, please indicate if you agree or disagree with the following statements:					
	Agree Strongly	**Agree**	**No opinion**	**Disagree**	**Disagree Strongly**
a. People who pronounce both words the same way are less [more] educated than those who pronounce them differently					
b. People who pronounce both words the same way are more [less] likely to be Hong Kong people than to be immigrants from the mainland.					

4. Some people pronounce the words 唔 (*m̀h*, not) and 吳 (*ńgh*, a surname) in exactly the same way (with a sound like English m at the beginning of both). Others pronounce them differently.					
Do you yourself ever hear any difference between the two words? Yes/No					
If you have answered yes, please indicate if you agree or disagree with the following statements:					
	Agree Strongly	**Agree**	**No opinion**	**Disagree**	**Disagree Strongly**
a. People who pronounce both words the same way are less [more] educated than those who pronounce them differently.					
b. People who pronounce both words the same way are more [less] likely to be Hong Kong people than to be immigrants from the mainland.					

5. Some people pronounce the characters 江 (*gòng*, river) and 光 (*gwòng*, brightness) in exactly the same way. Others pronounce them differently, with a sound like the English "w" in the second one but not the first.					
Do you yourself ever hear any difference between the two words? Yes/No					
If you have answered yes, please indicate if you agree or disagree with the following statements:					
	Agree Strongly	**Agree**	**No opinion**	**Disagree**	**Disagree Strongly**
a. People who pronounce both words the same way are less [more] educated than those who pronounce them differently.					
b. People who pronounce both words the same way are more [less] likely to be Hong Kong people than to be immigrants from the mainland.					