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The Linguistic Norms of Hong Kong English in Computer-mediated Communication

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Abstract

Hong Kong is widely known as a bilingual city. In addition to the locally spoken Cantonese, the vast majority of Hong Kong Chinese people are also able to speak English, the ex-colonial and the international language which has played an important role in the community since the colony was founded. This linguistic situation has given rise to a local variety of English. Recognising the distinct form and function of this variety, scholars (e.g. Bolton 2002, Joseph 2004: 132-161) have argued that the linguistic features in the English spoken by Hong Kong people should be identified as Hong Kong English (HKE).

Observing that certain Hong Kong English features specific to computer-mediated communication (CMC) have been developed through communication among bilingual Hong Kong Chinese on the internet, I believe that Hong Kong English in CMC should be seen as a distinct variety. To support my argument, I have, in this thesis, re-examined the notion of linguistic variety. This in turn has required an investigation into the nature of the linguistic norms that define a 'systematically different' form of language.

I begin my study by looking at the sociolinguistics of Hong Kong. The distribution of the three main languages – Cantonese, English, and Putonghua – is examined, and Cantonese-English code-mixing is discussed. The focus then turns to the notion of Hong Kong English, and its linguistic features are analysed. Then, the nature of computer-mediated communication is explored. I look at how this context has affected the use of language in general, and HKE specifically. The distinctive HKE features that can only be seen in CMC are examined. I show that Hong Kong English in computer-mediated communication (CHKE) is formally different from HKE in other written contexts.

In order to argue that CHKE is a variety of its own, I look at how various scholars define 'variety' and similar notions such as 'language', 'dialect', 'sociolect', and 'register'. Seeing that the concept of norms is essential in determining whether a variety is 'systematically different', I explore the nature of social norms and linguistic norms. A model of norms is proposed, identifying three kinds of linguistic norms: formal norms, contextual norms and identity norms.

I present the results of a survey I conducted that aims to elicit Hong Kong people's attitudes towards CHKE. Analysis of the data obtained from the survey shows that linguistic norms of CHKE have emerged. Not only is CHKE recognised by its users as a distinct variety, this variety also has an identity marking function that is not seen in other forms of written HKE.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is of my own composition, and that it contains no material previously submitted for the award of any other degree. The work reported in this thesis has been executed by myself, except where due acknowledgement is made in the text.

Wing Kin Vinton Poon
Edinburgh, January 2010

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Contents

Abstract	i
Declaration	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
List of tables, excerpts, and figures.....	5
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	7
1.1 Background information	10
1.2 Structure of the thesis.....	16
CHAPTER TWO: THE SOCIOLINGUISTICS OF HONG KONG AND HONG KONG ENGLISH	21
2.1 Background information	21
2.2 Languages in Hong Kong.....	22
2.2.1 Cantonese	24
2.2.2 Putonghua.....	26
2.2.3 English	29
2.3 Functions of English in Hong Kong.....	33
2.3.1 English as a tool to success	33
2.3.2 English as a form of cultural capital	34
2.3.3 English as a linguistic habitus of Hong Kong.....	35
2.3.4 English as an identity marker of the Hong Kong people	36
2.4 The code-mixing phenomenon in Hong Kong.....	38
2.5 Hong Kong English.....	48
2.5.1 The linguistic form of Hong Kong English	54
2.5.1.1 Phonology	54
2.5.1.2 Morphology.....	57
2.5.1.3 Syntax.....	59
2.5.2 The functions of Hong Kong English	62

CHAPTER THREE: COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION AND CMC-HONG KONG ENGLISH	65
3.1 Introduction	65
3.2 Computer-mediated communication	67
3.2.1 Electronic mail	67
3.2.2 World-wide web	69
3.2.3 Virtual worlds	70
3.2.4 Asynchronous chatgroups	75
3.2.5 Synchronous chatgroups	79
3.2.6 Combination of internet-using situations	84
3.3 Netspeak	85
3.4 Chatgroups and identity	88
3.5 Hong Kong English on the internet	95
3.6 CMC Hong Kong English (CHKE) and Hong Kong English (HKE)	100

CHAPTER FOUR: LANGUAGE, DIALECT, STYLE, REGISTER, AND VARIETY	111
4.1 Introduction	111
4.2 Language and dialect	113
4.3 Sociolect	118
4.4 Register	119
4.5 Style	124
4.6 Genre	128
4.7 Variety	131
4.8 Taxonomies of the terms – users vs. uses	136
4.9 Problems in the definitions	142
4.9.1 The amount of distinctive features	146
4.9.2 The number of people who use the distinctive features	147
4.9.3 The people who see the features as distinctive	148
4.10 What is CMC Hong Kong English?	151
4.11 CMC Hong Kong English as a variety: a norm perspective	153

CHAPTER FIVE: NORMS, SOCIAL NORMS, AND LINGUISTIC NORMS . 157	
5.1	Defining norms 157
5.2	Social norms, descriptive norms, and conventions 161
5.3	The emergence of norms 163
5.4	When is a norm generated? 168
5.5	Revisiting the definition of norms..... 170
5.5.1	Norms of obligation and norms of pattern 174
5.6.	Three kinds of linguistic norms..... 176
5.6.1	Formal norms 176
5.6.2	Contextual norms 177
5.6.3	Identity norms 181
5.7	Application of the three types of linguistic norms 183
5.7.1	Case studies 183
5.8	Conclusion 190
CHAPTER SIX: THE CMC-HONG KONG ENGLISH SURVEY: RESULTS . 191	
6.1	About the survey 191
6.1.1	The passage 191
6.1.2	The informants 194
6.1.3	The questions 196
6.2	The results 200
6.2.1	Question 3 200
6.2.2	Question 4 201
6.2.3	Question 5 205
6.2.4	Question 6 206
6.2.5	Question 7 206
6.2.6	Question 8 208
6.2.7	Question 9 218
6.2.8	Question 10 219
6.2.9	Considering the independent factors 222
6.2.9.1	Gender 223
6.2.9.2	Education level..... 224

6.2.9.3	Geographical location	225
6.2.9.4	Age	228
CHAPTER SEVEN: THE CMC-HONG KONG ENGLISH SURVEY: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION.....		231
7.1	Linguistic norms of CHKE	231
7.2	CHKE and various theories of norms	232
7.2.1	Hart and Ullmann-Margalit.....	232
7.2.2	Bartsch.....	236
7.2.3	Bicchieri	237
7.2.4	Horne.....	242
7.2.5	Kahneman & Miller	247
7.3	The three kinds of linguistic norms.....	250
7.3.1	Formal norms	250
7.3.2	Contextual norms	252
7.3.3	Identity norms	254
7.3.4	On abnormality – recognising two sets of norms	256
7.4	Norms of pattern and norms of obligation	258
7.5	Linguistic norms and identity.....	262
7.6	CHKE as a variety – a linguistic norm perspective	266
CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSIONS		269
8.1	Summary	269
8.1.1	The linguistic features of Hong Kong English in computer-mediated communication.....	269
8.1.2	The linguistic differences between CHKE and HKE.....	270
8.1.3	The language attitudes of the users of CHKE.....	270
8.1.4	The functional differences between CHKE and HKE	271
8.1.5	Reanalysing the concept of variety	272
8.1.6	Studying the notions of norms, social norms and linguistic norms.....	273
8.2	Implications.....	275
8.3	Concluding remarks	279
8.3.1	Limitations of the study	279

8.3.2	Future developments	280
References	286
Appendix I: The Online Survey	297
Appendix II: Background information of the informants	301

List of tables, excerpts, and figures

Table 2.1	HKE consonant chart	56
Figure 3.1	An email	68
Figure 3.2	A conversation between two players in <i>Second Life</i>	73
Figure 3.3	The front page of a forum	76
Figure 3.4	A sub forum	77
Figure 3.5	A thread	78
Figure 3.6	Opera – an IRC client	80
Figure 3.7	Windows Live Messenger	81
Excerpt 3.1	Conversation between two Hong Kong postgraduate students	96
Excerpt 3.2	Conversation between two high school students	104
Excerpt 3.3	Conversation between two friends conducted in 2006	106
Figure 5.1	The general order of the applications of norms	183
Figure 5.2	The norms of an English teacher in an English classroom in Hong Kong	184
Figure 5.3	The norms of a student in a linguistics tutorial	186
Figure 5.4	The norms of the American professor	187
Figure 5.5	The norms of the local professor	187
Figure 5.6	The norms of a student in Hong Kong	189
Table 6.1	Details of the informants	195
Figure 8.1	The linguistic norms of HKE according to the linguists	277
Figure 8.2	The linguistic norms of HKE and CHKE according to the informants	278
Table 8.1	Phonological details of “我點算好” and “禾典扇巧”	284

In this thesis, I argue that Hong Kong English in computer-mediated communication is a linguistic variety distinct from other forms of Hong Kong English. In order to show this, I need to discuss two main issues. First of all, the controversial notion of Hong Kong English itself has to be analysed. Secondly, computer-mediated communication (CMC) – a relatively new form of communication – must be examined to see what makes it distinctive. These two issues constitute the background of this study. Understanding them should allow us to determine in detail what are the specific linguistic features that appear in the language used by Hong Kong people on the internet, and whether the bundle of features can be regarded as a variety.

Nevertheless, before deciding whether these features in question constitute a variety, one needs to understand the meaning of the term *variety*. *Linguistic variety* is a term belonging to the professional jargon of linguists, and was originally introduced to avoid the ideologically loaded *language* and *dialect*. It is often described as a neutral term whose definition is clear-cut and obvious. However, when this term is looked at in detail, it is found that scholars do not have a consensus as to its meaning.

Although linguists agree that, in general, a variety is a set of features that is systematically distinctive, they disagree on what constitutes systematic distinctiveness. For example, no minimum number of features that would render a set of features distinct is recognised, nor is there an agreed minimum number of people using these features that would make them distinguishable as a variety. When considering these factors, linguists, who are trained to make objective judgements

based on evidence, may be affected by their personal perspectives and experience.

This may cause two linguists to make different judgements even when they are faced with the same set of evidence.

Moreover, at least since Edward Sapir's ground-breaking 1933 article on "The psychological reality of phonemes", linguists have distinguished between an "etic" outlook represented by the outside expert's analysis, and an "emic" one that takes account of the cultural knowledge possessed by speakers concerning their own language use. Modern linguistics does not generally consider it to be properly "scientific" procedure to take an etic analysis to offer the whole truth, especially when it is in conflict with an emic one. In the case of Hong Kong English in CMC, this obliges us to take account of its users' beliefs, attitudes, ideologies and practices, first in interpreting, then in deploying, the features that set it apart. In other words, answering the question of whether it is a variety is not solely a matter of a linguist's objective analysis of its structure, but needs also to look to the users of these features for information. The users' beliefs and practices about how the features they use are or are not systematically distinctive play a significant, perhaps even determining role in deciding whether these features constitute a variety.

Ultimately, a set of features forms a distinctive variety if and only if the users exhibit *norms* in their understanding and production of the features. How to determine the existence or non-existence of norms thus becomes the central issue. As will be explained in the thesis, the term *norm* is itself multi-faceted, and each facet has to be investigated in a different way. One of these involves observing whether the users produce and interpret the features in a "patterned" way. Another involves finding the

users' attitudes and beliefs regarding the "normality" of the features, which boils down to whether they are recognised as *functional* in some sense. If they treat the features as normal, and recognise them as having an aggregate function that is distinctive, that is *prima facie* evidence that, emically, the set of features is systematically distinct, which in turn implies that the users see this set of features as a distinct linguistic variety. There is, in addition, a great deal of more detailed information to be teased out concerning their attitudes, beliefs, ideologies and practices, which adds up to a fuller emic account, allowing us in the end to treat the variety question not simplistically, but to address it in a persuasive and convincing way.

Regarding the CMC Hong Kong English features, at the heart of this thesis is a survey which I have conducted to seek Hong Kong people's own emic understanding of the features that appear in their online communication. It is primarily on their answers that I have relied in determining whether norms of using such internet-specific Hong Kong English features have emerged.

Contrary to what linguistics manuals might have us believe, determining the boundaries of a variety is no easier a task than determining the boundaries of a language or dialect. Since each person speaks differently, circumscribing a group of linguistic features and calling it a language, dialect or variety involves a certain degree of abstraction. This abstraction means that the inevitable variations within the language, dialect or variety are largely if not wholly overlooked. The result is what logicians call a Morton's fork: most variation must be overlooked if a coherent grammar or linguistic description is to be written; and yet, overlooking the variation

means that this grammar or description cannot accurately reflect the full reality of the language or dialect or variety. In what follows, I shall set out the background of this study by addressing this issue of language and dialect in more detail.

1.1 Background information

In the book *The World's Major Languages* (Comrie 1990: ix), the editor admits that the first and foremost question he encountered when he started editing the book was to choose which languages to include. He said that it was obvious to include languages that were widely spoken, like English, and Russian, and languages that had played significant historic roles, such as Latin and Greek. However, it became more debatable whether, for example, Sumerian, once a major language spoken in Southern Mesopotamia, should be included. In the book, there are 50 chapters. Each chapter is dedicated to either a language or a language family (such as Germanic) or sub-family (such as Scandinavian). The editor acknowledges that whether a speech variety is regarded as a language is a sociolinguistic issue, instead of a linguistic one. He groups Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish in one chapter because they are linguistically very similar, even though sociolinguistically they are seen as different languages.

Although Comrie appears to have carefully considered what languages he should discuss in his book, and whether certain speech varieties should be regarded as a dialect instead of a language, he sees no problems viewing English, Thai, or Polish as languages and as distinct entities for analysis, despite his awareness of the fact that each of these speech varieties has its own variations.

Another epitomical example to show that linguists see each language as an entity can be seen in the book *Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* (Crystal 1995), which is a comprehensive introduction to English linguistics. The book describes the history of the language, and explores the vocabulary and syntax. Even though the author acknowledges that there are variations in how the English Language is used, the fact the book is entitled “Encyclopedia of the English language” suggests that the author considers the English language as one entity. The variations and differences are varieties of one language, namely English.

Other scholars offer a different perspective, concluding that English is not one entity, but many. For example, Kachru (1992) discusses the models of non-native English, saying that, while native-speaker versions of English are recognised as varieties and have their own models, non-native Englishes should also have their own models due to the fact that they are also varieties of English (ibid.: 56-57). In other words, non-native English varieties should not be regarded as “deficient English”, but should be treated as varieties, just like those spoken by native speakers.

This viewpoint challenges the idea that the collection of features constituting the language called English is constant among its speakers. Nevertheless, this school of thought still assumes that each linguistic variety (or speech variety, according to Kachru), such as Indian English, is linguistically constant, and that speakers of each variety speak in an effectively homogeneous way. It overlooks, or at least marginalises, the fact that speakers who speak the same linguistic varieties may use the language differently from each other. A good example is that different British English speakers use different prepositions after the word “different”. While some

would say X is “different from” Y, others will say X is “different to” Y and some other prefer to say X is “different than” Y. Variations are not at all rare within one identified linguistic variety.

Such variation occurs in every language. The Chinese language is said to be the most widely-spoken in the world today, but one often finds it very difficult to pinpoint a constant system – spoken or written – within the Chinese language. Concerning the spoken aspect, Chinese is said to have many dialects, all of which are part of this language. Nonetheless, some of the “dialects” are phonologically and syntactically so different from each other that they are not mutually intelligible. For instance, Cantonese and Mandarin, two of the largest Chinese dialects in terms of the number of speakers, are linguistically very different. Mandarin speakers are not able to understand Cantonese, and vice versa. Concerning the written language, Chinese can be written in traditional characters or simplified characters. Each is regarded as the standard form, depending on the region (e.g. Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macau recognise traditional Chinese as the standard, while Mainland China regards simplified Chinese as the standard). People who read and write traditional Chinese often find reading and writing simplified Chinese difficult. Although both spoken and written Chinese involve such vast variations, Chinese is generally regarded as one language, even by speakers who know that there are variations. A Cantonese speaker from Hong Kong who reads and writes in traditional Chinese, and a Mandarin speaker from Beijing who reads and writes in simplified Chinese, might not understand each other regardless of whether they are using oral or written communication, even though they are both regarded as Chinese speakers, and they are said to be speaking and writing the same language. The enormous linguistic

variations between these two speakers, and within the Chinese language, are overlooked.

From recognising that speakers of the same language speak and write differently, linguists introduced the concept of idiolect. Idiolect may be regarded as the linguistic system of one person. However, scholars do not have a consensus concerning the meaning of this term. For instance, Bloch (1948: 7) defined idiolect as “[t]he totality of the possible utterances of one speaker at one time using a language to interact with one other speaker”, suggesting that each individual has a set of idiolects, and he or she would use a different idiolect depending on who he or she is speaking to.

Differently, Robins (1964: 51) understood the term as “[t]he lower limit of dialect division [that] comes down to the individual speakers”. For him, idiolect is “the speech habits of a single person” (ibid.), which implies that each speaker of a dialect speaks only one idiolect. In other words, what Bloch understands as a set of idiolects possessed by one person is regarded by Robins as one idiolect specific to that person. Despite the differences in definitions, one would expect that looking at the unique linguistic output of individuals might allow linguists to address the variations within a language by studying the linguistic patterns of different individuals.

But whilst the notion of idiolect is useful, it still does not give one important aspect of linguistic variation its full significance, which is the fact that individuals do not speak in a consistent way. One expresses oneself differently, depending on the situations in which one speaks, the number of people one speaks to, the relationship one has with the other participants in the conversation, and other contextual factors. By Robins’s (1964) definition, the notion of idiolect assumes that linguistic

expressions of individuals are systematically stable in all situations and all kinds of contexts, but in reality, this is patently not the case. Even, Bloch's (1948) definition of idiolect as the repertoire of an individual's linguistic expressions to another person at one point of time still assumes an unrealistic level of consistency. Halliday has made a similar argument concerning the consistency of idiolect:

[T]he homogeneity of the idiolect is a fiction, tenable only so long as we continue to treat language SYNCHRONICALLY, in abstraction from time. As soon as we consider DIACHRONIC varieties of language, taking in the dimension of persistence and change in time, we have to recognize that changes take place not only in the transmission of language from one generation to the next but also in speech habits of individual in the course of his life. (Halliday 1968: 156)

Essentially, when linguistic expressions are bound as a group and tagged, the variation aspect of human communication is inevitably overlooked. Assuming that a group of linguistic expressions is consistent implies that the group has no variations, which is unrealistic. Regardless of which factors define the group – be they geographical factors (e.g. continent, country, and town), social factors (e.g. profession, class, or education level), or even biological factors (e.g. sex, age, and ethnicity) – or at which level they are set – global, regional or individual – once a boundary is set up, it raises the linguistic expressions it bounds to the level of an abstraction. This abstraction creates the illusion of formal consistency in these linguistic expressions and turns variation from data to noise within the data.

Hong Kong English is a good example, and will form the main focus of this thesis. English is deeply embedded in Hong Kong due to the region's colonial history. In Hong Kong, English not only provides a way to achieve success, making it a form of

cultural capital (§2.3.2), it is also an identity marker (§2.3.4). Both scholars and the Hong Kong people understand that the English spoken and written in Hong Kong is linguistically different from the English spoken and written elsewhere. In recognition of this linguistic difference, some researchers have proposed the notion of Hong Kong English (HKE), saying that English in Hong Kong should be seen as a distinct linguistic variety. However, what the scholars see as HKE is not usually recognised by Hong Kong people. When they are able to identify the HKE features, they regard them as features of learners' English, pidgin English, or even bad English. This kind of English, according to the very people who speak it, should be avoided (Poon 2005).

The difference in attitudes between linguists and the Hong Kong English speakers makes defining HKE difficult. The issue is complicated further by the fact that Hong Kong people tend not to totally reject the notion of HKE. While they reject the notion of HKE on the basis that it is formally different from Standard English, they seem to view HKE used in computer-mediated communication (CMC) positively. As will be shown in Chapter Three of this thesis, not only are they able to recognise the features of HKE in CMC, they also tend to see these features as markers of Hong Kong identity. The difference in attitudes towards HKE in CMC and written and spoken HKE elsewhere gives rise to additional questions, however. Firstly, does it validate or invalidate the notion of HKE proposed by the scholars? Secondly, if HKE is a valid notion, should we only include features recognisable to Hong Kong people in HKE, or should we also include features identified by scholars which Hong Kong people do not acknowledge? Can one bound a certain set of features and call them

Hong Kong English, and if so, which features should be included and which should not?

Having highlighted the problems that arise when defining languages, dialects, and even varieties in the context of HKE, I propose that, in order to determine which Hong Kong English features are to its users systematically distinctive, thus constituting a linguistic variety in the eyes of these users, one has to examine the problem from a different viewpoint by looking at languages as collections of linguistic norms. By asking the people who use these features whether there are norms for using these features, one can see whether these people see these features as systematically distinctive, and therefore can be regarded as a linguistic variety. In this thesis, I look at how using the notion of linguistic norms can yield a better explanation of the phenomenon of Hong Kong English.

1.2 Structure of the thesis

Following this introductory chapter, in Chapter Two of this thesis, I present the sociolinguistics of Hong Kong, which is the background to the issue of Hong Kong English. The three main languages in Hong Kong – Cantonese, Mandarin, and English – are examined, with the focus on the English language. Then, I briefly discuss the phenomenon of language-mixing, in which Hong Kong people combine Cantonese and English when speaking to each other. This phenomenon has partly given rise to the notion of Hong Kong English, which is examined in the next section.

In the analysis of HKE, arguments made by various scholars for and against the notion are presented. To argue for the existence of HKE, researchers have analysed

the linguistic forms of HKE, including its phonology, morphology, and syntax. These are also presented in the chapter.

In Chapter Three, I explore computer-mediated communication in detail. As mentioned above, HKE features are more recognisable in CMC in the eyes of Hong Kong people, and this chapter examines this new medium of communication.

Different internet-using situations, as proposed by Crystal (2001), are studied, with the emphasis on synchronous chatgroups, in which CHKE features are particularly abundant. I analyse the change in language form due to the emergence of this medium, and discuss the reasons for this change. Then, I look at how the internet has affected the use of English among Hong Kong people, and how specific features emerge and become what can be identified as CMC-Hong Kong English (CHKE).

I have previously argued that CHKE should be regarded as a specific linguistic variety compared to other forms of written HKE (Poon 2005). However, various scholars have disputed the evidence for the distinctive form and function of CHKE, maintaining that the linguistic evidence is not sufficient for the set of features found in Hong Kong people's English online communication to be identified as a distinct variety. This disagreement reveals a theoretical-*cum*-methodological issue, namely that there is no consensus concerning what constitutes enough difference to make a variety distinguishable. The fact that different people have different definitions of "variety", and of similar terms like "dialect", "register", and even "language", also needs to be considered. In Chapter Four, I focus on how different scholars define these terms, in order to determine what CHKE is.

As mentioned above, I believe understanding CHKE using the concept of linguistic norms will help clarify the issues of HKE and CHKE. It will also help answer whether CHKE can be regarded as a variety. This is because, if users see norms in using a set of features (i.e. they see that using such features is in some sense “normal”), it implies that users see these features as systematically distinctive from other varieties, which in turns means that they see the features in question as a distinctive variety. In Chapter Five, I study the notion of norms and social norms. I first look at how various scholars understand norms and social norms. Then, I examine the notion of linguistic norms. On the basis of this understanding of norms and social norms, I propose a framework of linguistic norms. For people to communicate successfully, they would need to maintain and comply with certain sets of shared linguistic norms. I explain the framework, and use several examples to illustrate how linguistic norms work in this framework.

To verify whether this framework could successfully explain linguistic phenomena, I have conducted an online survey, in which participants were asked to express their attitudes towards and opinions regarding different aspects of CHKE. I conducted the survey to determine whether using CHKE in CMC has become a norm among Hong Kong people. Their answers in the survey also enable me to evaluate how useful the framework of linguistic norms I have proposed is for explaining the phenomenon of CHKE. Details of the survey and the results are presented in Chapter Six.

Discussion of the results is provided in Chapter Seven. In this chapter I assess whether the data collected fits into the social norm theories proposed by various scholars surveyed in Chapter Five. Then I focus on my linguistic norm framework,

and see to what extent the results support the framework. This is followed by the final chapter, in which I present my concluding remarks.

2.1 Background information

The island of Hong Kong (literally meaning “fragrant harbour”), off the southeast coast of China, was ruled by China’s Qing government until, following the First and Second Opium Wars, it was ceded to the British under the Treaty of Nanking in 1842. Subsequently, in 1860 and 1898, respectively, following further disputes between a powerful and assertive United Kingdom and a weak and weakening China, China leased to the British Government the Kowloon peninsula opposite Hong Kong Island and the hinterland that subsequently became known as the New Territories. During the Second World War, Hong Kong was occupied by Japan. In the 1950s, after the end of the Chinese Civil War and the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), many refugees and immigrants fled from Mainland China to Hong Kong, bringing cheap labour to the region. These workers enabled the dramatic growth of the manufacturing sector that took off in the 1950s.

Until 1997, the whole region was a colony of the United Kingdom. On 1st July 1997, instead of it being returned to the Qing government – which had been overthrown in 1912 – sovereignty over Hong Kong was handed to the PRC, which the Chinese Communist Party led by Mao Zedong had established in 1949. Today, as of 2010, Hong Kong is a Special Administrative Region (SAR), a self-governing region of the PRC, which has guaranteed the rights and freedoms of its people for at least the 50 years following 1997 (Hong Kong Government 1991: 6).

The population of Hong Kong is quite homogenous. Of the seven million Hong Kong residents, 95% are ethnically Chinese, and the rest of the population is made up mainly of Filipinos, Indonesians, and other South East Asians. Ethnically Caucasian people make up only 0.5% of the Hong Kong population (Census and Statistic Department, Hong Kong Government 2006). In spite of the relatively small number of Caucasian people, among whom are predominately native speakers of English from the U.S. and U.K., the English language plays an important part in the region. The news media are a good example. Chan (2002b: 101) comments that “[t]he English-language news media in Hong Kong have always been minority media in circulation and audience. Normal market mechanisms do not explain why the minority of readers could wield such disproportionate influence until the mid-1980s, when Hong Kong began the transition to Chinese rule”. I would argue that, still today, English plays a significant role in the field of media. For instance, the only two commercial television companies, TVB and ATV, which are licensed to do free-to-air broadcasts, each have an English language channel as well as a Cantonese language channel. Given that the English speaking community in the region is relatively small, it is somewhat surprising to see that half of the four free-to-air channels are in English. In what follows, I examine the languages in Hong Kong, and look at the social dynamics that have given rise to such an interesting sociolinguistic phenomenon, in which English is an important language despite the small number of native speakers.

2.2 Languages in Hong Kong

According to the 2006 government by-census, more than 90% of Hong Kong’s population use Cantonese as their everyday language, and about 4.5% of the

population speak other Chinese dialects. Only about 1% of Hong Kong people use Putonghua, the official language of the PRC, as their first language. Native speakers of English make up 2.8% of the population. The statistics also show that, despite the 1997 Handover, the percentage of Putonghua speakers in the population has not increased (it was 1.1% in 1996 and 0.9% in 2001), although the number of speakers has increased slightly from approximately 55,000 in 2001 to 60,000 in 2006. The number of native English speakers, on the other hand, has decreased from approximately 203,000 people in 2001 to 187,000 in 2006 (Census and Statistic Department Hong Kong Government 2006).

Despite the big contrast in the numbers of speakers of Cantonese, English, and Putonghua, it would be a mistake to assume that Hong Kong is largely a monolingual society. Bolton (2002: 41-43) argues that Hong Kong is, in fact, far from monolingual. Not only does English play an important role in the region, Putonghua permeated Hong Kong people's everyday lives before and after the Handover. The government as well as the general public in Hong Kong see these three languages as the major languages in the region. This is reflected in the Hong Kong government's constant efforts to have its citizens, through education, become biliterate and trilingual, which means to be proficient in written Chinese and English, as well as spoken Cantonese, Putonghua, and English (Education Bureau, Hong Kong Government 2006).

English in Hong Kong has been researched extensively by various scholars (§2.2.3), and some researchers claim that English in Hong Kong should be regarded as a variety, namely Hong Kong English (§2.5). The notion of Hong Kong English has

been a topic of debate and discussion since the 1980s, and this chapter focuses on that notion. Since the understanding of Hong Kong English requires an understanding of the sociolinguistics of Hong Kong, and as the Hong Kong linguistic situation involves Cantonese, Putonghua, and English, the sections which follow briefly discuss the use of these three spoken languages in Hong Kong.

2.2.1 Cantonese

Cantonese (guong2 dong1 wa2¹), literally meaning “Guangdong speech”, can be a slightly ambiguous term. It can refer to the Yue dialects as a whole, and also the regional standard which originated from the speech in Guangzhou (Whelpton 1999: 44). Hong Kong Cantonese, which is the variety I discuss here, is based on the Guangzhou standard with some specific local features.

Although Cantonese and other Chinese spoken varieties are often mutually unintelligible, and as Cantonese and the official spoken variety Putonghua are linguistically quite different, Hong Kong people in general see Cantonese as a dialect, understanding it as “Guangdong speech” of the Chinese language. Snow (1993) comments that, as many language varieties in China, including Cantonese and Putonghua, are mutually unintelligible, using the term ‘dialect’ to describe Cantonese “is misleading in that it gives the impression that somehow Cantonese and Mandarin [the dialect Putonghua is based on] are closer to each other than are ‘languages’ like French and Spanish” (1993: 15).

¹ Jyutping is used in this thesis for phonological descriptions. Jyutping, formally known as The Linguistic Society of Hong Kong Cantonese Romanization Scheme, is the Romanised system for Cantonese developed by the Linguistics Society of Hong Kong in 1993. The Arabic numeral (1 to 6) at the end of each syllable is to denote the tone of the word: 1 – high level or high falling (contour: 55/53); 2 – mid falling (contour: 35/25); 3 – mid level (contour: 33); 4 – low falling (contour: 21/11); 5 – low rising (contour: 13/23); 6 – low level (contour: 22). Further information can be found on <http://www.lshk.org/cantonese.php>.

Cantonese, as mentioned above, is spoken by the vast majority of Hong Kong's population in daily conversation. Even though Cantonese has a long history of being published in literature, it was still "playing a minor role in Hong Kong publishing during the 1980s" (Snow 1994: 139). The situation has not changed much today; although more books are published in Cantonese than in the 1980s, books written in Cantonese remain a minority in the local publishing world, and Hong Kong people in general would still regard Cantonese as mainly a spoken language (Matthews and Yip 1994: 402).

The belief that Cantonese is a spoken language is due mainly to the fact that the written language in Hong Kong is standard written Chinese (SWC), which is derived from the norms of Putonghua. When Hong Kong students learn the Chinese language, they are given texts in SWC, in which the syntactic structure is very different from everyday Cantonese. However, unlike people in Mainland China, who use Putonghua to read texts written in SWC, students in Hong Kong read and understand texts in Cantonese. This practice of reading out texts in their local dialects, according to Barnes (1982), was a prevalent practice in China before 1932. At that time, students would pronounce Chinese characters in their regional standard variety. This situation did not change until 1957, when the Chinese government made Putonghua the official medium of instruction in every school (Lam 1993:167). Hong Kong, not being under the PRC government at that time, retained the old way of learning Chinese.

As a result of this practice of reading SWC, Cantonese has a spectrum of social varieties. On one end of the spectrum is "high" Cantonese, the norms of which

largely follow those in Modern Standard Chinese (Lord and T'sou 1985: 7); and on the other end of the spectrum is “low” Cantonese, which has its own norms and is used in daily conversation. Which variety one uses depends on the context of the situation and the person to whom one is talking). Basically, the more formal the occasion is, the more likely one would use “high” Cantonese. News on television and radio and meetings in Hong Kong’s Legislative Council would use “high” Cantonese.

Hong Kong people in general view Cantonese positively. Lai (2001) conducted a questionnaire study with 134 high school leavers in Hong Kong. She found that more than half of the respondents thought that Cantonese was the language that best represented Hong Kong, and about one third thought that it was a superior language in present day Hong Kong. However, not many respondents thought it was an important language that could help them succeed in the 21st century, and only 1.6% of the students from middle-class backgrounds suggested that Cantonese should be used as the medium of instruction in secondary schools. Lai concluded that although Cantonese possessed high social value, it was “not considered an important language as far as academic and career developments [were] concerned” (2001: 121).

2.2.2 Putonghua

Another language that contributes to the sociolinguistics of Hong Kong is Putonghua. Putonghua, literally meaning “the common speech” or “the common language”, became the official language of the PRC in 1957. Because of the interaction between Hong Kong and Mainland China, Putonghua has played a role in the region since long before the end of colonialism. In 1974, the *Official Language Ordinance* stated that Chinese and English were to be the official languages of Hong Kong (Hong Kong Government 1974). With the changing economic and political context in the

1980s, using Putonghua as a medium of instruction was advocated by some scholars (for example, Kwo 1989). Also, in 1995, Chris Patten, the last British Governor, declared in his policy address that the use of the Chinese language should be promoted and that the teaching of Putonghua should be strengthened in schools.

The role of Putonghua became even more significant after the change of sovereignty. Zhang & Yang (2004) reported on the changes in language policy that reflected the government's emphasis on promoting the use of Putonghua:

Before 1998, Putonghua was offered, when schools were capable, only as a non-core and optional subject at primary schools from the 4th to the 6th years (referred to as Primary 4 to Primary 6) and secondary schools from the 1st to the 3rd years (referred to as Form 1 to Form 3). According to records from [the Education Bureau], Putonghua was offered as an independent and optional subject at about 60% of primary schools and at about 46% of secondary schools in Hong Kong during the academic year 1995-96. Since 1998, Putonghua has been officially made the core subject from Primary 1 to Primary 6 and from Form 1 to Form 5. In September 2000, up to 98% of primary and secondary schools offered Putonghua courses to their students (Education Bureau, Hong Kong Government 2000). Since 2000, Putonghua has also officially been a fully independent subject of the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE), the most important examination for secondary school students, normally taken at the end of five years of secondary school (after Form 5), to determine eligibility to continue studies in Form 6 and Form 7, which would, in turn, end with the matriculation examination to university, called Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE). (Zhang & Yang 2004: 146)

The change in socio-political environment has also favoured the use of Putonghua. Since 1997, the Chinese government has promoted the PRC-Hong Kong economic relationship. Zhang and Yang show that since the 1997 Handover, several economic policies initiated by the Chinese government, such as China's 'open-door' policy, a

policy that promotes trade and economic investment, and its entry to the World Trade Organisation in 2001, have “created a great need for Hong Kong to learn Putonghua” (Zhang & Yang 2004: 157).

Lai’s 2001 survey of attitudes towards the three languages shows that Hong Kong students in general have a positive attitude towards Putonghua. The students in the survey said that they would like to learn Putonghua because it could help them communicate with people in Mainland China and Taiwan. They also agreed that Hong Kong would be more prosperous if Putonghua were used more widely in society. However, only a few respondents thought that Putonghua was an important language, and the majority thought that being able to speak fluent Putonghua would not make them appear more educated. Regarding this language, Lai drew the following conclusion:

[T]here is little evidence to show that Hong Kong is transforming from a diglossic society into a triglossic society since Putonghua is used only among a restricted minority and its functions and status within the community are not yet defined. (Lai 2001: 129)

Also, the increased importance of Putonghua caused by shifts in government policies is still not comparable to the importance of English. In many schools, there are one or two Putonghua classes a week, considerably fewer than the number of English classes, which is usually about five each week. Even though the general public see the growing need to learn Putonghua, they would not put it before learning English, which is seen as an international language that would lead to a good career.

2.2.3 English

Being the language of the ex-colonisers who ruled for more than a century and who left little more than a decade ago, English is deeply entrenched in Hong Kong.

Pennington (1998) looked at the history of English in Hong Kong and divided it into three stages.

The Early Stage: Pidgin English (18th century)

English was first introduced to Hong Kong as early as the 18th century. People used mainly English lexis with mainly Cantonese grammar. Socially, there were two contradictory factors. By Chinese government decree, only minimal contact was allowed between Chinese and foreigners, and it was also illegal to teach the Chinese language to non-Chinese (since the Chinese language had always been considered to be one language by the Chinese people, it was not clear whether it was Cantonese, Putonghua, or other Chinese dialects that the government was prohibiting from being taught), even though there were many Chinese grammars written by westerners available. On the other hand, there was considerable desire for such contact on the part of Chinese people.

The Middle Stage: Linguistic Middlemen (19th century)

Hong Kong people started learning English from English missionary outposts and religious schools in Hong Kong (St. Paul's College was founded in 1851, Diocesan Girl's School in 1860, Diocesan Boy's School in 1869, and St. Joseph's in 1876). These students "gained status as a new elite class to which others... aspired" (Pennington 1998: 26). Bolton (2003: 84-85) sums up this part of the history by saying that,

[f]or much of the history of colonial Hong Kong, English remained the language of a minority, comprising the British community of colonial administrators, army and navy personnel, the business community and their dependents. It also became a second language for the local Chinese merchant elite, who rose to power towards the end of the nineteenth century.

Present Day (20th – 21st centuries)

As the knowledge of English among people in Hong Kong increased with the spread of education, English became an important second language and now functions not only in government, law, and education, but in society in general. A census conducted by the Hong Kong Government in 2001 showed that 43% of the population claimed to be able to speak English (Bolton 2003: 87). Although Hong Kong Chinese still speak in Cantonese to one another, the Cantonese they speak includes some English lexis. Pennington (1998: 28) finds this comparable to the earlier pidgin in being a highly variable mixture of essentially Cantonese grammar on the one hand and English lexis on the other.

The history presented above shows how English has permeated the lives of Hong Kong people through the years. When Hong Kong became a British colony, English became the language of government administration, education, and the law. It became an integral part of the administrative system of Hong Kong before English was widely used by Hong Kong Chinese in their daily lives. Although the status of Chinese has risen since the Handover, English remains an important language in the territory.

Luke and Richards (1982) reported that before 1974 English was the only language used for communication within the government and between the government and its people. Since then, Chinese has been recognised as an official language, along with English. After the Handover, according to the *Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region* (National People's Congress 1991: 7), English "may also be used as an official language" in addition to the Chinese language. Although English no longer has the status of sole official language in Hong Kong, its importance in the government, as well as among the general public, has not decreased. Evans & Green (2001) surveyed the language used in the public and private sectors, and found that English continued to function as the "unmarked language of internal and external written communication" (2001: 247). A similar study by Evans and Green in 2003 indicated that, among Chinese professionals, reading and writing in English plays an important role in their lives. Most of their documents, such as e-mails, faxes, memos and letters, are written in English.

English also plays a big role in education. Many children begin learning English in kindergarten, when they are three or four years old, and English is a compulsory subject in schools until the end of secondary school. In both of the public examinations, the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) and the Hong Kong Advanced Level (HKAL), both Chinese and English are compulsory subjects, and failing either of them almost guarantees an unsuccessful application to university. However, English is the more important of the two language subjects because, when considering applications, the majority of the university departments rate English more highly than Chinese. Each year, one can see a number of cases in which students who fail HKAL Chinese are still admitted to university because of

their outstanding performance in other subjects. Nevertheless, none of the students who fail the English HKAL are admitted, even if they pass all other subjects with flying colours.

The issue of medium of instruction (MOI) in education also reflects the importance of English in the region. After the change of sovereignty, the government decided that Chinese should be the MOI in all secondary schools. The Education Bureau provided the following reason for doing so:

with the use of Chinese as MOI lifting language barriers in the study of most subjects, students will be better able to understand what is taught, analyse problems, express views, develop an enquiring mind and cultivate critical thinking. Mother tongue teaching thus leads to better cognitive and academic development. (Education Bureau, Hong Kong Government 1997: 3)

However, the government allowed 100 schools to continue using English as the medium of instruction (EMI schools). These EMI schools were schools that had been regarded as prestige schools, producing students who had higher achievement. As a result, the MOI issue was tied to the quality of the schools. Schools that used Chinese as the medium of instruction (CMI schools) were regarded as second-class schools by the general public (Tsui et al. 1999). Seeing these responses to the change in language policy, researchers observed that “[p]arents [had] always wanted English medium education. The business sector [had] always demanded more and better English” (Tsui et al. 1999: 197). Despite the government’s efforts to promote the use of Chinese, English is still seen as very important because of its various functions in society. This is discussed below.

2.3 Functions of English in Hong Kong

English has been closely related to the daily lives of the people of Hong Kong, so it is not surprising to see it performing various functions there. In what follows, I discuss the various functions that the English language has in the community.

2.3.1 English as a tool to success

The economy of Hong Kong depends largely on import and export, tourism, and financial services. All of these fields are outward looking and depend on interaction with organisations and people from other countries, so it is not a surprise to see that having a good command of English – considered the global language – is one of the major factors that determine the success of people in these fields. Many firms and companies that deal with other countries require their staff members, especially those who are in higher positions, to speak fluent English. In the vast majority of high-paying professions, such as medicine, law, and accountancy, English is commonplace as an unmarked language. Examinations in the professional qualifications for these professions are all conducted in English. So, the better the English one speaks, the better chance one has of obtaining a good job and of climbing up the professional and social ladder.

As early as the 1970s, a command of English was seen as necessary if one hoped to get a good job. Fu's (1975) survey found that 84% of the 561 secondary-school students agreed that competency in English was necessary when seeking a good job. This attitude did not change in the 1990s. Littlewood et al. (1996) surveyed 2,156 first-year students from four universities, and 93% of them said that they learned English in order to improve their career prospects. Boyle (1996) interviewed 1,903 professionals, civil servants, and businessmen, and found that almost all of them

agreed that English was important for their careers. Boyle (1997: 6) aptly concluded that “for Hong Kong people, proficiency in English was the high road to a better job”.

2.3.2 English as a form of cultural capital

The concept of cultural capital was proposed by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. According to Bourdieu, economic capital is not the only factor that determines one’s social class. Three other forms of capital – namely cultural, social, and symbolic capital – also play a role. Economic capital is a person’s wealth and capacity for earning; cultural capital relates to different kinds of useful knowledge usually acquired through education; social capital includes a person’s social network and relationships to other people; and symbolic capital has to do with one’s prestige and honour, which are more intangible in nature, and the other three forms of capital all have symbolic value. These different forms of capital are interconnected. Economic, cultural and social capital can interchange with each other. For example, one’s knowledge of law (i.e., cultural capital), can help one gain a job as a lawyer, earning a high salary (i.e., economic capital) (Bourdieu 1986).

In Bourdieu’s theory, linguistic capital is seen as a kind of cultural capital. When one can speak certain languages (or certain forms of a language) legitimised by society, one possesses linguistic capital. These “certain languages” are usually the national language of a country, or the language of the (ex) colonisers. Linguistic capital, like cultural capital, can be converted into other forms of capital. For instance, in the early colonial days of Sri Lanka, the ability to speak English fluently meant that a native Sri Lankan could use this linguistic skill to get a well-paid job in the government (Canagarajah 2000). The English language, in this case, was linguistic capital, and possessing it permitted a Sri Lankan to gain economic capital.

Chan (2002a) says that English has become linguistic capital in Hong Kong. She looks at the social discourses that led to the changes in the MOI in secondary schools in 1998. These discourses show that Hong Kong people regard English as a form of cultural capital. Thus, since in Hong Kong, the better one's ability to speak English, the higher one can climb the social ladder, she concludes that students and parents "regard the language as cultural capital, which can later be converted into economic capital" (Chan 2002a: 277).

2.3.3 English as a linguistic habitus of Hong Kong

The notion of habitus is also proposed by Bourdieu. Habitus is a set of dispositions that makes individuals inclined to act and react in certain ways. The dispositions give rise to practices, perceptions, and attitudes that are not regulated by any rule or law recognised by the individuals. According to Bourdieu, in a linguistic market – which is an agreed notion of what can be said and what should be censored – a language used by a privileged few is promoted to the status of standard language through the education system, whilst the use of other languages and dialects is discouraged. The education system also functions to maintain the legitimised language. The legitimisation and the maintenance of the standard language gradually constitute the formation of a linguistic habitus (Bourdieu 1991: 37-42).

Professionals in the fields of business, law, and education claim that English has become characteristic of Hong Kong. This characteristic, according to these people, is essential to Hong Kong society. They worry that a drop in the standard of English would harm Hong Kong as a commercial and international city, which has a well-established administrative and legal system. Through these observations, Chan

(2002a: 281) argues that “the English language has become a habitus of the community”.

2.3.4 English as an identity marker of the Hong Kong people

It is widely agreed not only by linguists, but also people in general, that language and national identity are intimately related. Often, people are not accepted as being “genuinely” from a country because they speak the language with a foreign accent, or are unable to speak that language at all. Joseph (2004: 98-125) examines the work of different scholars, and discusses how, in various ways, these scholars approached the relationship between nations and their standard languages. Despite their differences, one consensus among the scholars was that all acknowledged the strong bond between a nation and its language (or languages).

Brewer (1999) says that the identities of Hong Kong people have been in transition since the 1980s. In establishing her model, she wrote that, in Hong Kong, people were negotiating between two identities – being a “Chinese” person, the more inclusive ethnic identity, and being a “Hong Konger”, the more exclusive regional identity. Tong et al. (1999: 292) further develop this point. They say that the language choice of a person in conversation depends mostly on whether he or she regarded himself or herself as being more of a “Chinese” person or more of a “Hong Konger”.

As mentioned above, more than 95% of the population in Hong Kong is ethnically Chinese. Many of them speak Cantonese as their first language. Based on this observation, one can suggest that speaking Cantonese is an identity marker of being a “Hong Konger”. Speaking Putonghua – the national language of the PRC, which is

the country to which Hong Kong belongs – is an important identity marker of being a “Chinese” person.

English, alongside Cantonese and Putonghua, marks the identity of the Hong Kong people. Lai (2001) surveyed 134 senior-secondary-school students, and found that they agreed with the notion, “English is part of my life” (2001: 124). In examining the social discourses concerning the MOI in Hong Kong, Chan (2002a: 281) also suggests that insofar as English is a habitus of the people in Hong Kong, it has become “part and parcel of the Hong Kong identity”.

The notion, however, has not gone unchallenged. Studying the language use in various domains in Hong Kong, Johnson (1994: 182) has concluded that English is merely used instrumentally in Hong Kong society, and that there are “no social or cultural roles for English to play among Hong Kong Chinese”. The function of the language, he argues, is to communicate with expatriates and the outside world; English has no social or cultural function in the community, since Hong Kong Chinese use the language rarely in conversation among themselves. In her analysis of students’ attitudes to the learning of English, Lai (1999: 280) likewise states that English is only for instrumental use.

Hyland (1997) surveys the language attitudes of university students in Hong Kong. He finds that it is the instrumental value that motivates students to learn English. This is because English gives no social benefits to its users, and English does not motivate Hong Kong people “to embrace Western culture and its values” (1997: 207).

Yang and Lau (2003) take a similar stance. They say that “the need for high standards of English [is] invariably an economic one” (2003: 109). This implies that

English is merely for instrumental use, and that it has no social roles to play. The interesting point here is that Yang and Lau refer specifically to “high standards of English”, leaving space for discussion of the social roles of low-standard or non-standard English in Hong Kong.

The English spoken by Hong Kong people is different from standard varieties of English, both phonetically and syntactically. This “below-standard” English is known by Hong Kong people themselves as “Chinglish”, “Pidgin English”, or simply “bad English”. Linguists generally reject such labels, maintaining that this variety should be regarded as Hong Kong English — a neutral designation — instead of a non-standard variety of English. The notion of Hong Kong English will be further discussed in §2.5.

2.4 The code-mixing phenomenon in Hong Kong

Linguists have long been aware of the fact that people who can speak two or more languages usually use more than one language when they converse with one another; consequently, the study of bilingualism has emerged in discourse analysis, as well as in other fields of linguistics. As Hong Kong people are in general bilingual in Cantonese and English, the way they communicate with one another can be described and discussed in terms of bilingualism and code-switching/mixing.

The terms code-switching and code-mixing can be quite confusing at times. Some scholars tend to use them interchangeably, while others use them to denote different notions. Myers-Scotton (1988/2000) discusses this issue. Myers-Scotton defines code-switching as “the use of two or more linguistic

varieties in the same conversation, without prominent phonological assimilation of one variety to another” (2000: 142). She also mentions that, while “some writers use ‘mixing’ for what is referred to here as ‘switching’”, other writers “use mixing for intrasentential shifts only, reserving ‘switching’ for intersentential switches” (ibid.: 143). Some even use ‘mixing’ “for what they see as a development beyond switching, with more integration for the two varieties than under switching” (ibid.). Here, for ease of discussion, I shall use only the term code-mixing, with the notion meaning the use of two or more linguistic varieties in the same conversation.

Although, as mentioned in §2.2.1, Cantonese is spoken by the vast majority of people in Hong Kong on a daily basis, when Hong Kong people speak to one another, seldom do they use only Cantonese. They insert English lexis sporadically in their speech. Gibbons (1979) was one of the earliest researchers to look at the code-mixing phenomenon in Hong Kong. He studied the way in which students in the University of Hong Kong – an English-medium university – spoke to one another, and found that the language was based on Cantonese mixed with many elements borrowed from English. He argued that the language these students used had “to some extent developed into a separate system... which differ[ed] in a number of respects from Cantonese” (Gibbons 1979: 34-35). Similarly, instead of saying that Hong Kong people spoke Cantonese, David Li used the term “mixed code” to refer to their everyday spoken language.

Not recognised as an autonomous spoken language but extremely pervasive is “mixed code”, which occurs when English words, typically below the clause level, are

“sprinkled” to the base language Cantonese, hence “intra-sentential code-switching”... (Li 1999: 71-72).

Scholars who use code-mixing as an approach to describe this linguistic phenomenon in Hong Kong tend to see the linguistic varieties separately. Supporting this viewpoint, there are studies which show that each variety in Hong Kong has its own functions in the community. For instance, Yau (1993) argues that written Chinese and English have different functions in Hong Kong. In written media, mixing English lexemes in a Chinese text can “create specific moods and appeal to people’s emotions” (Yau 1993: 29), as well as providing linguistic information which “either do[es] not have a Chinese equivalent or ha[s] a Chinese translation which is not sufficiently well-established to ensure its acceptance by all bilingual readers” (ibid.: 30). Additionally, the psychological experiment conducted by Yeung & Wong in 2004 shows that trilingual teachers from Hong Kong had distinct self-concepts – the way they understood themselves – that were respectively tied to English, Cantonese, and Putonghua. In other words, for each of the teachers, instead of having one verbal self-concept, their “English self” was different from “Cantonese self” or “Putonghua self”.

Noting that the linguistic varieties performed different functions in Hong Kong, scholars analysed how speakers mixed Cantonese and English in the same conversation to perform various social functions. Luke (1984/1998) proposes that Hong Kong people mix English and Cantonese in their conversation for two reasons. The first reason is “orientational”, which is used to “display” the speaker’s social identities, and which is a strategy to show Westernisation and

Modernism (Luke 1998: 156). In other words, the orientational reason for inserting English elements into their ‘low’ Cantonese conversations is to allow speakers to perform their identity when they communicate with other people. The second reason for mixing two codes is “expedient”. It happens when a term of Western origin has no known equivalent in “low” Cantonese, and where the use of a “high” Cantonese equivalent, if it exists, would be stylistically inappropriate. One of the examples provided by Luke is the term *form* (meaning a piece of document). It has no known “low” Cantonese equivalent, and its “high” Cantonese equivalent *biu2 gaak5* (表格) is not appropriate in terms of style. This results in Hong Kong people using the English term in their Cantonese conversation when they are talking about form.

A number of discourse analysts focus on the first reason (i.e., orientational) when they examine bilingual conversations. For example, Myers-Scotton (1999) attempts to explain why speakers in western Kenya mix codes in various circumstances. She argues that, in certain circumstances, a certain code would be the unmarked choice, which means the code is seen as normal in that circumstance. However, speakers sometimes mix other codes in the conversation, and these would be seen as marked choices in that context, in order to perform various social functions, for example, emphasising their identities, showing their authority, and distancing themselves from their interlocutors. The second reason (i.e., expedient) is also a linguistic strategy for speakers to communicate more economically and effectively. Sometimes without realising it, speakers utilise their linguistic repertoire by mixing codes in order to achieve certain communicative goals. It is noted that these two

reasons are not mutually exclusive. In fact, code mixing is usually motivated by both expedient and orientational reasons at the same time.

Li (2002) suggests four motivations for Hong Kong people to mix codes, and these motivations are similar to the ones proposed in Myers-Scotton's (1999) framework. They are *euphemism*, *specificity*, *bilingual punning*, and *principle of economy*.

Firstly, people choose to use English lexemes instead of their “low” Cantonese equivalent because of *euphemism*. Terms seen as taboo or too explicit are likely to be expressed in English so that one can avoid expressing these objects or ideas in Cantonese, which is the first language, and thus a closer language, for the majority of Hong Kong people. Secondly, an English expression is sometimes preferred because of its *specificity* in meaning. Sometimes, the English expression “is more general or specific compared with its near-synonymous counterparts” (Li 2002: 88). For example, the English term *book* (as a verb) is used because its meaning is more specific than its Chinese counterpart 訂 (deng6), which can also mean ‘to order something’ or ‘to made to measure’. Thirdly, mixing English into Chinese/Cantonese “is the deliberate attempt to create double meaning” (ibid.: 90), in other words, to generate *bilingual puns*. Li has provided an example that comes from the title of a newspaper column:

著數有得 FUN
zeok6 sou3 jau5 dak1 fan1
offer exist have obtain fun/sharing
‘fun offer to share (with readers)’ (ibid.: 91)

In this column title, *FUN* “is embedded in a Cantonese clause featuring a bilingual pun and double meaning: ‘**fun** offer to **share** (with reader)’” (ibid.: 92), as *fun* also means share in Cantonese. According to Li, bilingual punning is a common feature in Hong Kong advertisements. Using bilingual puns allows writers to utilise two or more languages to communicate effectively.

Finally, code mixing among Hong Kong people is motivated by the *principle of economy*. An English expression is preferred “because it is shorter and thus requires less linguistic effort compared with its Chinese/Cantonese equivalent” (ibid.: 94). For instance, using the term *check-in* would be much easier to use than its Cantonese equivalent 辦理登機手續 (baan6 lei5 dang1 gei1 sau2 zuk6):

你 check in 咗未啊?
nei5 check in zo2 mei6 aa3
you check in ASP² not yet FP³
‘Have you checked in (for your flight) already?’ (ibid.: 95)

你辦理咗登機手續未啊?
nei5 baan6 lei5 zo2 dang1 gei1 sau2 zuk6 mei6 aa3
you go through ASP board plane procedure not yet FP
‘Have you checked in (for your flight) already?’ (ibid.: 95)

As Li himself argues, his model is more adequate than Luke’s (1984/1998) “orientational” and “expedient” model because “lexical and stylistic equivalents across languages may be difficult to establish owing to the slippery notion of ‘translation equivalent’” (2002: 95). Despite the differences, both

² Key to abbreviations: ASP, ‘aspectual marker’; FP, ‘sentence-final particle’, also known as ‘end-of-sentence particle’.

³ Sentence-final particle, also known as end-of-sentence particle, is common in the Chinese languages. It is a lexeme that appears at the end of a sentence. They do not have referential meaning, but they can carry grammatical functions such as marking questions and aspect, or they may provide pragmatic information, for instance exclamation, assertion, or emphasis (Packard 1993: 36).

models are based on the assumption that each language has its own functions in society, and speakers fulfil their communicative goals by using two or more languages in the same conversation so that the functions of each language can be performed.

This assumption, nonetheless, is not taken for granted. Some scholars argue that language alternation does not necessarily imply that speakers intend to make use of the functions of each of the languages that are mixed in the conversation. Gafaranga contends that “the orderliness (i.e. the possibility) of language alternation among bilingual speakers is accountable, not in terms of the identities society associates with the languages involved, but rather in terms of the locally relevant linguistic identities participants have adopted” (2001: 1916).

After examining the bilingual conversations between Rwandans who speak French and Kinyarwanda, Gafaranga (2001) found that the speakers did not mark their identity by using any one of the two languages. Instead, their identities are made apparent by mixing the two linguistic varieties. This can also imply that, even though these people speak two languages, what they speak every day can be seen as a single variety made up of features of French and Kinyarwanda.

I believe that Hong Kong is in a similar situation. Even though the vast majority of Hong Kong people claim that Cantonese is their everyday language, their identities as Hong Kong people are not marked by this language alone. The English language is also heavily involved in constructing their identities.

Mixing English in their Cantonese conversation not only performs the functions Luke (1984/1998) and Li (2002) suggest; the mixture of the two languages can also be seen as one variety marking their Hong Kong identities.

The idea that Hong Kong people speak a bilingual variety is supported by a documentary film produced by Chen and Carper (2005). In the film, various Hong Kong people were interviewed and they were asked how a bilingual expression *present —[㗎]project⁴* should be expressed solely in Cantonese. Without exception, none of the interviewees could come up with a satisfying Cantonese expression. This showed that people in Hong Kong found it hard to avoid not using English in their Cantonese exchanges. This code-mixing phenomenon is especially prevalent among the younger generation, mainly because of their better knowledge of English. One interviewee aptly commented that using only Cantonese in their daily conversation was stylistically strange, and it was not normal to do so.

Moreover, analysing speakers' motivations to use mixed code raises another question. This is because of the assumption based on which the analyses are made. This assumption is that code-mixing is abnormal, given that only abnormal actions are explained. Usually, when an action is seen as normal, one would not seek the motivations behind it. For instance, one would not ask or try to explain the motivation for a person to cross the road when the green pedestrian light shows, because in that situation crossing the road would be the normal thing to do. By contrast, one would seek the motivation for someone *not* crossing the road in that situation, as not crossing the road would be seen as abnormal. The same idea can be

⁴ —[㗎] (*jat1 go3*) – *jat1* means “one” and *go3* is a class marker.

applied to the analyses of the motivation for code-mixing here. Seeking the motivations seems to suggest that the scholars assume the existence of a norm. In the cases of Luke (1984/1998) and Li (2002), one could see this norm as being: “‘low’ Cantonese is used unless there is a lack of a term in ‘low’ Cantonese’. These scholars then have an anomaly to explain when speakers mix English in low Cantonese, and they look to the speakers’ motivations for violating the perceived norm.

In order to assess the validity of analysing code-mixing in terms of speaker’s motivations, one has to ask whether this assumption is correct. This in turn means that one has to see whether the norm correctly describes the situation, because the assumption would be unwarranted if the norm on which it is based does not accurately describe the reality.

In Luke’s (1984/1998) discussion, he mentions the “high” Cantonese term 表格 (biu2 gaak3), “form”. Luke says that the English word *form* is used in Hong Kong people’s daily conversation because there is no equivalent term in “low” Cantonese. However, one could easily think of the “low” Cantonese term 表 (biu2), which would usually be used as the English term “form” in day-to-day conversation among Hong Kong people. Below are three expressions using, respectively, (1) the “high” Cantonese term, (2) the English term, and (3) the “low” Cantonese term:

(1) 我最近填咗張表格申請獎學金，希望得啦。

ngo3 zui3 gan6 tin4 zo2 jeong1 biu2 gaak3 san1 cing2 jeong2 hok6 gam1, hei1 mong6 dak1 laa1
I recently fill-in CL⁵ form apply scholarship , hope succeed FP

⁵ Key to abbreviations: CL, ‘class marker’; FP ‘sentence-final particle’, also known as ‘end-of-sentence particle’.

(2) 我最近填咗張 form 申請獎學金，希望得啦。

ngo3 zui3 gan6 tin4 zo2 jeong1 form san1 cing2 jeong2 hok3 gam1 , hei1 mong6 dak1 laa1

I recently fill-in CL *form* apply scholarship , hope succeed FP

(3) 我最近填咗張表申請獎學金，希望得啦。

ngo3 zui3 gan6 tin4 zo2 jeong1 biu2 san1 cing2 jeong2 hok6 gam1 , hei1 mong6 dak1 laa1

I recently fill-in CL *form* apply scholarship , hope succeed FP

Translation: I recently filled in a form to apply for a scholarship. I hope I will succeed [in getting the scholarship].

Of the above three expressions, (2) and (3) are both unmarked and sound normal to most Hong Kong speakers of Cantonese. Although the term *biu2* can also mean “chart”, there is often enough information from the context – both from the immediate linguistic context⁶ and from the circumstances – in which the term is used for hearers to understand that it means “application form” instead of “chart”. This is similar to English *form*, which also has multiple meanings, and the immediate linguistic context usually supplies enough information as to which meaning this term denotes. What is more surprising is that, after asking the opinions of a number of Hong Kong people, (1) apparently also sounds normal. Some of the people I asked commented that all of the expressions were equally normal. Choosing which of the three terms to use depends on which word came to mind first. This suggests that the norm ““low” Cantonese is used unless there is no equivalent term in “low” Cantonese” does not accurately describe the linguistic situation in Hong Kong.

Additionally, given the dynamic nature of language, if there is a norm to use “low” Cantonese whenever possible, then one would expect the English terms mixed in “low” Cantonese to be unstable. A “low” Cantonese term would soon be generated to

⁶ If the term *biu2* means “chart”, then the class marker would usually be *go3* instead of *zeong1*.

replace the English term to fill in the semantic gap, perhaps by borrowing and nativising the English word, as has occurred with, for instance, 的士 (*dik1 si2* – taxi), 巴士 (*ba1 si2* – bus), and 菲林 (*fei1 lam2* – camera film). Yet, many English terms stay on unassimilated. For example, the term “project” has not given rise to any “low” Cantonese equivalent and it continues to be used in day-to-day conversations among Hong Kong speakers. This also suggests that the norms on which the analyses of motivation for code-mixing in Hong Kong are based are not realistic, and looking at bilingual conversation as a separate variety, as Gafaranga (2001) argues, would be a more suitable way to look at the code-mixing phenomenon in Hong Kong.

Looking at bilingual conversations as one variety, instead of as two (or more) languages being involved, also opens up a space for people to see bilingual exchanges and expressions not only in terms of the functions of individual languages, but also of how the speakers use bilingual conversation to achieve various communicative goals. The idea of seeing a bilingual or multilingual conversation as a variety can also be a basis on which new varieties of English are recognised. As mentioned in §2.2.3, while many regard the English spoken in Hong Kong as “pidgin English” and “bad English” because of its Chinese/Cantonese influence, in the last 15 years scholars have started to see it as an English variety of its own, and to explore the notion of Hong Kong English.

2.5 Hong Kong English

The notion of Hong Kong English has been a topic for discussion since the beginning of the 1980s. In the analysis of the functions and status of English in Hong Kong, Luke and Richards maintained that Hong Kong English did not exist, because there

was “no societal basis for ‘indigenization’ or ‘nativization’ of English in Hong Kong” (1982: 55). Firstly, Hong Kong was following English grammar according to the rules of British and American English, instead of their own rules. Secondly, as English was rarely used by Hong Kong Chinese to communicate with each other, there was “neither the societal need nor opportunity for the development of a stable Cantonese variety of spoken English” (ibid.). In a report on the sociolinguistics of Hong Kong, Li (1999) also argued against the existence of Hong Kong English for similar reasons. He pointed out that there was “no societal basis for a nativized variety of “Hong Kong English”, because “the norms of correctness as referenced in the key domains of education, government, business and law follow those of standard English varieties” (1999: 95).

However, one should note that, although Luke and Richards (1982) and Li (1999) did not think that there was a distinct variety of English in Hong Kong, they were not unaware of the fact that the English language as spoken by the Hong Kong people was not the same as the standard varieties. To account for this, Luke and Richards (1982) proposed the notion of a “cline of proficiency”. In this cline, “the proficiency of individual speakers may range from minimal to native-like,” depending on the speakers’ education and social background (1982: 56). According to Luke and Richards, difference between speakers in the cline was idiosyncratic, which implied that there was not a specific pattern of speaking English among the speakers in Hong Kong.

Bolton (2002: 41-47), however, argued for the existence of Hong Kong English. According to Bolton, the arguments underpinning the non-existence of Hong Kong

English were “myths”. He used Butler’s (1997) model as a reference to support his stance. In the model, a variety of English had to have (1) a distinctive accent; (2) a culturally specific set of words and phrases; (3) a history that showed that English had been in the community for a long time; (4) a literature written in that variety of English with no apology for the variety of English; and (5) reference works such as dictionaries and style guides. Bolton (2002) showed that Hong Kong English fulfilled all of these criteria. He concluded that Hong Kong English exists as a distinct variety.

Approaching the issue from a different perspective, Joseph (2004: 132-161) also said that Hong Kong English existed. He was aware of the Hong Kong public’s opinions on the decline of the English standard among the people in the community, and he examined the notion of Hong Kong English, in which people claimed that this variety of English had its own specific patterns and features. Noticing that the “errors” that Hong Kong people made had a certain specific pattern, and that the pattern was to a large extent the same as the features of Hong Kong English, he concluded that “the emergence of ‘Hong Kong English’ and ‘the decline of English standards in Hong Kong’ are *one and the same thing*, looked at from two different points of view” (Joseph 2004: 147).

Schneider (2003) proposed a model to explain the developmental process of a variety of English in a colony or an ex-colony. In this model, there were five phases for the development of an English variety. The first phase was *foundation* in which “English began to be used on a regular basis in a country that was not English-speaking before, because a significant group of English speakers settles in a new country for an

extended period” (2003: 244). The second phase was *exonormative stabilization*, in which English was spoken regularly in a new environment because “colonies and settlers’ communities tend to stabilize politically, normally under foreign, mostly British, dominance” (ibid.: 245). Then, English may go through the third phase, *nativization*. According to Schneider, this was a very important phase:

The third phase... is the most important, the most vibrant one, the central phase of both cultural and linguistic transformation in which both parties [i.e., the colonisers and the colonised] involved realize that something fundamental has been changing for good: traditional realities, identities, and sociopolitical alignments are discerned as no longer conforming to a changed reality, and the potentially painful process of gradually replacing them with something different, a new identity reflecting a changed reality, combining the old and the new, is in full swing. This process has immediate linguistic consequences, for the drastically increased ranges of communication between the parties involved now makes language use a major practical issue and an expression of new identity. (ibid.: 247)

Having gone through Phase 1 in the nineteenth century, and Phase 2 in much of the twentieth century, Schneider said that Hong Kong started Phase 3 in the 1960s.

During the 1960s, “mass bilingualism” replaced “elitist bilingualism” due to various reasons such as the rapid growth of the economy, and the introduction of “Anglo-Chinese” secondary schools. In conjunction with the social changes brought about by negotiations on the future status of the territory, most Hong Kong Chinese people had adopted a Hong Kong identity in which English was an essential component.

Schneider also acknowledged the fact that there were disputes concerning the status of the variety, which could be signs of progression to Phase 4, *endonormative stabilization*. In this phase, there is “the gradual adoption and acceptance of an

indigenous linguistic norm, supported by a new, locally rooted linguistic self-confidence” (ibid.: 249). Finally, the development of the English variety could enter Phase 5, *differentiation*, by which time the English variety has emerged and become “a thing of the past, recorded and remembered in recent history” (ibid.: 253).

Schneider stated that it was not clear whether Hong Kong would step into Phase 4 of English variety development, because of the many political uncertainties. Despite all the ever-changing factors, one could still see a slow “transition from acceptance of a distant mother country as the source of both practical power and linguistic and cultural guidance to gradual independence” (ibid.: 247) in the society of Hong Kong. This is in line with my argument. I believe that, through computer-mediated communication, Hong Kong people are developing norms of using Hong Kong English. These norms could be a factor helping Hong Kong English to develop into its fourth phase. This will be further discussed in Chapter Seven.

Although the scholars quoted above have different points of view and approaches to understanding the English spoken by Hong Kong people, they all agree that the English spoken in Hong Kong is different from the English spoken elsewhere. Both Luke and Richards (1984) and Li (1999) acknowledge that the English spoken by Hong Kong people has a number of recognisable phonological features. Luke and Richards (1984: 58-61) lay out the typical features of a “mid-proficiency” speaker of English in Hong Kong, and Li (1999: 100) says “Chinese Hongkongers, including highly educated speakers bilingual in Cantonese and English, tend to speak with a marked “Hong Kong accent””. However, none of them believes that Hong Kong English exists, the major reason, as mentioned above, being that there is no societal

function for such a variety. They argue that as English is not used in intra-ethnic communication in Hong Kong society, Hong Kong English does not have a ground on which it can develop. Moreover, the norms of English in Hong Kong are still “exonormative”, which means that the norms of correctness follow those of other places, mainly Britain and the U.S.

Countering the “exonormative” argument, Bolton (2002: 48-49) points out that several reference works are being produced. As of 2002, the Macquarie Dictionary Company was planning to publish a dictionary of Hong Kong English. A database of around one million words of English in Hong Kong has also been set up as a part of the International Corpus of English. Although these references may not immediately change the norms of English in Hong Kong from “exonormative” to “endonormative” (i.e., the norms of correctness following the ones of the speakers’ own society), the fact that the forms, patterns, and features of Hong Kong English are documented as a variety instead of as “wrong English usage” shows the first step towards the recognition of Hong Kong English as a distinct variety of English.

Regarding the second argument that Luke and Richards put forward to support their stance that Hong Kong English does not exist, Bolton (2002) says that English, especially in its written form, is actually used in intra-ethnic communication. He cites the data obtained by Bacon-Shone and Bolton (1993). The data show that English has infiltrated the Hong Kong community in various ways, and the use of English among Hong Kong Chinese is not at all rare. The statistics in the work of Evans and Green (2003) also show that English is prevalent in written communication between Hong Kong Chinese both in the public and in the private

sectors. Evans and Green also say that, although spoken English is used less frequently, it is still an important form of verbal communication between people at work.

The fact that English is used in intra-ethnic communication provides a space for Hong Kong English to develop. Additionally, English has a long history in the community, and English in Hong Kong has distinctive patterns and features (discussed below). Even though, as Schneider (2003) and Joseph (2004) have mentioned, Hong Kong English is still emerging and being nativised, one can still conclude that Hong Kong English exists as a variety.

2.5.1 The linguistic form of Hong Kong English

According to Kloss (1967), a new linguistic variety has to meet two requirements to be recognised. First, the new variety has to differ in form from the already recognised variety; this phenomenon is known as *Abstand*. Second, this new variety has to differ in function, and Kloss terms this *Ausbau*. In what follows, I focus on the *Abstand* of Hong Kong English, and discuss its phonology, morphology, and syntax.

2.5.1.1 Phonology

Although Luke and Richards (1982) say that Hong Kong people speak in a distinctive Hong Kong accent, they touch only slightly on the phonology of the accent. They have briefly laid out the typical phonetic and phonological features of a “mid-proficiency” speaker of English in Hong Kong: for instance substitution of /w/ for /v/ (e.g. [sɜ:'weɪ] “survey”); deletion of final consonant /s/, /t/, and /d/ (e.g. [kwai] “quite”); simplification of consonant cluster such as /s/ for /sk/ (e.g. [ta:s] “task”); and devoicing of voiced consonant such as /s/ for /z/ (e.g. ['si:rəu] “zero”). They have

also commented on the differences in stress, rhythm, and intonation. However, Hung (2002) comments that, since their paper is not intended to be a comprehensive account and detailed description of Hong Kong English, the observations tend to be impressionistic and many of the features they point out are over-simplistic.

Hung (2002) has provided a concise discussion of the phonology of Hong Kong English. In his paper, he analyses the data collected from recordings of 15 first-year undergraduates of Hong Kong Baptist University – seven males and eight females. In the three recording sessions that Hung held, the students read aloud from three different word lists, and each list was read twice. The words were intended to capture all the vowel and consonant contrasts that potentially existed in English.

From the analyses of the data, Hung finds that certain vowels that are distinguishable in British Received Pronunciation (RP) are virtually indistinguishable in Hong Kong English (HKE). Also, he lists certain vowels that are contrastive in RP but are identical in HKE.

Words	HKE vowel	RP vowels
<i>heed-hid, heat-hit</i>	/i/	/i:/ - /ɪ/
<i>head-had, bet-bat</i>	/ɛ/	/e/ - /æ/
<i>hoot-hood</i>	/u/	/u:/ - /ʊ/
<i>hawed-hod, caught-cot</i>	/ɔ/	/ɔ:/ - /ɒ/

Having looked at the differences between RP and HKE vowels, Hung lays out an inventory of HKE vowels that consists of fewer vowels than RP.

	<u>Front</u>	<u>Central</u>	<u>Back</u>
High	i, y		u
Mid	ɛ, ø		ɔ
Low		ʌ	ɑ

Not only are the HKE vowels different from RP vowels, the diphthongs are also different. According to Hung, HKE has eight diphthongs, which is one less than RP has.

Hung also finds that HKE has fewer consonants than RP. Hung's chart of HKE consonants is shown below.

	Bilabial	Labio-Dental	Inter-Dental	Alveolar	Palato-Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Labio-Velar	Glottal
Stop	p b			t d			k g		
Affricative					tʃ dʒ				
Fricative		f	θ	s	ʃ				
Lateral Approximant				l					
Approximant				r		j		w	h
Nasal				n			ŋ		

Table 2.1: HKE consonant chart.

In his research, Hung concludes that, influenced by Cantonese, a phonology of HKE exists “with systematic features of its own”, and the phonemic inventory of HKE “is considerably simpler than that of OVEs [i.e., Old Varieties of English], both in its vowel and consonant systems” (2002: 138).

One should note, however, that although the above analysis is useful in understanding that HKE is phonologically distinctive, it can also be potentially misleading. This is because this kind of phonological inventory imposes an

“abstract” homogeneity where there is actually a great variety of phonological differences among speakers of Hong Kong English. The above inventories tend to strongly reflect the extreme end of a continuum, at the other end of which would be RP (or something very close to RP).

2.5.1.2 Morphology

The morphology of Hong Kong English is discussed by Joseph (2004: 144-147). He points out that “[o]ne marker of Hong Kong English that regularly occurs in discourse samples is the lack of the Standard English distinction between count noun phrase and mass noun phrase” (Joseph 2004: 144). For instance, while in Standard English, it is unmarked to say “a bowl of noodles”, in Hong Kong English, the unmarked equivalent is “a bowl of noodle”. Joseph says that this non-distinction between count and mass nouns is influenced by Cantonese, a language that does not distinguish between count and mass nouns.

Benson (2002) says that in the vocabulary of Hong Kong English a number of words have been localized and are now specific to Hong Kong English, for example, *nullah*, and *short week*. He notes that these words might not fit well with the description of Hong Kong English as the language of the Hong Kong English speaking community as a whole, because many of those are used mostly only by the expatriate residents of Hong Kong. However, they “fit well with the idea of a Hong Kong word as one whose distinctiveness lies in its semantic and pragmatic relationships to the regional sociocultural context to which it refers” (Benson 2002: 163).

Gisborne (2002) mentions the distinctive features of verb marking in HKE. He says that speakers of HKE often display a certain degree of ambiguity when using word-

final morphemes, including *-s*, *-ing* and *-ed*. Below are two instances he found in the spoken part of the Hong Kong corpus of English

(1) She like to go there

(2) Have you try

In the first example, the verb does not have third person feature marking *-s*, and in the second example, the perfect form *-ed* is missing. Gisborne says that this kind of levelling takes place because of a phonological rather than a morphosyntactic process, as “there is in new varieties and interlanguage varieties a tendency to reduce word-final elements” (2002: 153). Due to the fact that Cantonese does not permit the kinds of syllable clusters that are found in native varieties of English, speakers of Hong Kong English, who are often native speakers of Cantonese, tend to drop the word-final morphemes that would constitute syllable clusters not allowed in Cantonese.

Another factor that contributes to this kind of morphological distinction, according to Gisborne, is the ambiguity that is caused by the morphosyntactic feature system of native varieties of English. Native varieties of English have four forms (i.e. $-\emptyset$, *-ed*, *-s*, and *-ing*) that correspond to seven different morphosyntactic contrasts (i.e. imperative, past, present, infinitive, active participle, perfect participle, and passive participle). This system leaves *-ing* as the only morpheme that displays one-to-one correspondence with a feature-value. However, since *-ing* is also used in the English gerund, all four forms display “a certain degree of ambiguity even if that ambiguity is not strictly in the morphosyntactic feature system of English” (ibid.: 154). For this reason, the marking of verbs in Hong Kong English is distinctive from that in native

varieties of English. Below are two examples of verb marking in Hong Kong English provided by Gisborne:

(3) Then she had to promote to Accountant One

(4) I think it's very difficult to described.

In (3), *promote*, which should be marked with *-ed* in native varieties of English, is not marked. In (4) the non-finite verb *describe*, which is not marked in native varieties, is marked with *-ed*.

2.5.1.3 Syntax

Gisborne (2002) also analyses the way Hong Kong people use relative clauses and finds that there are six features. First of all, in Hong Kong English, '*zero*' *subject relatives* can be found, for instance:

This is the student *0* did badly in the test.

In Standard English, a relative marker is needed when it is the subject of the relative clause. In Hong Kong English, one can see '*zero*' subject relatives, in which the subject of the relative clause is not marked by any relative marker.

One can also see *reduced relatives with a relative marker* in Hong Kong English as well. For example:

This is the student who admitted last year. (Gisborne 2002:146)

Referring to Newbrook (1998:48), Gisborne says that this "is a reduced relative construction, which has a redundant subject relative pronoun added" (2002: 147). In

Standard English, there would be no relative marker (in this example, *who*) in the expression above.

Gisborne also says that, in Hong Kong English, one can find the use of *where* with abstract head nominals. An example is shown below:

This is the basis where we can go on. (Gisborne 2002: 148)

He explains that, in Hong Kong English, the sense of *where* has been extended.

Usually *where* “is a locative prepositional phrase but what has happened in this example is that [*where*] has replaced a directional prepositional phrase” (ibid.: 148).

Another feature seen in Hong Kong English relative clauses is the lack of prepositions before the relative marker *which*. Gisborne says that, in native-speaker varieties, a preposition is needed before *which* in certain relative clauses, for example:

This is the newspaper in which I read the news.

In Hong Kong English, the preposition is absent:

This is the newspaper which I read the news.

Possibly influenced by Cantonese, Gisborne points out that there are *resumptive pronouns* in Hong Kong English, for example:

‘Go in for’ is a phrasal verb which the meaning of **it** is very different from the literal meaning.

They wanted to build a tower which **its** top can reach the heaven.

Finally, in Hong Kong English, one can also see the absence of the restrictive and non-restrictive contrast, for example:

Hong Kong **that** is now a colony will soon change its status. (Gisborne 2002: 151)

Gisborne comments that “[a]lthough proper nouns are not amenable to restrictive modification, this example has a relative marker that is typically only used in restrictive relative” (2001: 151). Below is a list summarising the features of Hong Kong relative clauses mentioned above:

1. ‘Zero’-subject relatives
2. Participial relatives with a relative marker
3. Where-relatives with a directional sense as well as a locative sense
4. The omission of prepositions
5. Resumptive pronouns
6. The absence of the restrictive/non-restrictive contrast

Gisborne says that of these features, (2) and (3) appear to be unique to Hong Kong English; (4) and (5) also appear in learner-varieties of other languages; and (1) and (6) seem to be extensions of phenomena that are found in other varieties of English, including the ones of native speakers’. However, one should note that, regardless of whether they appear in other English varieties, all of them are features that can be seen in Hong Kong English and they are all components of the syntax of this variety.

Another marked syntactic feature of Hong Kong English is the use of prepositions. The system of prepositions in Hong Kong English is quite different from the one in Standard English. Examples can be found in the essays written by university students from Hong Kong:

Beside they seek **for** employees who possess the service willingness.

At the meanwhile, forecasting and reviewing the changes **of** external environment should also be practiced.

The use of articles in Hong Kong English is also different from Standard English, for instance:

Music were also a popular culture among **the** blacks in the 60s.

The Mercury is the closest planet to the sun.

One can observe that Hong Kong English has various formal features that allow the variety to be distinguished phonologically, morphologically, and syntactically. Using Kloss's (1967) term, the discussion above has shown that Hong Kong English is distinctive in terms of *Abstand*. In other words, its features have granted the variety a recognizable linguistic distance from native varieties of English.

2.5.2 The functions of Hong Kong English

As mentioned above, the second of Kloss's (1967) criteria that distinguish a linguistic variety is *Ausbau*, which means that the variety in question differs in

function from a variety already known. So, normally, the functions of Hong Kong English would be discussed after an examination of its form. However, since the core of my thesis is to explore the functions of the different kinds of Hong Kong English, most particularly how Hong Kong English in computer-mediated communication (CMC) is different from Hong Kong English in other contexts, the functions of Hong Kong English will be examined and discussed in details later in chapter seven.

In the next chapter, I explore the nature of CMC and look at how it affects the way in which people, particularly Hong Kong people, communicate.

3.1 Introduction

The invention of the internet has brought radical changes to people's lives, as well as to society. Through the internet, people can retrieve information that they might not otherwise have been able to obtain. Communication between people from different parts of the world has been enriched in the sense that people can communicate with each other in many more ways (e.g. video conferencing and online chatting). The internet has been instrumental in changing many aspects of language: how information is exchanged; modes of communication; the way that people use language; and, more importantly, the forms of language.

Baron (2000: 216-259) discusses in detail how advances in communication technology have changed language forms. Every time a new way of communicating is invented, the linguistic behaviour of people changes to suit this new medium. For example, when telegraphy was introduced, news could be conveyed much faster, and sending and receiving messages became timelier as well, but messages became significantly shorter, and the social etiquette that usually appeared in letters was lacking, because of the high cost involved.

It is obvious that language technologies are "the servants of their makers", as Baron (2000: 228) puts it, but they can also have an effect on the nature of people's communication. Her book explores the history and nature of three media: telegraphy, telephony, and email. Baron compares and contrasts the different aspects of these communication technologies: for instance, whether they cater for monologues or

dialogues; how much privacy is in the messages; whether social etiquette is needed; and their usual message length. She concludes that these media differ from one another in essential ways, and each in its own way influences the language through which it conveys its message.

An obvious example of media affecting language use would be text messaging on mobile phones. Nowadays, many people convey information by typing short messages using the number keys on mobile phones and sending them to their friends. Usually, text messaging is charged according to the number of messages sent, and each message is limited by the number of letters and signs. Additionally, using the number pad to type is relatively more difficult than using the keyboard, so people tend to condense their sentences and use various short forms to save effort and cost. Below is an example of a text message:

Yes nice place 3pm is perfect 4 me that it then sortd cu then

A friend sent the message in reply to my message that had suggested meeting at a specific café. Distinctive features in the message include the lack of punctuation marks and the use of short forms (e.g., *cu* for “see you”). The emergence of these features is a result of the constraints of text messaging as mentioned above. This shows how a medium can affect the use of language.

Among the three media Baron considers, email, which is one of the many sub-products of the internet, is the youngest. Baron comments that “[g]iven the relative novelty of email, it may be too soon to know how email will affect speech or writing in the long run. But some trends seem likely... grammatical and stylistic features of

email are prime candidates to spill over into traditional written prose” (2000: 246). Indeed, even though the influence of email on the forms of language might be at an early stage, it is clear that email is affecting the use of language, and that it will in turn, like the telegraph and the telephone, have an effect on language form. Like the internet, other methods of conveying information in computer-mediated communication (CMC) have brought about changes in terms of language use. In what follows, I explore the nature of CMC, identify its different methods for communicating, and discuss how it affects language use and language form.

3.2 Computer-mediated communication

In his discussion of language use on the internet, Crystal (2001: 10-14) identifies five “internet-using situations” that, he maintains, affect the form of language. The situations are: 1) electronic mail; 2) the world-wide-web; 3) virtual worlds; 4) asynchronous chatgroups; and 5) synchronous chatgroups.

3.2.1 Electronic mail

Electronic mail (now widely known as e-mail or email) is “the use of computer systems to transfer messages between users – now chiefly used to refer to messages sent between private mailboxes (as opposed to those posted to a chatgroup)” (Crystal 2001: 10). It is nowadays one of the most prevalent ways, if not the most prevalent, to communicate. People use it to trade messages with family, friends, and colleagues in both formal and informal exchanges, and these messages vary in length and style.

Normally (though not necessarily), each email has certain consistent functional elements. At the top of each email, there are four core headers: subject, sender’s name and email address, address to which the message is being sent, and date and

time at which the email was sent. Figure 3.1 is an example of the format of a typical email.

talent show

From: vicky chan ([REDACTED].com)

Sent: Friday, February 20, 2009 1:49:09 PM

To: [REDACTED]@hotmail.com; [REDACTED]@hotmail.com; [REDACTED]@hotmail.co.uk

Hello!

I don't know whether Ivan has told you, but I'm going to be one of the judges for the HKSoc Talent Show. As you guys are the MC's, Ivan asked me to contact you to give you some information about me.

What do you want to know? :)

Thanks.

-Vicky

Figure 3.1: an email.

In spite of having certain consistent functional elements in every email, Crystal comments that “[t]he diversity of e-mail contexts is immediately apparent” (ibid.: 11) because, under the headers, the body of the message can be freely constructed by the writer of the email, and the features of the text in the message body vary depending on factors such as the writer, the recipient(s), and the purpose of writing the email. For these reasons, despite its being a key internet-using situation, it is questionable whether one can generalise about the language of email. While many emails look like letters stylistically, with salutations and openings, some are structured like lines of verbal conversation. Also, some emails are written in standard style, but others have non-standard features (in the case of English, abbreviated forms are a kind of significant non-standard feature that can be found in emails, for instance *thx* for “thanks”, and *b4n* for “before then”).

3.2.2 World-wide web

The World-wide web is “the full collection of all the computers linked to the Internet which hold documents that are mutually accessible through the use of a standard protocol” (ibid.: 13). Each of these pages has an address corresponding to it, and, up to now, the vast majority of these addresses start with *www*, which is an abbreviation of world-wide web. Given that the number of web pages on the internet is at least 18 million as of this writing (WorldWideWebSize.com, 2009), it is not surprising to see web pages featuring a wide variety of conventions. These pages can range from being formal official web pages of governments to informal personal web-logs (now widely known as *blogs*).

Crystal has the following description of the world-wide web:

So, a few minutes' Web browsing will bring to light every conceivable facet of our graphic linguistic existence. There will be large quantities of *interrupted linear* text – that is, text which follows the unidimensional flow of speech, but interrupted by conventions which aid intelligibility – chiefly the use of spaces between words and the division of a text into lines and screens. This is the normal way of using written language, and it dominates the Web as it does any other graphic medium. But there will also be large quantities of *non-linear* text – that is, text which can be read in a multidimensional way. In non-linear viewing, the lines of a text are not read in a fixed sequence; the eye moves about the page in a manner dictated only by the user's interest and the designer's skill, with some parts not being read at all. (Crystal 2001: 196)

What the author also points out indirectly in this paragraph is that one can rarely find uninterrupted linear texts in web pages. By uninterrupted linear texts I mean texts that one normally sees in books, magazines and other printed material. The content is presented in straight lines of paragraphs. According to Crystal, web page texts are

dynamic. Through the use of graphics, hyperlinks, colour, flashing, movement, and other devices, the organisation of the text is changed to accommodate the format or layout of web pages and becomes relatively more dynamic than in other written media. Of course, this does not imply that there are no linear texts in the web, as some web pages consist of linear text, for example some articles, novels and academic essays. However, the vast majority of web pages are linked to others through hyperlinks (i.e., links that bring you to another page) in the form of hypertext and graphics that interrupt the otherwise linear text.

The nature of the web also gives rise to some other distinctive features of the language on web pages. For example, Crystal points out that the way that text on web pages can be displayed on a monitor screen affects how that text is written. This is because on the internet browsers with which people access web pages, users usually read the text by scrolling down from the top of the page. To accommodate readers, text has to be arranged to facilitate ease of reading, because it would be “common to experience difficulty when we encounter screens filled with unbroken text in a single typeface, or screens where the information is typographically complex or fragmented, forbidding easy assimilation of the content” (2001: 199).

3.2.3 Virtual worlds

Unlike the above two kinds of internet communication, virtual worlds consist of “electronic interaction where the subject-matter is totally imaginary”, and “[a]ll communication between participants takes place with reference to the characters, events, and environments of a [particular] virtual world” (Crystal 2001: 171).

Nowadays, this virtual world usually exists as multi-user online games. In these games, a player chooses to play as a character and perform various tasks to advance

within the game. In order to complete certain tasks, the player is required to interact with other users. The linguistic interactions among characters are usually about discussing game strategies. Players who are on the same team, or who are collaborating with each other for a certain task type messages to each other to discuss what they should do as a group. *World of Warcraft*, the massively multiplayer online (MMO) game that has the largest market share (at the time of writing), is a good example. In this game, a player chooses to play as a character from a selection of races (e.g., human, night elf, undead) and classes (e.g., hunter, priest, warrior). Depending on the choices the player makes, the character, in the form of an avatar, will have specific abilities. In order to finish some tasks that need abilities of different classes or races, players have to communicate and cooperate with each other. The task-oriented nature of their communication means there tends to be a lack of small talk and exchanges of pleasantries.

However, not all conversations in virtual worlds are task-oriented. Depending on the purpose of the games, the way gamers/players communicate varies. An example can be found in another very popular MMO game called *Second Life*. In this game, each player chooses to appear in the form of an avatar in a digital world, and experiences life as that character in that world. MMO games like this, known as Massively Multiplayer Online Social Games (MMOSGs), are “designed to enable socialization through the building of shared interested communities” (Mennecke et al. 2007: 2). Different from other MMO games, this kind of game, with an emphasis on the social aspect, does not provide specific goals for players to reach, and the main purpose is to socialise with other players. MMOSGs also give rise to other forms of interactions, for example, virtual economies. A virtual economy is one in which virtual goods in

the digital world are exchanged using currencies in the games that can then be exchanged for real world money. The kinds of interactions in MMOSGs are similar to ones in the real world. Residents in this kind of virtual world socialise, trade, and develop various sorts of relationships with one other. However, since these interactions are conducted through a different medium, the language used in these virtual worlds is different from that used in the real world.

One obvious difference is that, in the real world, conversations are spoken and heard; in virtual worlds (as well as in CMC generally), however, conversations are primarily typed/written and read. Without paralinguistic factors, for instance voice quality, tone, and volume, which enhance the effectiveness of the communication, interlocutors have less information than in the real world to comprehend what the other participants in the conversation want to convey. To make up for the lack of paralinguistic information, communicators have to utilise written features, such as abbreviations and emoticons (combinations of typewritten letters, symbols, and numbers that resemble facial expressions indicative of emotions or reactions that the sender can use to indicate her feelings about the topic/subject under discussion). These features are similar to those seen in synchronous chatgroups, the focus of this chapter, and are further discussed below in §3.2.5.

The fact that players are playing as characters that are distinct from who they are in the real world may also contribute to the players communicating in different ways. In other words, since players in virtual worlds assume different identities, the way they speak/write can be different as well. The following is a segment of a conversation between two players in *Second Life*. One player (*Hunter Pearce*) was negotiating

with another player (*Chaotic Hermit*) who was a moderator of a place called “Sexy Nude Beach – The Erotic Beach”. The moderator wanted to evict the visitor because the place permitted only adults, and one rule to ensure the adult-only policy was that visitors’ avatars had to be at least 4 foot 9 inches tall. However, since the visitor appeared as an alien who was shorter than 4 foot 9 inches, the moderator saw the need to evict him.



Figure 3.2: a conversation between two players in *Second Life*.

This conversation shows the seriousness with which some players take on an identity and perceive others’ identities in the virtual world. In reality, age is sometimes the major factor for one to decide whether a person can engage in certain activities. For instance, some pubs and many clubs in the U.K. do not allow people under the age of 18 to enter. Given that it is rare for adults to be less than 4 feet 9 inches tall, the

height rule seems like an efficient method of preventing the participation of young children. But in virtual worlds, the appearance of a player's avatar in no way reflects the player's age. Thus it is absurd to have a height rule to prevent non-adult players from entering adult-only places.

The moderator in the above conversation appeared to understand that the virtual world is different from the real world in the sense that avatars do not necessarily match the identities of the players who act through them, hence he asked the visitor to change the avatar if he wanted to stay in the virtual nude beach. Nevertheless, the moderator still applied the height rule firmly and did not consider the fact that the visitor appeared as an alien who was obviously not a child. The moderator wanted to maintain the nude-beach as an adult-only area even if he knew that a player's digital appearance might (or might not) reflect the player's age. The reason he chose to still apply the height rule appeared to be that he wanted to maintain the nude-beach as a *digitally* adult-only one.

As virtual worlds provide a platform for people to perform as a different identity, players are allowed space to use their language to perform the digital identity they assume. While the interactions among players in the digital world might be similar to those of the real world, because of the identity they assume, players can speak differently from the way they do in the offline world. For instance, a man in his 40s can choose an avatar that looks like a small girl, and he can also speak like a small girl to make his digital identity more consistent⁷. Hence, while the linguistic features in virtual worlds are similar to those of synchronous chatgroups, which are discussed

⁷ This is one of the reasons for people to be wary of the internet being used as a tool for paedophiles to "groom" children for sex.

below, the linguistic performance of identity (i.e., the use of language to perform one's identity) is quite different from other internet-using situations. Further analyses concerning how identities are performed and perceived online are made in session §3.4.

3.2.4 Asynchronous chatgroups

Chatgroups, as defined by Crystal (2001: 11), are “continuous discussions on a particular topic, organized in ‘rooms’ at particular Internet sites, in which computer users interested in the topic can participate”. In asynchronous chatgroups, the interactions are “stored in some format, and made available to users upon demand, so that they can catch up with the discussion, or add to it, at any time – even after an appreciable period has passed” (ibid.). Today, asynchronous chatgroups usually appear as forums or blogs, in which participants can create a topic for discussions and reply to existing topics.

In a typical forum, if one wants to participate, one needs to register as a member by setting up a profile for oneself. One usually needs to create a *screen name*, and the screen name would be used as an identification of the participant. Every contribution she makes in the forum, in the form of a post, would be under her screen name. The profile can also include the member's real name, geographical location, sex, age, email address, and homepage address. However, since usually the screen name and email address are required categories and the rest are usually optional, many members in forums would not provide much personal information.

On the front page of a forum, one can usually see a list of categories, also known as sub forums, in which similar topics are grouped together. The first few sub forums

are normally for administrative issues, for example, announcements by forum moderators, and frequently asked questions (FAQs) for members to ask moderators questions concerning the operation of the forum. Then, the sub forums below these would be various discussions topics depending on the purpose of the forums. Below is a picture capturing part a forum, called *Badminton Central*, that has a typical forum layout.

Welcome to the Badminton Central Discussion Forums.

Welcome to the Badminton Central Discussion Forum (BF). BF is an online community dedicated to the exchange of information and sharing of our passion for the game of badminton. The community consists of badminton fans from all over the world. BF's goal is to promote badminton via being the leading badminton resource online.

In order to join us in our discussion, you have to [register](#): click the register link above to proceed. In order to post, remember to reply the registration email.

Forum	Last Post	Threads	Posts
Badminton Central			
Badminton Central Announcements (1 Viewing) Find out the latest about Badminton Central here.	Don't Get Banned by Oldhand 06-26-2009 11:25 PM	24	906
Professional Players Forums			
Professional Players (22 Viewing) let's talk about the professional players	why Malaysia keep failing to... by 2cents 08-04-2009 10:29 AM	2,077	79,645
Jonas Rasmussen Forum (3 Viewing) Jonas is the 2003 Men's Doubles World Champion.	Hi Everyone! by Amin Khallij 07-25-2009 09:45 AM	427	3,098
Thomas Laybourn Forum (3 Viewing) Thomas is the 2005 Mixed Doubles Danish National Champion!	The psychical part in... by vorxaw 07-23-2009 12:22 AM	76	632
Badminton Tournaments			
2009 Tournaments (35 Viewing)	Who will win the MS title at... by 2cents 08-04-2009 10:26 AM	505	51,713
2001 - 2008 Tournaments (17 Viewing)	Tribute to Indian Star, Saina... by Cheung 08-01-2009 09:25 PM	6,464	385,606

Figure 3.3: the front page of a forum.

Since this forum is for badminton enthusiasts, the sub forums below the administrative forum (i.e., announcements) are all related to badminton. In this page one can also see the topic in which the most recent post in each sub forum has been

made, and the screen name of the participant who wrote that post. The number of threads⁸ and posts in each sub forum can also be seen.

In each sub forum, various threads are displayed, and the thread with the newest reply is put on top). Showing next to each topic of the thread are the author of the most recent post and the time that the post was published (figure 3.4). If one clicks on the topic, one will be linked to a page in which the topic post and the replying posts are displayed (figure 3.5).

Thread / Thread Starter		Last Post	Replies	Views
	Who is your badminton hero? (1 2 3 4 5 6) Deathsticks	08-04-2009 11:00 AM by tbqoh288	90	4,022
	why Malaysia keep failing to Boleh? 2cents	08-04-2009 10:29 AM by 2cents	0	16
	Ma Jin (1 2 3 4 5 6 7) alala	08-04-2009 09:22 AM by Zabee	113	9,937
	Wong Choong Hann Live Chat Raphy	08-04-2009 09:19 AM by Raphy	0	15
	Indonesia Badminton (1 2 3 4 5 6 7 ... Last Page) kidosetiawan	08-04-2009 06:32 AM by isaura	1,289	91,537
	Jiang Yanjiao (1 2 3 4 5 6 7 ... Last Page) itsnotabirdie	08-04-2009 03:31 AM by suetyan	136	11,003
	Boonsak Ponsana (1 2 3 4 5 6 7 ... Last Page) labyrinthian	08-04-2009 01:38 AM by justme_manda	290	25,428
	Lee Chong Wei (1 2 3 4 5 6 7 ... Last Page) tbleong	08-04-2009 01:37 AM by Loh	1,742	115,057
	Kumiko Ogura and Reiko Shiota Pictures (1 2 3 4 5 6 7 ... Last Page) ants	08-04-2009 12:31 AM by george@chongwei	798	191,047

Figure 3.4: a sub forum.

⁸ A thread is made up of a topic post and its replying posts.

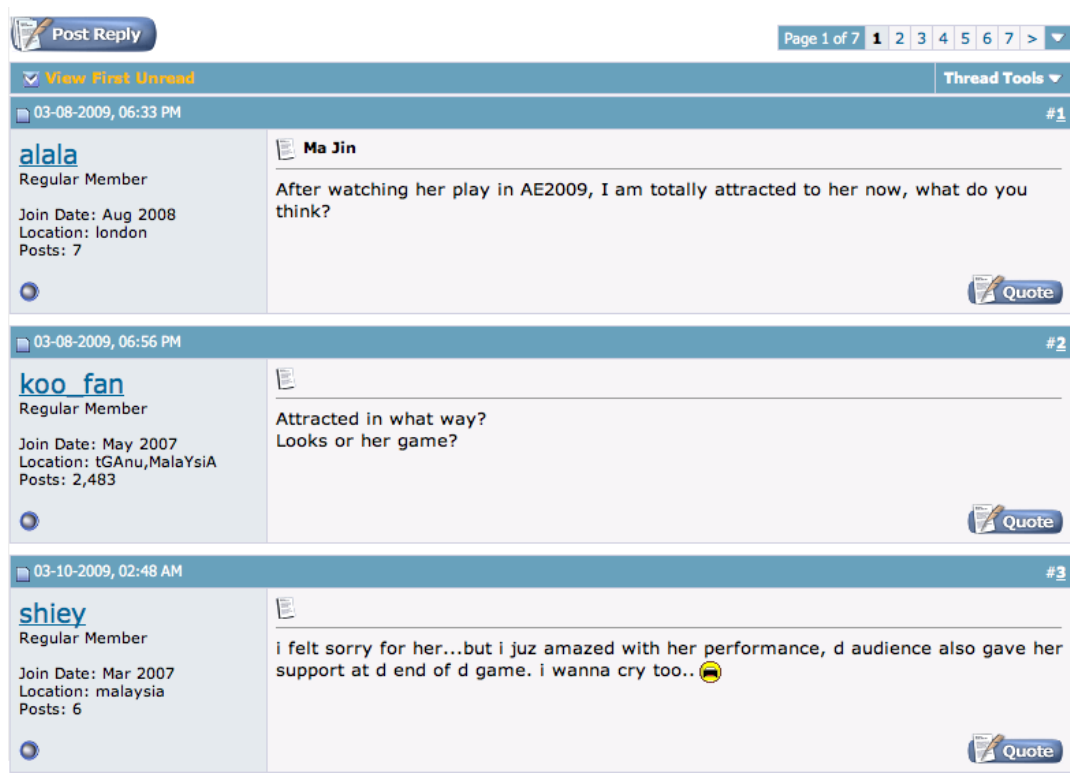


Figure 3.5: a thread.

In general, since this kind of chatgroup is asynchronous in nature, without the time constraint that is induced by the need to reply promptly, participants in forums can write their messages more elaborately. However, it does not mean that there are no features that are specific to asynchronous chatgroups. Davis and Brewer (1997: 85-91) find that there are several linguistic features in asynchronous chatgroups. For instance, there is an overwhelming use of the first person pronoun *I*, and the use of *it* as an introduction to a personal comment (e.g., *It seems to me that...*). According to Davis and Brewer, this is because this kind of internet-using situation is mainly for voicing of personal opinions, hence the frequent use of the pronoun *I* and the phrase *it seems to me that...* as an indication of personal involvement. This nature of

asynchronous chatgroups has also given rise to the frequent use of private verbs⁹ such as *think*, *feel*, and *know* (ibid.: 106-110). The authors explain that private verbs are used to report the chatgroup participants' "perceptions of a long ago event to other participants in the here and now in a way that [allow] the other participants to share their perceptions. In that sense the use of private verbs [is] a politeness strategy and an invitation to other participants to share their own perceptions" (ibid.: 108).

3.2.5 Synchronous chatgroups

Different from asynchronous chatgroups, synchronous chatgroups are a kind of chatgroup in which "a user enters a chat room and participates in an ongoing conversation in real time, sending named contributions which are inserted into a permanently scrolling screen along with the contributions from other participants" (Crystal 2001: 11). Crystal's discussion of synchronous chatgroups is largely based on *Internet Relay Chat (IRC)*, which "allows several users to be simultaneously in touch with each other" (2001: 151). With an IRC client, a user can see, from the chat room interface, the current conversation involving other participants who are also in the chat. A small section on the right-hand side shows a list of the current participants. The user can join in the conversation by typing into a section at the bottom of the interface and pressing *Enter* to add it to the main conversation for everyone else to see. An example is shown in figure 3.6.

⁹ Private verbs are verbs that refer to mental activities, and activities that cannot be publicly observed. They are contrastive to public verbs, for instance *speak* and *explain* (Davis and Brewer 1997: 106).



Figure 3.6: Opera – an IRC client.

Another kind of synchronous chatgroup is an Instant Messenger (IM) chatgroup. Different from IRC, IMs are normally used for one-to-one online conversations. Currently, the most popular IMs in the market include *AOL Instant Messenger*, *ICQ*, *Yahoo! Messenger*, and *Windows Live Messenger*. When one opens an IM application, it shows a list of contacts that the user has added previously. The list shows which contacts are online and which ones are offline. If the user wants to chat with one of her contacts who is online, she clicks on that contact and opens a new window. The window is divided into two parts. The top half is a box in which sentences typed by both sides can be seen. The exchange is shown in chronological order, with the earlier entries on top and later entries added below. The bottom half is another box, into which the user can type her “utterances”. When the user has finished typing what she wants to say, she presses *Enter*, or clicks the *Send* button,

and what she has typed in the bottom box is sent to the top box. Figure 3.7 is a chat window in *Windows Live Messenger*.



Figure 3.7: Windows Live Messenger.

Principally, this kind of interaction on the internet is very similar to face-to-face conversation. In both events, speakers take turn to contribute. Also, the typed-out exchanges in IMs usually are syntactically more like spoken language than written language. They are generally more informal, and participants are less aware of using the correct spellings. This is because the major purpose in a synchronous chatgroup

is to have a casual chat, and chatting does not usually require the use of formal language. Users tend to type out the content in the way that they speak, instead of in the way that they write, making the exchanges more speech-like.

However, there are differences between communication on IMs and face-to-face conversations. One main difference is that communication in synchronous chatgroups does not have overlapping and interruptions. This is due to the fact that exchanges in this context are not exactly real-time. The receivers are not able to see the turn that the conversation is taking until the senders have sent the typed texts. By contrast, in face-to-face conversations, a receiver hears an utterance as it is being spoken, so overlapping and interruptions are possible (Nofsinger 1991:101).

One feature of synchronous chatgroup conversation is language play. Danet et al. (1997) analysed a “virtual party” on IRC, in which participants simulated the action of smoking marijuana. They found that participants played with their identities by frequently changing their screen names, engaging in various frames of interaction. According to Danet et al. (1997), “[t]he activation of frames in real life is related to the notion of “multitasking” in computer operating systems. When using a multitasking operating system, one can keep more than one window running at the same time, but they do not need to be visible on screen simultaneously. The researchers say that “[t]echnically, only one frame at a time is “foregrounded” while all others are “running in the background”. As humans, we do this without thinking: we may write while listening to music, or cook a meal while carrying on a conversation with someone”.

When using IRC, users open an “IRC game” frame within the “real life” frame. In this “IRC frame”, there is no pretence or “fooling around” at this level. In order to be able to enjoy reduced accountability and engage in playful actions, the user would activate a “party” frame within the “IRC game” frame. Danet et al. say that, by activating and foreground various frames, users are able to shift to a playful mode and participate in language play with each other.

Another form of language play is to use typographic symbols like emoticons¹⁰ to create an informal virtual environment in which participants could perform playful acts. Danet et al. (1997) argue that “digital writing [is] inherently playful”, because “the absence of non-verbal and other social or material cues to identity frees participants to be other than ‘themselves’, or more of themselves than they normally express”.

It is noted that language play can also happen in face-to-face conversation. However, Danet et al. point out that, during face-to-face conversation, personal information, such as one’s gender and age, is attached to the speakers. This information constrains participants from being people other than themselves. As a result, speakers are involved less in language play in the real world. Also, in face-to-face conversations, there is less to “play with”. Unlike synchronous chatgroup conversations, speakers in face-to-face conversations cannot play with online features like typographic symbols. Playing with identities in face-to-face conversation is still possible, but it involves much more effort and cost. As a result, Danet et al. concludes that language play happens less in face-to-face conversations.

¹⁰ The notion of emoticons is discussed in §3.4.

3.2.6 Combination of internet-using situations

The above five internet-using situations were identified by Crystal in 2001. Since then, because of the advancement of computer technology, new online contexts have come into being. Although they have unprecedented interfaces and their purposes are different from the aforementioned five situations, they are combinations of the five basic internet-user situations Crystal identified. One very good example is social-networking websites.

Social-networking websites are websites that focus on building online communities. *Friendster*, the earliest social networking website, started in 2002. Currently, the most popular ones are *MySpace*, *Bebo*, and *Facebook*. In a typical social networking website, a registered user has a profile in which her basic information, such as her name and email address, is present. The user can provide further personal information such as gender, age, interest, educational background, and even phone numbers and postal address. The user can also upload photographs and videos to enrich the profile. To build a personal social network, the user can add other users as friends, so that they are connected to them in this website.

These social networking websites usually provide various features that encourage interactions between connected users in different ways. For example, on *Facebook*, connected users can write on each other's *wall*, which is a space on the profile page where other users can post messages. Users can comment on one another's photographs or videos. There are also *notes*, which are similar to blogs on the world-wide web. Users can write and update their *status*, which is a column next to their name. By doing so, they can inform their friends of their current actions and thoughts. If a user wants to send a private message to another user, she can use the *messages*

function, and send the message to the other user's *inbox*. In 2008, *Facebook* introduced a *chat* function, which allows users who are on the website to chat to one another online.

One can see that social networking websites can provide users with functions that are a combination of several internet-using situations. On *Facebook*, for instance, there are functions such as electronic mail (*messages*), the world-wide web (*notes*), asynchronous chatgroups (*wall*), and synchronous chatgroups (*chat*). These combinations of functions may blur the distinctions between various online genres, which in turn may lead to the convergence of the different language use in the five internet using situations. Also, the combination of different internet-using situations may have an effect on the manifestation and perception of online identity. For example, on a Facebook profile, users can input not just information about themselves, such as age, personal history and interests, but can also write about their daily life on blogs, post pictures of themselves, and chat to friends. These different online activities allow users to show different aspects of themselves and permit other people to get to know them in more than one way.

3.3 Netspeak

Different types of language are used in each of the five internet-using situations, and each type has its own distinctive features, but it does not mean that the features are mutually exclusive. One can see a set of linguistic features on the internet that are specific to CMC and that are different from the features of spoken or written language. Moreover, as mentioned in the previous section (§3.2.6), since the emergence of new kinds of websites has blurred the distinctiveness of these internet-using situations, some of their individual linguistic features may diffuse into other

online genres. Crystal names the use of language on the internet “netspeak”, and he describes it as “something genuinely different in kind – ‘speech + writing + electronically mediated properties’” (2001: 48).

Netspeak has features of both written and spoken language. It is written in the sense that the texts are typed, instead of spoken, into the computer, and read, instead of heard, by the person at the receiving end. However, the spoken features in these written texts are obvious and abundant compared to other written forms. For instance, in synchronous chatgroups and virtual worlds, sentences are often quite loosely bound, and expressions tend to be more informal and shorter. In figure 3.6, one can see an informal expression “aye I’m fine ta”, which has a Scots expression “aye” (meaning *yes*), and an informal British English expression “ta” (meaning *thank you*).

Exploring the style of emails, Baron (2002: 33) says that “[m]any computer users function with a mental model of email as a private, speech-like medium of communication that disappears without a trace when ‘deleted’, even when we rationally know better”. In other words, when writing emails, people tend to think that what they have typed can be deleted relatively easily, even though they understand that, after they are being sent to the recipient’s inbox, they do not have access to delete the texts they have produced. With this mentality, people tend to write emails as if they are speaking, making emails more speech-like than written texts in other media. Baron, however, also notes that “there is also a good deal of variation across individual users (and usage contexts) in the extent to which we model email as a spoken or a written medium” (ibid.).

Baron's analysis of email style can also be applied to other internet-using situations such as virtual worlds and synchronous chatgroups. Because of their time-bound and spontaneous nature, it is possible that with these two factors in mind writers feel that the exchanges are speech-like. Hence the type of language that they use when they write, and its manner of presentation, might resemble that which they use when they speak, as they may be functioning in the "speaking mode" when they are typing away. However, fewer spoken features seem to occur in the texts in the world-wide web and asynchronous chatgroups. Using Baron's explanation, this could be due to the lack of contextual factors in these two internet-using situations that would lead writers to communicate in the "speaking mode". In these two kinds of situations, communication is not time-bound or spontaneous. Also, they are neither private nor one-to-one in nature. Without these features, writers tend to function in a "written mode" and their texts tend to have fewer spoken features. Nonetheless, with the emergence of new internet genres that are combinations of several internet-using situations (§3.2.6), the spoken-language features in the written language on CMC have become more apparent in asynchronous chatgroups and the world-wide web as well. Nowadays, many forums and blogs are filled with spoken features. For example, in figure 3.5, the replying post written by *koo_fan* contains text that is stylistically very much like spoken language, with an informal style and loose sentence structure.

Another aspect that makes CMC a unique form of communication is that it is carried out through the medium of a computer. As words and sentences are typed onto the screen, the texts on the internet lose a large amount of personal and social cues that an author might want to convey or would have conveyed in other forms of communication. For example, in an IRC chatroom, even though people are said to be

“chatting” and “having conversations” with each other, by just typing and reading the texts on the screen, interlocutors’ emotions, tones, voice qualities and other cues are not detectable. To bridge the gap, people have employed various strategies, so that they are able to convey personal and social cues. In the following section, these strategies are discussed.

3.4 Chatgroups and identity

Upon entering a chatgroup, one creates a screen name, which will be the only personal cue for the chat session. Other personal information, such as age, sex, and place of origin, is not immediately apparent. Sometimes in asynchronous chatgroups one is asked to provide personal information, but there is virtually no consequence if one lies about it. One can, of course, provide this information to other users during the chat, but lying and creating a false identity is not at all difficult. A 40-year-old man living in New York can convince other users that he is a 20-year-old woman coming from Sydney if he uses his language judiciously.

In fact, one does not even need sophisticated skills to construct a fictitious identity. Herring (1999) describes a case in which a robot programme named Julia fooled a male IRC user over a period of several weeks into thinking that the programme was a female human. This shows that it is not at all difficult for participants on online chats to create different identities for themselves.

Besides the above identity information (i.e., screen name and language use), other cues to personal identities, such as voice quality, tone, and accent, as well as emotions and behaviours that allow an individual to be distinguishable, are also

lacking. Without these elements, constructing and perceiving a person's identity in these chatgroups is relatively more difficult than in face-to-face conversation.

One can see that the lack of identity cues opens the door to freely constructing identity on the one hand, but on the other hand makes constructing one more difficult. To compensate for the lack of elements that are used for identity construction in face-to-face dialogue, internet users make use of the limited resources of, for instance, words of different sizes and fonts, and a variety of digital graphics, to convey personal cues.

Online chatters have developed conventions to convey the cues of their personal identities, for example, words and sentences written with capital letters are used as stresses (1), and phrases between two asterisks are used to depict actions (2). One can also see that the online interlocutors type out laughter (3), and use excessive punctuation marks, especially exclamation marks (3).

(1) A: I failed my retake as well...
B: GOSH!!!!
B: NO YOU DIDN'T!!

(2) A: brill let's go shopping tmr then
B: yay! *sing and dance*

(3) A: I'm getting married...
B: !!!!!
A: yeah it's a bit sudden isn't it hahaha
B: congrats!!!!!!

(4) A: u sure you can't go?
B: no I really can't join you guys sorry
A: oh well... nevermind :-(

Another convention is the use of emoticons (4). Emoticons, or smileys, are combinations of letters and symbols to represent different facial expressions. As mentioned in §3.2.3, the purpose of using emoticons is to convey the writer's emotions to the readers on CMC. Due to the lack of non-verbal social cues, it is relatively difficult for interlocutors to express emotions in communication.

Emoticons are means by which people can make up for this lack of social cues to convey emotions and other non-verbal cues to those with whom they interact.

With the advancement of technology, emoticons are now usually shown as graphics. The little yellow faces in figures 3.5 and 3.6 are emoticons for “cry” and “surprised”, respectively. On some IMs such as *Windows Live Messenger*, users can now personalise their emoticons by installing their own graphics in the programme, adding personalities in their expressions to show their emotions more effectively.

Besides the using of fonts, capitalisations and emoticons, online chatters also make use of other resources to convey their identities. Firstly, similar to interacting in the offline world, online chatters use their names to tell people who they are. Bechar-Israeli (1995) studied the use of nicknames in an IRC chat room, and found that among all the screen names she looked at, those that are self-related (names that are related to the identity of oneself's) occur most frequently. She points out that nicknames are part of a person's identity. Since screen names in IRC are similar to nicknames in the sense that both are used repetitively and are means by which others interact with each other, when creating their screen names, people would tend to choose names that are related to themselves.

Secondly, similar to what happens in the offline world, language style is used to reflect a person's internet identity. Paolillo (1999) observed the linguistic behaviour of an online chatgroup named *#India*, in which participants were believed to be mostly Indian nationals living abroad. He found that, although many of the participants were able to speak fluent British or American English, they would still insert Hindi elements into their English, and the group's language use was "characterized by greater use of Hindi and avoidance of most of the other features, which are localized elsewhere in the network". From this observation, Paolillo suggests that the use of different linguistic variables "may... be localized in different areas of a social network". In other words, within a virtual social group, people tend to use expressions that are linked to their social group to mark their group identities.

Cassell and Tversky (2005) studied the online linguistic behaviour of 3,062 teenagers from 139 countries. These teenagers were put together in an online forum for three months. Results showed that during the period the participants influenced each other's language use, and their writing styles became more alike. This convergence of language use, according to Cassell and Tversky, was a reflection of the users constructing a group identity. They added that "the participants' use of English points up an important aspect of how language does not only reflect, but also *constitutes* community".

One should note that a person's identity in CMC is not constructed solely by the speaker himself or herself. The language of other participants in the interaction is also very important in constructing an internet identity. Baker (2001) investigated and analysed a 'moral panic' issue that took place in a forum. In this case, a user in a

forum posted numerous messages voicing homophobic views, which induced many responses not only countering his opinions, but also commenting negatively on their author. Baker argued that the user who presented himself as homophobic could not have successfully constructed his identity without other users' criticisms of his behaviour. Having made such an observation, he concluded that identity was constructed by the collaborative efforts of both the speakers/writers and the hearers/readers.

For bilingual internet users, language mixing is an effective strategy to mark their social identities. After studying the language use of Egyptian young professionals on the internet, Warschauer et al. (2002) found that, while English was the dominant language of formal emails, these internet users tended to use a mix of English and Egyptian Arabic in informal emails and online chats. The mix of two languages, according to the authors, was to show the internet users' "globalness", which means being international by the use of English, as well as "localness", which is being Egyptian by the use of Egyptian Arabic. This practice has given rise to the notion of "glocalness", which is the product of the dynamics that appears when online communicators negotiate their global and local identity through the use of language. The negotiation of "glocalness" is not of course restricted to Egyptians who speak English as their second language. With English being the "global language", people from various places also need to negotiate their "glocal" identity online.

According to Hongladarom (2000), the internet functions not only to homogenise cultures, it also allows people to promote and maintain their local culture. The internet provides a platform on which people negotiate their identities between global

and local culture. Since it is widely perceived that English is the default language on the internet, the use of English represents the global culture. Durham's (2003) study supports this claim. Studying the language used in a Swiss mailing list, she observed that "English has become the lingua franca, the preferred language of intra-Swiss communication". In the "globalness" side of the equation, one can usually see that, as far as the languages used on the internet are concerned, English prevails.

The dynamics between being global and being local has led to the creation of hybrid languages. On top of the language-mixing phenomenon in CMC among Egyptian young professionals, Warschauer et al. (2002) also reported the use of a Romanised version of Egyptian Arabic on the internet. It was an interesting phenomenon because Egyptian Arabic is principally a spoken variety. Prior to the advent of the internet, this variety appeared in only limited written domains, for instance comic books and language-instruction books for foreigners. Using written Egyptian Arabic in domains such as business, scholarship, and religion is discouraged by educational and religious authorities. The authors commented that "[t]he use of Egyptian Arabic in online communications represents a major expansion of its written use, especially in a Romanized form, in a few realms in which informality is considered acceptable and in which no authority has stepped forward to discourage its use". This phenomenon is not exclusive to Egyptian Arabic, however, as Hong Kong people behave in a similar way linguistically. This is further discussed in §3.6.

The effects of the symbolic and textual freedoms allowed by communication on the internet and the restrictions imposed by it can also be seen in other cultures. Su (2003) studied data collected from postings on bulletin boards of two college student

organisations in Taiwan, and observed that the students used Chinese characters to represent language varieties, such as Taiwanese, Taiwanese-accented Mandarin, English, Hakka-accented Mandarin, and Japanese, as playful linguistic practices. The students used characters that presented sounds “similar to the phonology of the target languages or accents, regardless of their original meanings”. Su added that “[w]hile the string of characters may not be readily transparent, to the initiated user the characters are easily recognized as representing sounds that humorously mimic their English, Taiwanese, or Taiwanese-accented Mandarin counterparts”.

Another case of linguistic hybridity can be seen in the use of Greek on the internet. Koutsogiannis and Mitsikopoulou (2003) focused their study on “Greeklish”, which “involves the use of the Latin alphabet in Greek online communication”. They said that, although Unicode had been designed to support non-Roman scripts, some computers still had problems decoding Greek. To avoid this problem, many Greeks used Latin alphabetical characters when writing Greek online. This practice had given rise to Greeklish, which was characterised by having Greek alphabetical characters being transliterated into more than one Latin equivalent phonetically (e.g., writing ‘η’, ‘υ’, ‘ει’ as ‘i’) and orthographically (e.g., writing ‘η’ as ‘h’, ‘ω’ as ‘w’, and ‘θ’ as ‘8’). Greeklish was not only extensively used in personal emails and chatgroups, but could also be found in formal electronic communications, such as those emanating from government departments and universities.

Similarly to the above two cases, in Hong Kong, a hybrid language that is used mainly by young people has developed. Based on English, this hybrid language is filled with Cantonese features. In the following section, I explore the use of English

on the internet by Hong Kong young people, and I discuss the notion of CMC Hong Kong English.

3.5. Hong Kong English on the internet

In his analysis of the sociolinguistics of Hong Kong and of Hong Kong English, Bolton (2002: 48-51) says that Hong Kong English is gaining new space for intra-ethnic communication. In cyberspace, Hong Kong English is able to develop in both form and function. He says that Hong Kong people, especially young people, “bubble up” a code-mixed and hybrid variety of English in their online conversation through synchronous chatgroups (ibid.: 49). As a point of reference, he cites an online ICQ conversation conducted in 1998 between two postgraduate students (‘Billy’ and ‘Amy’) studying at the University of Hong Kong. In this chat session, the language used by both sides showed marked features of Hong Kong English.

Below is part of the conversation:

Billy: knock ... knock ... anyone in??

Amy: yup, what's up?

Billy: No ar!! Just to make u type some words!! hehe

Amy: u r really ‘mo liu’

Amy: should find a gf quick ma!

Billy: No. So up till now no one suits me. I am too bad and eye corner high ar!!!

Amy: i don't think u can find them easily. u know, good looking girls are difficult to find nowadays la!

Billy: Haha ... that's true. One day I have to go back to China to find a perfect one ... hehe north mui!!!!

Excerpt 3.1: conversation between two Hong Kong postgraduate students. (Bolton 2002: 49)

One can see a number of CMC features in this conversation. For instance, in some sentences, there is a lack of capitalisation in the beginning, and an omission of sentential subject. The playful nature of the conversation can also be seen. For instance, Billy imitated a door-knocking action by typing in “knock... knock...”. This echoes the notion of language play proposed by Danet et al. (1997).

One can also see the use of shortenings from the excerpt (e.g., “u r” for “you are”, “yup” for “yes”, and “gf” for “girlfriend”). Based on a 70,000-word corpus of emails and ICQ instant messaging collected from a group of 72 young people aged 13 to 25 in Hong Kong, Lee (2002: 9) classifies six kinds of shortenings that are often used. They are *acronyms of sentences* (e.g., “brb” for “be right back”), *letter homophones* (or of similar pronunciation) (e.g., “u” for “you”), *number homophones* (e.g., “99” for “night night”), *combinations of letter and number homophones* (e.g., “b4” for “before”), *reductions of individual words* (e.g., “tmr” for “tomorrow”), and *combinations of letter initials and letter homophones* (e.g., “ttyl/ttul” for “talk to you later”). Although Lee’s (2002) analyses are based on data collected from online conversations by Hong Kong people, shortenings are not specific to Hong Kong. Crystal (2001: 85-86) also reports the use of shortenings in the data he collected from online conversation between native English speakers. Many of the examples found in Lee’s data are also mentioned in Crystal’s study. For instance, the forms “brb”, “ttyl”, and “b4” are also recorded in Crystal’s list of examples of abbreviations used in Netspeak conversations.

However, what makes the conversation in excerpt 3.1 stand out from other chatgroup conversations are certain CMC features that are markedly Hong Kong-specific. These features can be categorised into three main kinds. Firstly, there are *Romanised Cantonese* expressions, which are Cantonese expressions that are phonologically transcribed using the Roman alphabet, such as *mo liu*¹¹. Secondly, there are *literal translations of Cantonese to English*. In this category, each morpheme in a Chinese expression is literally translated into English. When they are read in English, it would make little sense. Only when readers translate each word into Cantonese and understand the combination in Cantonese can they understand the expression. An example in this conversation is *eye corner high*¹². Thirdly, there are *end-of-sentence particles in Romanised form*. They are Cantonese end-of-sentence particles that are written in English alphabet, such as *ma* in “should find a gf quick ma”. James (2001) argues that, in CMC, Hong Kong people use end-of-sentence particles to convey what English speakers use intonations to convey. He says “[w]hat in spoken English is carried by sentence intonation is, at least partially, compensated for in real-time written-spoken English by [emoticons]. In common with other varieties of Chinese, Cantonese, on the other hand, has a set of mostly, but not exclusively, utterance-final particles” (James 2001: 11).

As with the cases of Romanised Egyptian Arabic studied by Warschauer et al. (2002), the creative use of the Chinese writing system examined by Su (2003) and the phenomenon of Greeklish discussed by Koutsogiannis and Mitsikopoulou (2003), I believe that Hong Kong English on the internet is also a product of the Hong Kong

¹¹ *mo liu* – in Cantonese 無聊 (mou4 liu4), meaning “nonsense”.

¹² *eye corner high* – in Cantonese 眼角高 (ngaan3 gok3 gou1), meaning “to be very demanding”.

people's negotiation between "globalness" and "localness". English, being the default language on the internet, is widely adopted by internet users around the world, including people in Hong Kong. However, the fact that English also represents a global culture makes these users reluctant to accept the language as it comes, and there is a need for Hong Kong people to mark their localness. One option is to type Cantonese in Chinese characters, but inputting Chinese characters is less efficient than typing English characters. Even though many new Chinese input methods have been introduced in recent years to make typing Chinese characters easier and quicker, typing Chinese characters still takes longer than typing English equivalents. This disadvantage is especially obvious in synchronous chatgroups, when communication is time-bound.

Also, similar to the problems that the Greek alphabet has on the internet, since there are several character-encoding systems for both Simplified and Traditional Chinese characters, sometimes computers have problems decoding the Chinese characters. This problem is especially apparent in Cantonese, since written Cantonese has characters that formal written Chinese does not have, and many Traditional Chinese encoding systems, including the most popular encoding system *Big 5*, cannot encode and decode these Cantonese characters. One has to use a character-encoding system known as the *Hong Kong Supplementary Character Set* (HKSCS), created by the Hong Kong Government, to encode and decode these characters. This adds to the complication of inputting and decoding Cantonese on the internet.

Given that it is relatively less convenient and efficient to type Chinese characters, many Hong Kong people choose to communicate in English with each other on the

internet, as English is taught in the local curriculum and therefore most youngsters have at least a basic knowledge of it. However, since English is linked to “globalness”, its use in the informal context of chatting imposes a sort of personal distance, comparable to what Hong Kong people feel when speaking in English with each other. The reason is not only that they have a native language (Cantonese) which they can use more comfortably and effectively, but that the English language, in its standard form, is not able to mark their local identity as Hong Kong people. As a result, a dilemma has developed in Hong Kong’s online world, with the convenience of using English, the *global* language, on the one hand, and the desire to achieve friendliness and intimacy by marking *local* Hong Kong identity on the other. Generating a set of CMC Hong Kong English (CHKE) features can be seen as a solution to this global-versus-local dilemma, allowing Hong Kong people to use the more convenient global language while still being able mark their local Hong Kong identity.

One cannot see these features in other forms of written English in Hong Kong. Firstly, written English in Hong Kong is usually used for more formal communication, such as business letters, essays for schoolwork, and newspaper articles. In these contexts, personal features are normally discouraged by editors and teachers. “Hongkongness” is not valued in these offline contexts. Secondly, CMC is more conducive to language play than are other, offline, written contexts. In addition to marking identity, CHKE features are also associated with such play, during which online chatters from Hong Kong “bubble-up” this form of English in chat rooms.

3.6 CMC Hong Kong English (CHKE) and Hong Kong English (HKE)

CHKE is systematically different from Hong Kong English in its other written contexts, because not only does CHKE have its own significant features, it also functions differently from other written forms of Hong Kong English. In this section, I compare the forms and functions of CHKE and HKE to illustrate the differences.

In §2.5.1, I discussed the linguistic form of HKE. One can see that HKE is different from other forms of English phonologically, morphologically, and syntactically.

Since this section looks at written language, I focus on the morphology and syntax of HKE. I summarise the morphological and syntactic features of HKE in the list below.

Morphology:

1. A lack of distinction between count and mass noun phrase
2. Localised vocabulary
3. Ambiguity in verb marking

Syntax:

4. Distinctive structures of relative clauses
 - ‘Zero’-subject relatives
 - Participial relatives with a relative marker
 - Where-relatives with a directional sense as well as a locative sense
 - The omission of prepositions
 - Resumptive pronouns
 - The absence of restrictive/non restrictive contrast
5. Differences in the use of prepositions
6. Differences in the use of articles

HKE has a set of features that makes this variety formally distinctive, some of which, as mentioned in §2.5.1.3, can also be seen in other learner-varieties and non-native varieties of English. As CHKE is a linguistic manifestation of speakers of HKE in CMC, many of the HKE features mentioned above can be found in CHKE as well. Serving as examples are extracts from online conversations conducted in 2006 between two 26-year-old males through ICQ instant messaging. At the time they were chatting, A was in the U.S. having just finished an undergraduate degree and B was a postgraduate student in the U.K. The uses of prepositions (4) and articles (5) are different from those in Standard English:

- (4) A: for nancy, victor, felix and man chai lo!!!!!! Total 4 ppl!!! when u done w/ exam?? i think each of us pay about 30 – 40 *to* the whole thing la... how's that?
- (5) A: sigh....here is \emptyset village....can't compare with big cities ar...
B: Here is \emptyset UK la. Cannot compare with civilized town.

One can also see the lack of distinction between count and mass nouns in CHKE.

- (6) A: i think i will have instant noodle only 3 days **on** a row. still i haven't been to the supermarket to buy food.

It is not clear whether CHKE has the same relative clause structures that are seen in HKE. Since expressions in synchronous chatgroups are often structured like spoken language, relative clauses are rarely found in this internet-using situation. When analysing the linguistic features of emails, Baron (1998) says that the features of the

language in “synchronous email”, which is what Crystal (2001) regards as synchronous chatgroups, are very similar to the features of face-to-face speech. Language in synchronous emails is usually dialogical, spontaneous, loosely structured (including repetitive), and informal. It is also syntactically simpler, which means there is a lack of complex sentence structures, with fewer subordinate and relative clauses. For this reason, it is rare to see relative clauses in CHKE. Although with so few examples it is difficult to say definitively that CHKE has HKE relative-clause features, the few relative clauses in CHKE do show such features (as discussed below).

CHKE and HKE are not exactly the same, but they are similar in the sense that they share certain morphological and syntactic features. However, specific features of CHKE that are not shared by HKE make the two linguistically distinct. These features, as discussed in the previous section (§3.5), include:

1. Romanised Cantonese,
2. Literal translation of Cantonese to English, and
3. End-of-sentence particles in Romanised form.

These three features are quite apparent and easily recognisable. Though common in CHKE, they do not appear in other forms of written HKE except as code-switching (in novels and other fictional writing, for example) or as gross errors that HKE speakers themselves would reject as ‘not English’. End-of-sentence particles are also used frequently by online chatters from Hong Kong. Below is an excerpt from an online chat session, between two 18-year-old females in 2004 using *MSN Messenger*,

that serves to show the linguistic differences between the types. One of the females (A) was in the UK studying in Form Five, and the other (B) was in Hong Kong studying in Form Six in secondary school. They were chatting about A's coming back to Hong Kong.

A: hehe ~~ u know in Uk, it snowed for 3 days from Monday to Wednesday ar¹³ !!

B: wa.. gum mei ho leng law¹⁴

A: hai ar ~~ I took jor¹⁵ a lot of photos ar !! however, during snowing, the floor was so slippery and the temperature was so low lor¹⁶ ...

A: by the way, I will come back after 3 weeks jar¹⁷ !!!! haha
~~ Sooo excited ar ~~

B: waRRRRR

~~~~~\*\*\*\*\*

B: so excited!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

A: haha ~~~ What are we going to do then ?

B: wa~~~ u like ar~~~~

B: celebrate~~~~

B: u come back and celebrate bd<sup>18</sup> r<sup>19</sup>~~\*\*

A: hai<sup>20</sup> ar !!! ~~ Wow ~~!! Can't wait for it ar !!!

A: i want to sing k<sup>21</sup> la<sup>22</sup>, go shopping la and cut my hair ar

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<sup>13</sup> ar: end-of-sentence particle, from 啊 (aa3).

<sup>14</sup> wa.. gum mei ho leng law: Romanised Cantonese, from 哇.. 咁咪好靚囉 (wa3.. gum2 mai6 hou2 leng3 lo1), meaning “wow... then it'd be beautiful”.

<sup>15</sup> jor: Romanised Cantonese, from perfective aspect marker 咗, roughly meaning “already”.

<sup>16</sup> lor: end-of-sentence particle, from 囉 (lo1).

<sup>17</sup> jar: end-of-sentence particle, from 咋 (zaa3)

<sup>18</sup> bd: shortening of “birthday”.

<sup>19</sup> r: end-of-sentence particle, same as “ar”.

<sup>20</sup> hai: Romanised Cantonese, from 係 (hai6), meaning “yes”.

<sup>21</sup> sing k: shortening of “sing karaoke”.

<sup>22</sup> la: end-of-sentence particle, from 啦 (laa1).

B: hahahahaha~~

B: cut ur hair~~~here???

B: u wait jor gum long jui hai yiu hair cut ar????<sup>23</sup>

A: gum<sup>24</sup> the reason i come back not just cutting my hair  
gei<sup>25</sup> ... but I really have waited for half year gar la<sup>26</sup>

B: hhahahahahahahah~~~~~half yr<sup>27</sup>~~~~~

B: wt<sup>28</sup> do u want ar~?

A: u mean hair style ar ?

B: yes ar~

A: i don't know bor<sup>29</sup> ... something looks nice lor ... u know  
last Friday in the dance party , i curled my hair ar !! It  
looked so nice gar<sup>30</sup> bor !!!

Excerpt 3.2: conversation between two high school students conducted in 2004.

In this excerpt, there are many CMC features, such as shortenings (e.g., “bd” and “yr”) and the use of capitalisations as stressing (e.g., “waRRRRR”). There are also features that CHKE shares with HKE, for instance the use of articles (e.g., “but I really have waited for half Ø year gar la”), prepositions (e.g., “u know last Friday **in** the dance party”), and relative clauses (e.g., “something looks nice lor”). However,

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<sup>23</sup> u wait jor gum long jiu hai yiu cut ur hair ar: this is a Romanised Cantonese expression mixed with an English elements “wait” and “cut your hair”. It is derived from 你 wait 咗咁耐就係要 cut your hair 啊 (nei3 wait zo2 gam3 noi6 zau6 hai6 jiu3 cut your hair aa4), meaning “you have waited for so long just to have a hair cut”.

<sup>24</sup> gum: Romanised Cantonese, from 咁 (gam2), meaning “so”.

<sup>25</sup> gei: end-of-sentence particle, from 嘅 (ge3).

<sup>26</sup> gar la: end-of-sentence particles, from 㗎喇 (gaa3 laa3).

<sup>27</sup> yr: shortening of “year”.

<sup>28</sup> wt: shortening of “what”.

<sup>29</sup> bor: end-of-sentence particle, from 嘞 (bo3).

<sup>30</sup> gar: end-of-sentence particle, from 㗎 (gaa3).

what makes the conversation stand out from other CMC languages and HKE are the CHKE features. Although in the excerpt there are no literal translations from Cantonese to English, there are numerous instances of Romanised Cantonese. End-of-sentence particles can also be found in almost every line that does not express only laughter. This example shows the depth to which CHKE features have permeated the language of online chatters from Hong Kong, making CHKE linguistically distinctive from HKE in other written contexts.

It is noted that not all online conversations between Hong Kong people contain all three kinds of features. Some online conversations contain only one kind of feature. Below is a short online conversation between two friends conducted in 2006. The first interlocutor (A) was a 21-year-old male undergraduate student studying in Australia, and the second one (B) was 26-year-old male working in Hong Kong. Before this conversation took place, B sent A a video clip in which the daughter of a famous Hong Kong celebrity performed pop star Britney Spears's song "Oops I did it again". Since the celebrity was known for her weight (her nickname was "*fei4 fei2*", literally translated as "fat fat"), and her daughter was slightly overweight too, the performance was badly received and became an instant laughing-stock among Hong Kong people.

A: WAR<sup>31</sup>!!!! i sleep until now ar!!!!

B: haha! you have a holiday ma<sup>32</sup>.

A: War<sup>33</sup>!!! U have sent me something scary this morning

A: i am completely awake

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<sup>31</sup> WAR: exclamation, from 哇 (waa3).

<sup>32</sup> ma: end-of-sentence particle, from 嘛 (maa3).

<sup>33</sup> war: exclamation, from 哇 (waa3).

B:ahaha! that's a funny one, I can't help laughing when I received that!

A: u know that.....if i was in HK .....i will complain it too!!!!

B: hahaha! I didn't watcht that, by I read those discussion forums with pics posted, that's really made me laugh!

A: i wanna to complain her long time la<sup>34</sup> .....last time i saw her act Britney Spear!!! i was sick ar<sup>35</sup>

B: yes, i know that, haha, and she sang "Ooops! I did it again", haha. What a big oops! Haha!

A: if she only sing.....i can bear that.....BUT SHE DANCE!!!

B: yes, and every part of her body dance with her too! haha!

A: um..... i go buy breakfast sin<sup>36</sup>!!!

Excerpt 3.3: conversation between two friends conducted in 2006.

In the above conversation, there are numerous CMC features, like stressing using capitalisations (e.g. "BUT SHE DANCE!!!") and the use of short forms ("U" as "you"). There are also HKE features that are shared by CHKE, for instance, the lack of tense consistency (e.g. "I **can't** help laughing when I **received** that!"). Different from the previous conversation, there are no literal translations from Cantonese to English. Also, there is only one instance of Romanised Cantonese (i.e. *sin*). Nevertheless, there are still a number of end-of-sentence particles that distinguish this conversation from other forms of written Hong Kong English.

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<sup>34</sup> la: end-of-sentence particle, from 啦 (laa3).

<sup>35</sup> ar: end-of-sentence particle, from 啊 (aa3).

<sup>36</sup> sin: Romanised Cantonese, from 先 (sin1), meaning "first".

Functionally, CHKE is also different from HKE. My earlier research showed that CHKE has an identity-marking function that HKE does not possess. In the study (Poon 2005), I interviewed 16 young people from Hong Kong. In the interviews, I asked them to read four texts. Two of the texts were excerpts from academic essays and the other two were excerpts from an online chat sessions. All four texts were written by Hong Kong people, with identifiable HKE features in the essay texts and CHKE features in the online chat texts. The informants were asked to guess the background of the authors of each text, and evaluate “how Hong Kong” each text was. All 16 informants guessed that the authors of the two online chat texts were from Hong Kong, and most of them did so because they spotted the CHKE features in the texts. For the two essay texts, only a few informants correctly guessed that the authors were Hong Kong people, and only a few people could spot the HKE features.

When asked to score how “Hong Kong” each text was (1 being completely not “Hong Kong” and 10 being totally “Hong Kong”), the average scores given to the two online chat texts were 9.81 and 7.88 respectively, while the average scores of the two essay texts were 4.22 and 4.25. The results of the interviews showed that the informants could spot CHKE features and relate these features to a Hong Kong identity. On the other hand, they tended not to recognise HKE features and did not link HKE to a Hong Kong identity. These results suggested that Hong Kong people saw HKE and CHKE differently. While they saw CHKE as an identity marker of Hong Kong people, they did not tend to link HKE to Hong Kong identity.



Pang (2003) provides a framework that could help to explain the functional differences between HKE and CHKE. When discussing HKE as a variety, he distinguishes the notion of *localization* and *indigenization*:

By *localization*, I mean that a language variety develops its own characteristics in such aspects as phonology, syntax, lexis, and grammar... By *indigenization*, I mean the acceptance by the local community of the existence of a local variety of a language in wide use in day-to-day communication. (2003: 12)

Putting the results of the study in Poon (2005) in Pang's framework, one can see that HKE is localised, but not yet indigenised. The informants did not tend to recognise HKE, even though it has numerous linguistic features. Unlike HKE, CHKE was not only recognised by the informants, it was used as a marker of Hong Kong people on the internet. Although CHKE was not used for "day-to-day communication" in the sense that Hong Kong people would speak to each other every day in CHKE, it was used for everyday communication by Hong Kong people online through synchronous chatgroups. This situation with regard to CHKE is similar to Pang's *indigenization*.

Seeing that CHKE is linguistically and functionally different from HKE, I believe that CHKE and HKE should be seen as different linguistic systems. They are both produced by bilingual Hong Kong Chinese, but their formal and functional differences, and the contexts in which they arise, mark them apart systematically.

Having established that CHKE is a system, it would be appropriate to ask whether it is possible to use any term in the field of linguistics to denote this system. In other words, one would ask whether CHKE is a language, a sociolect, a register, a variety, or any other form of linguistic manifestation. In the next chapter, I examine the notions of these various terms, and discuss whether CHKE can be regarded as one or

more of the terms that denote a system that is linguistically and functionally distinctive.



#### 4.1 Introduction

As computer-mediated communication (CMC) is a relatively recent form of communication, there is not a consensus on what kind of language is produced through this. Especially for one-to-one synchronous conversation, there does not seem to be agreement on whether the kind of text produced through these “online chats” is a register, variety, or language. It is even argued that one cannot decide whether it is spoken or written language (Baron 2000).

A personal experience of mine illustrates this lack of consensus. In early 2007, I submitted an article to a journal, in which I argued that, since Hong Kong English in CMC had features that were not shared by other forms of written Hong Kong English, and since Hong Kong English had an identity marking function that other forms of written Hong Kong English did not, CMC Hong Kong English should be treated as a different variety.

One reviewer of the article (though not the other reviewer) said that CMC Hong Kong English could not be regarded as a variety, because, despite my effort to describe the unique features of CMC Hong Kong English, the formal differences between the two written Englishes in question are not sufficient to make them two varieties. The reviewer said that, “If the author would like to establish that CMC Hong Kong English is a distinctive variety different from other written forms of Hong Kong English, no matter how different its functions may be, the linguistic evidence must be strong”. This was surprising given that the previous issue of the

same journal had included an article on CMC Mandarin, treating it as a distinctive variety, though offering no “strong linguistic evidence” of a non-functional sort.

This experience shows that people hold different opinions on how a variety should be defined. While many expect a variety to have a distinguishable form and function, what constitutes enough difference to make a variety distinguishable does not appear to have a standard. Moreover, the reviewer argued that features of CMC Hong Kong English are phenomena of language mixing, because the features I point out are either literal translations from Cantonese to English, or Romanised Cantonese. These, according to the reviewer, cannot be features of a variety, because they only show that, when interacting with each other, Hong Kong speakers/writers on the internet mix two languages instead of using one variety. This further confuses the notion of variety with other concepts like code mixing and language mixing.

Often, when linguists analyse different uses of language, they explain certain specific features by notions like registers, code-mixing, and even styles. These notions can usually account for the appearance of certain linguistic features in a text or utterance. However, it can sometimes be difficult to find a consensus on whether a form of communication is constructed in a certain style, or a register, or a new variety, or a genre. This is caused by the ambiguity of the notions, for instance register, style, variety, genre, and code-mixing (when the text or utterance in question involves features of more than one language, and here the boundaries of “language” are not entirely clear). Therefore, in order to gain a better understanding of the language use in CMC, and more specifically of the text I am analysing, it is necessary to discuss these different terms, so that one can have a clearer idea of what is being analysed in

this thesis, and of what is at issue when we call, or refuse to call, a particular form of language a ‘variety’.

## 4.2 Language and dialect

According to the *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Linguistics* (Matthews 1997: 198), the word *language* has 2 senses:

1. A language in the ordinary sense: e.g. English or Japanese. Opp. dialect, also as in ordinary language.
2. The phenomenon of vocal and written communication among human beings generally, again as in ordinary usage. Thus the subject-matter of linguistics includes both language as a general property of our species (sense 2) and particular languages.

The first sense is further explained:

‘A language’ in sense 1 is defined more precisely in different ways according to different theories. For some it is a language system underlying the speech of a community: thus especially a *langue* as defined by Saussure. Alternatively, it is a system in the mind of an individual: thus especially I-language as defined by Chomsky in the mid-1980s. Others have conceived it as the set of sentences potentially observable in a speech community: thus especially a definition by Bloomfield in the 1920s. Alternatively, it is the set of sentences characterized or to be characterized by a generative grammar: thus Chomsky in the 1950s. (ibid.)

Similarly, the *Dictionary of Language and Linguistics* (Hartmann and Stork 1972:

124) based their definition of *language* on that provided by Sapir (1921: 8), who says that “language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols”. They also say that “[l]anguage is not only used as an instrument of communication,

however, but also as a means of individual expression” (ibid.: 124), which is discussed in the *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Linguistics* as well.

The *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Linguistics* provides the following definition for *dialect*.

Any distinct variety of a language, especially one spoken in a specific part of a country or other geographical area.  
(Matthews 1997: 96)

Recognising the need to further distinguish *language* and *dialect*, Matthews writes,

The criterion for distinguishing ‘dialects’ from ‘languages’ is taken, in principle, to be that of mutual intelligibility. (ibid.)

However, he adds that this is not a notion without exceptions and disagreements, because

(a) this is a matter of degree, and (b) ordinary usage often contradicts it. E.g. Italian ‘dialects’ (‘dialetti’) are so called though many from the north and south are not mutually intelligible. By contrast Danish and Norwegian are called ‘languages’ though speakers understand each other reasonably well. (ibid.: 96-7)

While Matthews provides a definition for *dialect* and distinguishes it from *language*, he seems to understand that these definitions are by no means definite, and the differences between the two concepts are not at all clear cut. This viewpoint is echoed by Hartmann and Stork (1972: 65), who say that “[s]ometimes it is difficult to decide whether a variant constitutes a dialectal sub-division or a different language, since it may be blurred by political boundaries...”. Nevertheless, in contrast with

Matthews, who says that the reason for difficulties in distinguishing between language and dialect is the ambiguity of the concept “mutual intelligibility”, Hartmann and Stork believe that the blurring of the distinction between language and dialect is due to political boundaries. They use Dutch and some Low German dialects as an example. These Low German dialects are linguistically closer to Dutch than to German. However, because these dialects are spoken in Germany, instead of the Netherlands, they are seen as dialects of German instead.

Holmes (2001) uses another example to illustrate the point that mutual intelligibility is not necessarily enough to distinguish language and dialect.

Though a map suggests the languages of Europe or India are tidily compartmentalised, in reality they ‘blend’ into one another. The French spoken in the border towns and villages of Italy, Spain and Switzerland, has more in common with the language of the next village than the language of Paris. From one village and town to the next there is a chain or continuum. (Holmes 2001: 129)

She also discusses the notion of *dialect chain*.

Dialect chains are very common across the whole of Europe. One chain links all dialects of German, Dutch and Flemish from Switzerland through Austria and Germany, to the Netherlands and Belgium, and there is another which links dialects of Portuguese, Spanish, Catalan, French, and Italian. A Scandinavian chain links dialects of Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish, so that Swedes and Norwegians in adjacent areas can communicate more easily than fellow-Swedes from southern and northern Sweden. The same kind of dialect chains are found throughout India. They illustrate very clearly the arbitrariness of the distinction between ‘language’ and ‘dialect’. (ibid.)



A question then arises concerning these distinctions — if it is true that some dialects are not mutually intelligible, while some languages are, then mutual intelligibility, which is related to the forms of the linguistic varieties, cannot be the deciding factor. Some other factors also contribute to the language/dialect distinction. For instance, Haugen pointed out in 1966 that, in general usage, the term “language” is superordinate to “dialect”, but the nature of this association “may be either linguistic or social” (Haugen 1966: 922). Since the linguistic side of the consideration cannot provide a full answer, one may need to turn to the social side for a complete picture.

Wardhaugh (2002) suggests that, in order to understand the issue of language and dialect, the notions of “power” and “solidarity” have to be taken into consideration.

Power requires some kind of asymmetrical relationship between entities: one has more of something that is important, e.g. status, money, influence, etc., than the other or others. A language has more power than any of its dialects. It is the powerful dialect but it has become so because of non-linguistic factors. Standard English and Parisian French are good examples. Solidarity, on the other hand, is a feeling of equality that people have with one another. They have a common interest around which they will bond. A feeling of solidarity can lead people to preserve a local dialect or an endangered language to resist power, or to insist on independence. It accounts for the persistence of local dialects, the modernization of Hebrew, and the separation of Serbo-Croatian into Serbian and Croatian. (Wardhaugh 2002: 30)

Holmes (2001) agrees that social factors are important to the definitions of the two terms.

Languages are not purely linguistic entities. They serve social functions. In order to define a language, it is important to look to its social and political functions, as well as its linguistic features. So a *language* can be thought of as a collection of dialects that are usually linguistically similar, used by different

social groups who *choose* to say that they are speakers of one language which functions to unite and represent them to other groups. (Holmes 2001: 130)

Bernard Comrie, the editor of *The World's Major Languages* (1990), states that one of the main issues in deciding which languages to include in the book was that “it is difficult or impossible in many cases to decide whether two related speech varieties should be considered different languages or merely dialect variants”, and he admits that decisions as to which varieties are languages and which are dialects “have often been made more on political and social grounds rather than strictly linguistic grounds” (Comrie 1990: 2).

There is, then, a broad consensus that social and political factors play an essential part in determining whether a set of features can be a language. Arguing that language is political in every aspect, Joseph (2006: 7-9) discusses how politics plays an indispensable role in judging what counts as a language.

[A] language is not a thing, but a practice always characterised by diversity into which attempts at imposing unity are introduced. These attempts are what we normally mean by linguistic authority, but they inevitably bump up against the sort of authority represented by *usage*, the earlier practice, which has behind it the force of custom and a certain social authenticity. (Joseph 2006: 9)

As apolitical as some linguists would like to see language as being, they would still have to decide what a language is by how speakers see it and use it. This usage implicitly entails “a certain social authenticity” with its own political dimension. In this sense, one cannot rid language of politics, which is an external and non-linguistic

factor. Deciding what “the language” is (and what its dialects are) is inevitably political in nature.

### 4.3 Sociolect

Similar to the notion of *dialect* is *sociolect* (also known as *social dialect*), as both terms denote variations in linguistic features within a language. While *dialect* is mainly used to describe differences in linguistic features in relation to geographical locations, *social dialect* (or *sociolect*) focuses on the relationship between linguistic features and social class. Matthews’s dictionary provides the following definition of *sociolects*.

Form of speech associated with a social class or similar group within a society, as opposed to a dialect in the ordinary sense, associated with a geographical place or region. (Matthews 1997: 344)

Similarly, Trudgill (2003: 122) defines sociolect as “a variety or lect which is thought of as being related to its speakers’ social background rather than geographical background. A social class dialect is thus a form of sociolect”.

Using the English language as an example, Holmes (2001) illustrates *sociolect*.

The dialect we grace with the name standard English is spoken with many different accents. But, as illustrated in the discussion of regional dialects, there are also many standard Englishes. American standard English is distinguishable from Australian standard English, for instance, and both differ from the British standard dialect. (Holmes 2001: 132)

Despite the relationship between sociolect and social classes, Holmes’ (2001) example illustrates that sociolect is not purely determined by social class. Even

though there exists a notion of Standard English, whose features are mainly based on the English spoken by upper- class and upper middle-class people, the fact that even their spoken usage differs from place to place makes Standard English more varied than it is usually thought to be. This phenomenon has also given rise to the different Standard Englishes referred to by Holmes. Although the most obvious differences between these Standard Englishes are phonological, one can also see variations in morphology and syntax. For instance, Bauer (2002:50) mentions the syntactic fact that, for collective nouns like *government*, *committee*, and *team*, British people tend to see plural concord as correct (e.g. “the government have decided...”) while Americans are more inclined to see singular concord as correct (e.g. “the team agrees...”).

#### 4.4 Register

Different from the two “lects” discussed above, *register* is related more to the “situation” and “context” the speaker is in. According to Leckie-Tarry (1995: 6), this term was first used by Reid in 1956. Halliday, MacIntosh and Strevens, who introduced this term to a wider audience, defined register as “varieties according to use... in the sense that each speaker has a range of varieties and chooses between them at different times” (Halliday et al.1964: 77). It seems from the definition that *registers* are sets of features possessed by a speaker, but what Halliday et al. meant by “different times” is unclear — presumably that the choice is determined by the factors of setting that generally matter for Halliday.

Biber’s (1995) definition of register complements Halliday’s in terms of explaining what is meant by “different times”. Biber sees *register* “as a cover term for any variety associated with particular situational contexts or purposes” (1995: 1). He says

that an adequate account of any one register includes three major components, namely (a) description of the situation in which the register is used; (b) description of the linguistic characteristic of the register; and (c) analysis of the functional or conventional associations between the situational and linguistic feature (ibid.: 10). In other words, a register is a set of linguistic features that is associated with the situation in which it arises. Likewise Biber and Finegan (1994: 4) define register as “a language variety viewed with respect to its contexts of use”.

However, various definitions say that *register* is more linked to specific occupations.

A set of features of speech or writing characteristic of a particular type of linguistic activity or a particular group when engaging in it. E.g. journalese is a register different from that in which sermons are delivered, or in which smutty stories are told. (Matthews 1997: 314)

A variety of language used for a specific purpose, as opposed to a social or regional dialect (which varies by speakers). Registers may be more narrowly defined by reference to subject matter... to medium... or to level or formality. (Hartmann & Stork 1972: 194)

Some linguists describe [the kind of jargon which a group of specialists often develop to talk about their speciality] as ‘register’ variation. Other use the term ‘register’ more narrowly to describe the specific vocabulary associated with different occupational groups. The distinction is not always clear, however, and many sociolinguists simply ignore it. (Holmes 2001: 246)

A technical term from sociolinguistics... which is used to describe a language variety that is associated with a particular topic subject or activity. (Trudgill 2003: 110)

These definitions say that registers are linguistic features in relation to professions and occupations. The activities involved in these professions give rise to certain linguistic features, and these features are used for a particular group of people for a specific purpose. One interesting observation is that this profession-based set of definitions is provided by introductory linguistic or sociolinguistic textbooks whose target readers are university undergraduates, whereas the first set of definitions is given by authors who are writing mainly for their fellow scholars.

Two main differences between the two sets of definitions of *register* are, (a) the term's scope, and (b) the inclusion or exclusion of the purpose for which the features are produced. Concerning (a), the first set of definitions covers many more language varieties than the second set. The first regards all distinctive forms that are associated with certain social situations as registers, whereas the second only includes forms that are linked to professions. Hence, provided that "cocktail party chat" has certain specific linguistic features, it would be a register according one set of definitions, but would not be a register according to the other set.

Secondly, while Hartmann and Stork see *register* as a language variety used for a specific purpose and Holmes regards it as a form that is "developed to talk about their speciality" (which is a purpose), none of the scholars in the first camp includes purpose in his definition of register. It is understandable why the second group includes purpose in their definition, since the idea of profession is itself purpose-based. A journalist is someone who writes with the specific purpose of publishing in newspapers or magazines, so 'journalese' will naturally be expected to reflect that same purpose.

However, including purpose in the definition creates conceptual difficulties of two sorts. First of all, a text or a language variety cannot have a ‘purpose’ in the same sense as a speaker or writer has. When one says that a set of linguistic features has a purpose, it implies that one can second guess the speaker’s purpose in producing such features. A purpose cannot be directly observed. It can only be discerned interpretatively through a person’s actions, whether they are linguistic actions or other kinds of actions. Hence, if register is defined by its purpose, then the definition would stand on shaky ground, because no one but the producer of a text or utterance could claim authoritatively that the variety in question is a register. It would also allow any and every linguistic production to potentially define a register, as speakers and writers can have, or at least claim to have, a specific purpose for what they write and say — or indeed more than one. Such a tautological definition, by which any text or utterance can be claimed as a register, makes the systematic study of register very difficult, if not impossible.

One might argue that, in general, people can confidently and correctly observe the writer’s purpose through looking at the language variety. The difficulty mentioned, although an insuperable philosophical and methodological problem, is not actually a problem in everyday practice. People can usually come to understand each other’s motives and purpose of an action (be it linguistic or not) by observations and their own living experience. This kind of understanding, although not always accurate, provides us with a good basis on which we can gain a good knowledge of the people around us. In this case, even though linguists cannot directly look at the mind of the writer or speaker and decide whether he or she has a specific purpose, they can still

see whether the set of features in question is a register, by discerning the purpose through examining the variety itself.

Nevertheless, this argument would lead to the second conceptual difficulty, which is that the definition is potentially circular. On the one hand, when deciding whether a variety is a register, one has to consider if there is a specific purpose. On the other hand, when one wants to determine whether a specific purpose is involved in the production of a language variety, one relies on looking at the specific features that constitute the register. This mutual dependency of meaning for both concepts (i.e. “feature of a register” and “specific purpose”) makes the definition circular. I say it is only potentially so because, theoretically, the specific purpose of the features is not dependent on the features themselves, but rather on the producer of the features. However, as discussed above, since in reality, a person’s purpose in initiating any linguistic (or non-linguistic) action is not directly observable, and it is predominately through examining the features that the purpose can be discerned, in practice, defining a variety as a register by looking at its purpose would lead to circularity.

Before moving on to the discussion of other terms, one point that is made by de Beaugrande (1993) is worth noting. He says that one cannot view register as ‘universal’, because “‘register’ is by its very definition, firmly embedded in cultural situation” (1993: 14). One might be able to identify “journalese” as a register, but one would see many differences between the forms of journalese in *The Times* and *The Sun*, which are both newspapers published in the UK. Even though they are owned by the same person, Rupert Murdoch, the language use (including grammar,



vocabulary and organisation of paragraphs) is quite different, reflecting the different linguistic cultures of their target readers.

#### 4.5 Style

One of the first uses of the term *style* in sociolinguistics was by Labov, who researched linguistic variables in various contexts. In his 1966 New York City survey, he put subjects into five different contexts (i.e. reading a minimal pair list, reading an isolated word list, reading a passage, speaking in an interview and speaking in a casual situation) (Labov 1966: 8). He found that subjects had a tendency to speak with more non-standard variables when they were in a more informal context. Labov regarded the speech differences produced in these varying contexts as differences of style. The implication of his study is that the set of linguistic features appearing in a certain situation forms a style. Thus a person can speak in an interview style, or a casual style, depending on the situation he or she is in.

*Style* has the following definition in the *Dictionary of Language and Linguistics*:

The personal use an individual makes in speech or writing of the language at his disposal. The choices a speaker or writer makes from among the phonological, grammatical and lexical resources of his language have been the subject of many different approaches in stylistic... Contemporary linguists take a wider view of style, recognising the less conscious personality traits in the language of an individual speaker ('idiolect') in relation to time, place, social environment and subject matter... Sometimes the notion of style is extended to cover the characterisation of groups of writers and their literary output, and statistical techniques may be used to compare 'texts' or 'genres'. (Hartmann & Stork 1972: 223)

This definition of style, similar to the one given by Labov, involves the variation of speech and writing a particular person exhibits in different contexts. The bundle of

linguistic features that appear in a person's use of language in a certain context constitutes a style. Based on this understanding, style seems to focus on individuals, unlike terms such as language and dialect, which focus on systemic variation across a group of people.

Hymes (2003) argues that *styles* are not just ways of speaking. It is not only a matter "of statistical frequency of elements already given in linguistic description, or as deviation from some norm given by such description", as it also "depend[s] upon qualitative judgements of appropriateness, and must often be described in terms of selections that apply globally to a discourse" (2003: 39). According to Hymes, it is important not only to look at style as an aggregation of linguistic features in a given particular situation, but also to consider speakers' and hearers' judgement of the appropriateness of producing such features in that situation.

Crystal and Davy (1969) suggest that the correlation between stylistic features and contexts is not usually one to one. They observe that, in many published works, there seem to be hidden assumptions that "the language can be predicted from the situation and the situation from the language with the same degree of certainty" (ibid.: 62). Although there can be cases in which the linguistic features and the situation are correlated to each other one to one, Crystal and Davy argue that, conceptually, such assumptions are invalid. Based on their observations, a feature is often ambiguous as to its situational function, and this indicates that more than one variable is in operation simultaneously.

Irvine (2001) points out that, in linguistics and sociolinguistics, style has a meaning beyond intra-speaker variation. Irvine uses Haynes' (1995) book entitled *Style* as her

example to illustrate this point. In his book, Haynes says that he does not attempt “to define style, or its relations to the central concerns of linguistics, to psychology, social theory or literature” (1995: 1). Instead, Haynes introduces various linguistic phenomena that are related to style. Examining the topics in the book, ranging from letter-writing conventions to patterns of grammar, Irvine says that style can be understood as meaning “almost anything within a language that could produce differences in and between monologic texts...” (Irvine 2001: 26), and according to this meaning, style ranges from meaning “relatively institutionalized variation, at one pole, to kinds of patterning that have more to do with individuals’ creativity and presentation of self, at the other” (ibid.: 26).

In Irvine’s words, the meaning of style includes sets of features that are shared by a group of people in the same speech community. Eckert’s (2001) definition of linguistic style agrees with this notion, and she adds that style is also defined by the functions performed by the set of linguistic features. First, Eckert defines linguistic style as “a clustering of linguistic resources, and an association of that clustering with social meaning” (2001: 123). Then, she points out that there are two kinds of styles. On the one hand, some styles are to be used by individuals to construct their self identities, and on the other hand, there exist some “group” styles, which mark someone as a member of a certain group, for instance “Valley Girl” or “New York Jew”.

From the discussions above it can be seen that, having different styles at their disposal, explicitly or implicitly, people shift their linguistic styles in different contexts to perform various functions. This can be for formality needs, hence the

subject of Labov's study shifts to different styles in different speech events. It can be for politeness purposes, as in Ide's (2005: 50) demonstration that Japanese addressee reference terms have three different styles according to politeness. It can also be for marking the speakers' identity, as Eckert suggests. Similar to *language* and *dialect*, each *style* has its social meanings, and speakers shift to and from various styles to convey meanings that lie beyond the semantics of individual words and sentences. Locating the boundary between such shifts of style and "code-switching", the use of different "languages" or "varieties" by the same speaker, involves all the conceptual problems discussed to this point.

Ervin-Tripp's (2001) paper focuses on the language ideologies that are brought about in style-shifting, but I shall focus on her conceptual division between *variety*, on the one hand, and *style*, on the other. In her investigation of the appearance of different features in a person's speech, Ervin-Tripp discusses style shifting, borrowing, and code-switching. While she examines the types of style-shifts in monolinguals, she agrees that code-switching is a term reserved "for maximally bilingual speakers who are known to have parallel options in both codes" (Ervin-Tripp 2001: 46). Style shifting is the strategy a monolingual employs, whereas for bilinguals and multilinguals, on top of style shifting, they can also utilise their linguistic repertoire which involves more than one language by code-switching. Style-shifting and code-switching are operating at two different levels — style-shifting is intra-language, while code-switching is inter-language. Ervin-Tripp, however, leaves some obvious questions unanswered: "What is a language?", "What is a dialect?", "What is a code?".

Without clarifying the concepts of the terms like "language", "dialect" and "code", it

would be difficult for readers of her work to fully understand the notion of “style” as she deploys it.

#### 4.6 Genre

*Genre*, according to Fairclough (2000), is the action of which language is a part. In other words, language is only part of the action. Genre is the whole action in which language is involved, and this action affects the way language is used. Using as his example Tony Blair’s (the then Prime Minister of the UK) press conference concerning the publication of a Green Paper (Government consultation document), Fairclough says that the Green Paper constitutes a genre, “a particular way of governing [which] involves particular ways of using language” (2000: 145).

Along the same lines, Devitt (1996) comments that genre is studied as action instead of form. A genre, she says, is “a text-type that *does* something rather than *is* something” (1996: 606, italics in the original). Devitt stresses the “action” aspect of genre. In many studies, she explains, genre is treated as rhetorical dynamic action, which is like “a game, like tennis, embedded in ceremony and place, each genre action as a serve that needs to be returned” (ibid.: 606). Unlike the terms discussed above, although genre involves language forms, it is the action that the linguistic features perform which is the focus of genre.

Swales’s influential study of *genre* gives the following definition:

A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style. Communicative purpose is both a

privileged criterion and one that operates to keep the scope of a genre as here conceived narrowly focused on comparable rhetorical action. In addition to purpose, exemplars of a genre exhibit various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content, and intended audience. If all high probability expectations are realized, the exemplar will be viewed as prototypical by the parent discourse community. The genre names inherited and produced by discourse communities and imported by others constitute valuable ethnographic communication, but typically need further validation. (Swales 1990: 58)

According to Swales, one can observe a genre through the language use constrained by that genre in a particular setting. Also, the author stresses the importance of communicative purpose in defining a genre. Communicative purpose, in his words, is a “privileged criterion”. Using purpose to define genre, however, would run into the same difficulties I mentioned in §4.4, the first of which is that purpose cannot be directly observed. Addressing this difficulty, Swales writes that:

Stressing the primacy of purpose may require the analyst to undertake a fair amount of independent and open-minded investigation, thus offering protection against a facile classification based on stylistic features and inherited beliefs, such as typifying research articles as simple reports of experiments. (ibid.: 46)

Nonetheless, even though one may be able to observe the purpose of a text or utterance, it leads to the second difficulty I mentioned in §4.4, which is that such definitions are potentially circular.

Ferguson (1994: 21) sets out “the basic working assumption implicit in the sociolinguistic study of genre variation”:

A message type that recurs regularly in a community (in terms of semantic content, participants, occasions of use, and so on) will tend over time to develop an identifying internal structure, differentiated from other message types in the repertoire of the community. (ibid.: 21).

Ferguson's view of genre as a message type that has developed a pattern over time due to its recurring regularly in similar occasions in a community is problematic according to Bauman (2001), as it cannot explain the variation within a genre.

Bauman suggests that some genres include well-defined sub-genres, and the differences among these sub-genres are partly the reason for which variations within a genre exist. Bauman believes that the definition of genre has to account for both the "relatively clearcut and conventional types", on the one hand, and "categories that escape into the margins of classificatory ambiguity" (2001: 58), on the other. He says that the resolution "requires a shift from the conception of genre as a framework for the classification of finished textual products with immanent formal properties to an understanding of genre as a framework for the comprehension of discursive practice" (ibid.). For this reason, Bauman suggests the following definition of genre:

We conceive of genre as one order of speech style, a constellation of systematically related, co-occurrent formal features and structures that contrasts with other such constellations... More specifically, a genre is a speech style oriented to the production and reception of particular kinds of texts. (ibid.)

Instead of emphasising the classification of a set of texts that have similar linguistic forms, Bauman focuses on classifying different genres by how these texts are produced and received. This also seems to be how Fairclough understands the term. Macaulay (2001), in his response to Bauman's article, praises him for bringing the

classification of genres into consideration when giving a definition of genre.

Nevertheless, he points out that the classification of genres, however carefully done, is almost impossible to get precise. This is because the number of non-linguistic factors in a genre that affect the production of a linguistic form is too high. The taxonomy is not detailed enough to be accurate.

Despite the different understanding of genre among these scholars, they all agree that, similarly to *register* and *sociolect*, a *genre* has to be understood not only in terms of its linguistic features, but also the social and contextual factors that are associated with the features. Compared to *register*, *genre* seems to be focused more on the whole speech event instead of the linguistic form in communication.

#### 4.7 Variety

Among all the terms that refer to language in use, many agree that the most neutral term is *variety*. Linguists normally understand that terms like *language*, *dialect*, and even *register* are ideologically loaded. Unlike these terms, *variety* seems to be a lot less ideological. This is how Matthews's dictionary defines variety:

Any form of a language seen as systematically distinct from others: thus the dialect of a specific region (e.g. Cornwall), any more general form distinguished as a whole by speakers (e.g. American English or British English), a social dialect, one of the forms distinguished in diglossia, a dialect used in specific genre of literature, and so on. (Matthews 1997: 394)

The key term here is “systematically distinct”. Any set of features that is seen as systematically distinct from other sets can be regarded as a variety. However, the passive voice in the phrase “seen as systematically distinct from others” begs a question: *who* sees them as systematically distinct? Who decides *how* distinct and



*how* systematic a set of features must be to qualify, and whether the features of any particular form of speech or writing meet the threshold? In other words, who can determine whether a set of features can be a variety?

Holmes (2001: 6) provides a similar definition that says a variety “is a set of linguistic forms used under specific social circumstances, i.e., with a distinctive social distribution”. Hence, to Holmes, variety “is a broad term which includes different accents, different linguistic styles, different dialects and even different languages which contrast with each other for social reasons” (ibid.). She says that this term is useful because of its neutrality.

Hudson (1996: 22) defines variety as “a set of linguistic items with similar social distribution”. Admitting it to be a general notion, he says *varieties* include what are normally known as languages, dialects and registers. Similarly to Holmes (2001), Hudson points out that this term gives linguists a neutral term to discuss sets of features without the ideological biases *language* and *dialect* embody.

Wardhaugh (2002), summarising various definitions, concludes that *variety* “is defined in terms of a specific set of ‘linguistic items’ or ‘human speech patterns’... which can uniquely associate with some external factor” (2002: 25). Examples of these factors can be speaker’s gender, class, geographical location and speech community. Wardhaugh’s list of several categories of talk that he would regard as varieties includes some that are generally considered languages (e.g. Standard English), dialects (e.g. Cockney), registers (e.g. legalese), and even use of language in specific contexts (e.g. cocktail party talk). It appears that, according to Wardhaugh, *language*, *dialect*, *register* are all hyponyms of *variety*.

Trudgill (2003: 139-140) says that *variety* is “[a] neutral term used to refer to any kind of language — a **dialect**, **accent**, **sociolect**, **style**, or **register** — that a linguist happens to want to discuss as a separate entity for some particular purpose”. Unlike the previous definitions, *varieties* here include *accents* as well.

Meyerhoff (2006: 297) explains *variety* as a “relatively neutral term used to refer to languages and dialects. [It] avoids the problem of drawing a distinction between the two, and avoids negative attitudes often attached to the term *dialect*”. In this definition, this term covers only *language* and *dialect*, leaving *register* and *style* out of its scope.

All of the above definitions of *variety* stress the link between linguistic features and external factors that include variables like age, gender, and class. However, it seems that the term is quite different in its scope according to different people. While some believe it is only a cover term for *language* and *dialect* (e.g. Meyerhoff 2006), some think that it should include *register* as well (e.g. Hudson 1996), and some others would include *style* and even *accent* (e.g. Trudgill 2003).

It is understandable why *variety* is used as a cover term for *language* and *dialect*. This is because the latter two terms are ideological, and they might be interpreted as implying language attitudes (as Meyerhoff 2006 mentions) that bar one from focusing on the systematic formal distinctions of a set of features. It would also make sense for *variety* to include the notion of *sociolect*, as it is just a specific type of dialect, the distinctive use of language that is associated with socioeconomic factors, like social class. Using the same logic, then, *register* and *style* should also be

*varieties*, as the former terms are distinctive forms that are linked to external social factors.

In the discussion of variety, Crystal and Davy (1969) say that any text and utterance can give us other kinds of information apart from the message being communicated. The authors list thirteen questions that an utterance can potentially answer through its form rather than (or in conjunction with) its semantic content:

Does it tell us which specific person used it? (*Individuality*)

Does it tell us where in the country he is from? (*Regional dialect*)

Does it tell us which social class he belongs to? (*Class dialect*)

Does it tell us during which period of English he spoke or wrote it, or how old he was (*Time*)

Does it tell us whether he was speaking or writing? (*Discourse medium*)

Does it tell us whether he was speaking or writing as an end in itself... or as a means to a further end? (*Simple v complex discourse medium*)

Does it tell us whether there was only one participant in the utterance, or whether there was more than one? (*Discourse participation*)

Does it tell us whether the monologue and dialogue are independent, or are to be considered as part of a wider type of discourse? (*Simple v complex discourse participation*)

Does it tell us which specific occupational activity the user is engaged in? (*Province*)

Does it tell us about the social relationship existing between the user and his interlocutors? (*Status*)

Does it tell us about the purpose he had in mind when conveying the message? (*Modality*)

Does it tell us that the user was being deliberately idiosyncratic? (*Singularity*)

Does it tell us none of these things? (*Common-core*)

(Crystal and Davy 1969: 81-82).

According to Crystal and Davy, any one text can provide us with information about each of these questions, and the answer to each question carries a dimension of the speaker's or writer's identity, or the context in which the text is produced. Having established this, a variety is then "seen as a unique configuration of linguistic features" which "displays a stable formal-function correspondence, which is the basis of the intuitive impression of coherence and predictability..." (ibid.: 82). In other words, these features or sets of features can function as a link between the form of language in a text and a certain kind of paralinguistic information, and a variety is a set of features that are linked to a certain dimension of the speaker, writer or context. It is noted that "function" in this definition does not mean notions such as the illocutionary force of a form, as Austin (1975) proposes, but rather that the form conveys the information about the speaker and the context in which the text is produced. By this definition, what *variety* points at would be similar to *variety* defined by scholars such as Meyerhoff (2006) and Wardhaugh (2002). However, conceptually, these two definitions are different. In Meyerhoff and Wardhaugh's definitions, whereby *variety* can be used to indicate socioeconomic factors, linguistic features are simply co-related to certain socioeconomic categories. For example, in Scotland, West Highland English speakers who have a knowledge of Gaelic would tend to say "take that whisky here" and "It's not that that I'm wanting", instead of "bring that whisky here" and "I don't want that", which are preferred by Standard Scots English speakers (Trudgill 2000: 50-51). The respective forms are linked to the social categories (in this case, "West Highland Scots" and "Lowland Scots").

However, in the form-function definition proposed by Crystal and Davy, the linguistic features also play a role in performing and constructing the speakers' social identities. In this context, by uttering "It's not that that I'm wanting", the speaker is seen as explicitly or implicitly constructing his or her identity as a Scot who is from the West Highland area, or who has some Gaelic background, or both. In other words, in the first kind of definition, as provided by Meyerhoff and Wardhaugh, the term variety is used to *index* social factors, while the form-function definition emphasises that the language forms can be used by speakers or writers to *perform* their identity that comprises these factors.

#### 4.8 Taxonomies of the terms – users vs. uses

In the previous section, I have shown that terms linguists believe have agreed meanings are actually defined and understood in a variety of ways. In this section, I examine how a number of prominent linguists conceptualise these terms in relation to one another.

Milroy and Milroy (1997) distinguish between "speaker variable" and "contextual style":

In order to demonstrate covariation between linguistic and social categories, it is normal to identify one or more *speaker variable*. The most widely used of these is *socioeconomic class*. Other variables that are commonly used include age of speaker, sex (gender) of speakers, ethnic group of speaker, and social network... In addition, it is usual, where possible, to recognize *contextual style* as a variable, and this variable tends to cut across or interact with the speaker variable. It is not a speaker variable in quite the same sense as the others mentioned, as variation according to social context or occasion of use (i.e. "stylistic variation") is not a characteristic of the speaker as such, but of the speaker's relationship to the resources of the language and of the situational contexts in

which the speaker finds himself at different times... (Milroy and Milroy 1997: 50)

*Style* and what the authors regard as *speaker variable* are both notions that refer to sets of features that are co-related to certain external factors. The main difference is that speaker variables are linked to factors like age, gender and ethnic group. Styles, on the other hand, are linked to different contexts, such as who the speaker is speaking to, in which situation he or she is speaking, and whether there is any third person listening to or mentioned in the conversation. The former kind of “feature sets” seem to be what people normally regard as languages, dialects, and varieties, and the latter kind are usually known as styles. This distinction between *contextual style* and *speaker variable* could be taken as a basis on which people believe *style* and *variety* should be distinguished.

In fact, this is no novel idea. As early as 1964, Halliday et al. discussed the *users* and *uses* of language (1964: 75-110). In their work, they say *dialect* is associated with language users, while *register* is a term associated with uses of language. Similarly, Biber and Finegan (1994: 4) say that “[i]n addition to the term *register*, the terms *genre*, *text type* and *style* have been used to refer to language varieties associated with situational *uses*”, and that “[a]ll these terms are distinguished from *dialect*, which is used to refer to language varieties associated with groups of *users*”. Here, the authors use “situational uses” and “groups of users” as factors to divide the notions in question into two kinds. What Milroy and Milroy (1997) regard as “speaker variables” could be under the classification of “groups of users”, whereas “contextual style” could be seen as factors in the “situational uses” category. It seems that both pairs of scholars are aware of the difference in nature of these terms. On the

one hand, there are terms which refer to the linguistic systems that have to do with their users, and on the other hand, we have terms which denote the distinctive sets of linguistic features that are linked to their use in various situations.

In his study of *register*, Biber (1995) distinguishes the term from geographical and social dialects. He uses *register* as “a cover term for any variety associated with particular situation contexts or purpose”, as opposed to *geographical dialects*, which “are varieties associated with speakers living in a particular location”, and *social dialects* which “are varieties associated with speakers belonging to a given demographic group” (1995: 1). This way of distinguishing the terms is comparable to the division between “uses” and “users” mentioned above.

Fairclough (2000) illustrates the relationship between the concepts of *style* and *genre* by examining how Tony Blair linguistically and rhetorically constructed a new ideology for the Labour Party. He explains:

Part of the variability of his style is to do with the variability of the genres within which he operates. For example, a political speech at a Labour Party conference or in Parliament entails a different use of language from that of a radio phone-in programme, television interview, Fabian Society pamphlet, or an article in the *Daily Mail*. Even within any one of these genres — let us say political speech — Blair uses language in different ways to do different things, for instance to spell out Government policy, or to argue a contentious issue, or to establish a rapport and intimacy with his immediate audience. (2000: 96)

According to Fairclough, *genres* are settings that affect a person’s speech in certain ways. Within each *genre*, one can choose to speak in different *styles* to do different

things. Genre and style seem to come in a particular order in his work: a speaker's awareness of genre precedes his or her choosing of a style.

Bex (1996) proposes a model to describe the terms he uses in his study of text varieties. He points out that one should differentiate between, on the one hand, discussing the construction of a text as, for example a letter, and, on the other hand, discussing using the text as a letter. The former concept he names as *language-in-observation*, and the latter *language-in-action* (1996: 85). With this idea, Bex suggests that both *register* and *genre* are terms that describe language-in-action, and his treatment of these terms is different from the ones mentioned in (§4.4 and §4.6). A genre is an “aggregation of texts which are perceived as performing broadly similar functions within this society” (ibid.: 85). Literature, advertising, business, and education are all examples of genre. Registers, on the other hand, are associated with individual pieces of text. Examples of registers given by Bex are particular novels, ads, contracts, and text books. Although both terms refer to concepts of text varieties and functions they perform, genre appears to be in a higher order than register. According to Bex, since both genre and register are language-in-action, the construction of the texts, which involves the language users, is emphasised. In the case of genre, the language users are all speakers of the language, and in the case of register, the language users are individual readers and writers of particular texts. For Bex, the focus of identifying genre and register is on users, instead of uses.

While the scholars above have provided various discussions of the meanings and the scope of the terms in questions, one of the more comprehensive analyses of the nature of the terms is given by Ferguson (1994). He examines notions including



*dialect*, *register*, *genre*, and *varieties*, and provides a working assumption implicit in sociolinguistic studies of each. For *dialect*, the assumption is:

A group that operates regularly in a society as a functional element (e.g. in terms of physical location, marriage patterns, or economic, religious, or other interactional behavior) will tend to develop identifying markers of language structure and language use, different from the language of other social groups. (Ferguson 1994: 18-19)

Here, *dialect* is said to be developed by a group that operates regularly in a society as a functional element. Unlike the previous discussions, dialects are not just linguistic norms that are related to people from the same physical locations (for *geographical dialect*) and economic behaviour (for *sociolect*). Other elements, like people's marriage patterns and religious behaviour, also need to be considered, because they play a role in giving rise to these norms. The author points out that *dialect* is not merely to do with groups of language users, as what the previous discussions say, it is actually associated with what those groups do, and how those groups behave and interact non-linguistically.

Ferguson provides the following working assumption for *register*:

A communication situation that recurs regularly in a society (in terms of participants, setting, communicative functions, and so forth) will tend over time to develop identifying markers of language structure and language use, different from the language of other communication situation. (Ferguson 1994: 20)

Again, one can see that the main distinction between *dialect* and *register* is that, while the former focuses on the language that is linked to how speakers behave as a

group, the latter stresses how language users behave in particular situations.

Ferguson sees the relationship between *register* and *genre* quite differently from Bex (1996). Ferguson's working assumption for *genre* (stated in §4.6) emphasizes "message type", whereas the language features of *register*, as mentioned above, are associated with "communication situation". According to this differentiation, *genre* is not a higher order of *register*. Rather, they are terms that focus on different aspects of the use of language.

The assumption underlying *variety* is also discussed by Ferguson:

Sets of identifying markers of dialect, register, and genre variation vary greatly in the degree of cohesiveness they show as systems and the sharpness of boundaries between them; the more cohesive the systems, the sharper the boundaries, and the more they are perceived by the participants as separate entities, the more useful it is to analyze them as language varieties: dialects, register, and genres, respectively. (Ferguson 1994: 23)

In this assumption, variety can be a cover term for dialect, register and genre. Its distinctiveness depends on two elements, the cohesiveness of the system itself, and the participants' perception of the set of linguistic norms in question. The first element says that, in a cohesive linguistic system, the norms in the system are numerous, distinctive, consistent and frequent in appearance. When the system is cohesive, it is easy for it to be distinguished from its neighbouring systems due to its large number of specific and recurring norms. This in turn causes what Ferguson refers to as a sharp boundary of the system in question. Concerning the second element, it is said that it is not enough only to have distinctive linguistic norms in the system. These norms need to be recognised by participants. It is noted that Ferguson has not defined what "participants" means in this article. Commonly, participants

here can be understood as participants of communication. However, in this context, it may also be understood as people in the community in which this linguistic system is used, as well as communities that would identify themselves with, or distance themselves from this system. In other words, according to Ferguson, a variety needs not only to have distinctive norms, these norms also need to be recognisable to the speakers and hearers of the system that contains these features.

From the above discussion, one can see that “[m]ost researchers agree in using *register* to refer to situationally defined varieties, as opposed to *dialect*, which refers to varieties associated with different speaker groups” (Biber 1994: 51), as Biber rightly sums up. This “uses” and “users” distinction is quite useful in conceptually clarifying the distinction between *register* and *dialect*. It does not however solve all the difficulties with these two terms, let alone the whole range of others examined in earlier sections.

#### 4.9 Problems in the definitions

The above discussion of the various (socio)linguistic terms for forms of language exhibiting distinct and systematic sets of features shows that there is not much consensus among researchers on how the terms should be defined. This, I believe, is the main reason for which scholars do not agree on whether a set of features is a language, a dialect, a style, a register, a genre, or a variety. In this section, I focus on the differences in opinions concerning the definitions of the terms in question.

As mentioned above, some researchers see register as a term to cover all uses that are related to speaking or writing situations, while others restrict it to mean occupational language use. This difference in scope makes the meaning of the term confusing.

While all would agree that, for instance, mechanical engineer talk is a register, there would be dispute over whether a speech given by the head teacher to her students in a school assembly is a register. To the group of scholars who define register as language use associated with speaking and writing situations, it would be a register, as its features are associated with the communication situation; but those who maintain that register is only occupational language use would be less likely to regard this as a register, seeing it instead perhaps as a style or genre within a register.

The second conceptual confusion can be seen when one compares *register* and *style*. Style is normally defined as language varieties that a person has at his or her disposal. People use different styles of speaking or writing in different situations. This definition of *style* is however the same as how Halliday et al. (1964: 77) define *register*: “a variety according to use in the sense that each speaker has a range of varieties and chooses between them at different times”. Indeed, both terms refer to linguistic features related to context, but how exactly these two terms differ is not clear. Some even treat them as the same notion (Fromkin & Rodman 1988: 425). Originally, *style* was a concept in literary studies. In the 1960s, the study of stylistics tended to focus on poets, sonnets and other literary works (e.g. Carroll 1960, Hrushovski 1960). *Register*, on the other hand, comes from functional grammar. As mentioned above, this term was first introduced by Reid in 1956, and started to be used in the study of functional grammar in the 1960s. Initially, these two terms had their own domains, and scholars used them in the study of quite different areas. As time went by, the terms crossed over from one area to the other, in the work of people with an interest in both areas. As a result, both *register* and *style* became terms in the study of linguistics. Standard English, for example, has been regarded as

both *register*, for it being the language of certain occupational or functional domains (Widdowson 1997, Agha 2005) and *style*, because of its formality (McIntosh 1972). With their similarity in meanings, it has become difficult to differentiate them conceptually.

*Register* can also be confused with *genre* to a certain extent. In the previous section, it can be seen that Bex's description of the relationship between the two terms is quite different from the one portrayed by Ferguson. While Bex regards *genre* as a concept that is of a higher order than *register*, Ferguson sees them as denoting different linguistic phenomena, and neither is of a higher or lower order than the other. In fact, the scope of *genre* itself is not without disagreement among linguists; as mentioned previously, Fairclough sees *genre* as an action of which language constitutes a part, and this is different from Bex's and Ferguson's understanding, according to which genre is the aggregation of text or a message form. With the nebulous definitions of *genre*, it is not surprising to see it become confusing when it is looked at together with *register*, which itself is an ambiguous notion.

One might think that, since the term *variety* is relatively neutral compared to all the other terms mentioned in this chapter, its meaning would be clearer than that of the other terms. However, when one looks at the definitions given by different researchers, one can see that they do not agree on how much *variety* should cover. Linguists generally believe that a variety is a form that is systematically distinctive, but it seems that there is not much consensus on, firstly, in which contexts distinctiveness counts, and secondly, and more fundamentally, how distinctive distinctive is.

Concerning the first point, as mentioned above, *variety* is taken to mean only *language* and *dialect* for some, but the term is also taken to refer to *register* and *style* for others. Some would even include *accent* in the distinction of varieties (e.g. Trudgill 2003). These differences in scope could give rise to disagreements concerning whether a certain set of features is a variety or not. It seems that the point that causes disagreements is the condition in which the distinctive form is found. Seeing it from the “users vs. uses” point of view, it can be observed that some linguists consider *varieties* as sets of differences in form that are induced by differences in users only. Hence we find the opinions that *variety* is only a cover term for *language* and *dialect* (and maybe *sociolect*). Some, however, believe that distinctive forms that are correlated to different uses in different speaking/writing situations should be considered as *varieties* as well, and this gives rise to opinions that says *variety* also covers *register* and *style*. For this “users vs. uses” reason, one does not find researchers who believe that *variety* should be covering *language* and *register* but not *dialect* and *style*.

The second point, which is also a more basic difference in opinions among scholars, is what makes it enough for a set of features to be distinctive. A number of factors need be considered when deciding whether a set of features is distinctive enough. The first point I just mentioned (i.e. how much *variety* covers) is one factor, and I believe there are three other main factors: 1) the amount of distinctive features, 2) the number of people who speak or write with such features, and 3) the degree to which the people themselves (as opposed to the linguist performing the analysis) see the features as distinctive. Not only will people have different ideas of “how much is

enough” for each factor, but they will also have different opinions on the importance of each factor.

#### 4.9.1 The amount of distinctive features

No one would deny that Cantonese and Mandarin are two varieties. Although they are both Chinese, they have many features — phonological, syntactic and morphological — that set them apart. However, people may be much more hesitant to regard, for instance, Guangzhou Cantonese and Hong Kong Cantonese as two varieties. Although there are a number of morphological differences between them, and speakers are generally aware of these differences (e.g. Refrigerator: syut8 gwai6 in HK Cantonese and bing1 gwai6 in Guangzhou Cantonese; Camera film: fei1 lam2 in HK Cantonese and gau1 gyun2 in Guangzhou Cantonese), not all linguists would likely distinguish them as two varieties, mainly because the number of differences is small.

The number of features was one of the reasons the reviewer of my article did not accept that CHKE is a variety. He wrote that “if the author would like to establish that CMC Hong Kong English is a distinctive variety different from other written forms of Hong Kong English, no matter how different its functions may be, the linguistic evidence must be strong”. This exemplifies the weight put by some linguists on *Abstand*, the amount of distinctive features, in deciding whether a form is a variety.

“Amount” here does not denote any actual number. There might also be a variety with only a few distinctive features, but the features are very significant. However,

other things being equal, the more the distinctive features there are, the easier it would be for one to see the distinctions and thus regard the form as a variety.

#### 4.9.2 The number of people who use the distinctive features

Even if the amount of distinctive features is regarded as “enough”, one would hesitate to call a set of features a variety if only a small number of people use such features. I (and I believe many other people, too) have developed some specific norms through interactions with a group of friends. This “in-group speak” is only used when I am speaking to my three old buddies, and it has many of its own linguistic norms that are not shared by other forms of speech. Nonetheless, despite the amount of distinctive features, it would be absurd to some (though certainly not all) linguists if I called it a “me-and-my-buddies variety”. This is not because of its odd name, but because there is not a representative number of people who share these features.

Nonetheless, there are researchers who recognise varieties spoken by only one person. Crystal and Davy (1969), for instance, are aware of the fact that certain linguistic features tell hearers which specific person the speaker is. They name this form *individuality* (1969: 66-67). Also, researchers in general acknowledge that, even if people follow the same set of norms when speaking in the one variety, the ways they speak are never completely identical. There are features that appear in the utterances of only one specific person, and linguists refer to this individual level of language as *idiolect*.

Crystal and Davy (1969: 81) consider individuality as one of the factors that contribute to the concept of *variety*. However, many researchers would not regard



idiolects as varieties. The *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* introduces *idiolect* as follows:

An idiolect, if there is such a thing, is a language that can be characterised exhaustively in terms of intrinsic properties of some single person at a time, a person whose idiolect it is at that time. The force of ‘intrinsic’ is the characterisation ought not to turn on features of the person’s wider linguistic community. Some think that this notion of an idiolect is unstable, and instead use ‘idiolect’ to describe a person’s incomplete or erroneous grasp of their language, where the latter is inherently social. (Zalta 2004)

Zalta (2004) defines idiolect as features that are specific to individuals at a time.

However, he also mentions some people’s belief that the notion of idiolect is unstable. These people understand idiolects as one’s imperfect grasp of their language. Based on this understanding, because an idiolect is a defective realisation of a language, it is not linguistically systematic, and hence cannot be regarded as a variety.

Again, as with the previous factor, there is no precise number of speakers that is considered universally to be sufficient. The bigger the group of speakers, the easier it would be for one to see the form in question as a variety.

#### 4.9.3 The people who see the features as distinctive

As mentioned in §4.7, the use of passive voice in Matthews’s definition of variety as “[a]ny form of a language seen as systematically distinct from others” (Matthews 1997: 394) begs the question of *who* sees it as such, hence of who has the power to recognise the distinctive features as a variety. Ferguson (1994: 23), in his description of *variety*, says that the sharper a linguistic boundary is between two forms, the

easier it is for the participants to perceive the two forms as separate entities.

Ferguson suggests that “the participants” are important in deciding if a set of features is a variety. Nevertheless, what he means by “the participants” is unclear. There would be few disagreements that the speaker and the addressee are participants in a conversation, but it is more ambiguous as to whether other hearers of the conversation are participants too. Similarly, it is difficult to decide who the “users” of a language form are. Speakers of such forms obviously qualify, but what about those who understand the form perfectly well though perhaps never produce it themselves? And what is the status of the linguist who, though an ‘outsider’ to the variety under observation, is an “expert observer” of the language forms in question? Do they have the power, granted by their expertise, to distinguish one variety from another?

The decision as to whether a set of features constitutes a variety is actually similar to judging whether a set of features is a language. In both cases, the linguistic experts, who observe the community under study as outsiders, and the people in the community, who have a different sort of expertise because they are insiders (Joseph 2006: 26), both play a role in deciding whether the set of features that appear in the community is a language or a variety. Nonetheless, there is also a big difference between them. While linguists are inclined to give more importance in weighing the opinions of “insiders” in the case of language, they tend to consider insiders’ views less in judging whether a form is a variety. I believe this is because *variety* is generally seen as an objective term to describe sets of linguistic features, without much consideration of attitudes towards those forms. This is also because *variety* is not an everyday term, but a specific term used in the field of linguistics. If variety is

about systematic distinction in language forms, it would be more reasonable for linguists, who are the experts, than speakers of the language forms, who are sometimes regarded as laypeople, to make the decision. Hence, there are often linguists who claim that a certain form is a variety without the awareness of the speakers themselves. Hong Kong English is a good example.

Obviously, the above three factors are interdependent on each other, and no one factor can stand alone in confirming or rejecting a form as a variety. The decision, then, would be the matrix of the considerations of these factors. Different people would emphasise different factors. Some, like the reviewer of my article, tend to see the first factor as more important, while others would think that the second or third factor is more salient.

One of the main reasons the term *variety* emerged was to avoid the ideologies that came with the use of *language* and *dialect*, as Meyerhoff (2006) mentions. However, when the notion of *variety* is examined in more detail, it can be seen that this notion can also be quite political and ideological. First of all, when one decides whether a set of features is a variety, one first considers whether there are enough features and speakers to make the language use salient enough to be called a variety. What counts as “enough”, however, depends on the person who makes the decision. The judgements of how many features and speakers constitute enough salience would inevitably involve evaluations other than ones which are strictly linguistic. Even for linguists, who like to claim that they are neutral, their educational background and personal beliefs would affect their evaluations. Secondly, deciding who has a say on whether a set of features is a variety involves politics — who has the right to decide?

And who has the power to decide? Obviously, the decision is by nature political.

Deciding what is a language is political (Joseph 2006: 7-9), but it is just as political to decide what is a variety.

#### 4.10 What is CMC Hong Kong English?

Having discussed the definitions of various linguistic terms and the problems underlying these terms, it is time to turn our attention to CMC Hong Kong English (CHKE). Is CHKE a language, a dialect, a sociolect, a register, a style, a genre, or a variety?

Before answering this question, one has to see whether CHKE is systematically distinct. This is because all the linguistic terms assume the linguistic form in question to have at least some distinctive features. As discussed above, how distinctive the features have to be to make a form distinctive depends on several factors. Regarding the distinctiveness of CHKE from Hong Kong English, three linguistic features stand out. They are *Romanised Cantonese*, *literal translation of Cantonese to English*, and most significantly, *end of sentence particles*. Although these are only a few features, they all seem to be very recognisable by both linguists and the users of the form themselves. I would argue that, for this reason, CHKE is systematically distinct. It is not only because there are distinctive features in CHKE, but also because these features are also recognised by many people. It is also on this basis I believe that CHKE is a variety, because it is, by definition, a “form of a language seen as systematically distinct from others” (Matthews 1997: 394).

Although *language* is an ambiguous term, as discussed above, it is still quite obvious that CHKE is not a language, at least not as the term is commonly understood. It is

not comparable to languages like English, Hungarian, or Xhosa. CHKE may be a geographical *dialect*. However, this is not because those who use this variety are mainly people geographically situated in Hong Kong or who have come from this city. The context linked to this form of language is not the geographical area, but rather the internet community that is formed by these Hong Kong people. For the same reason, CHKE can also be regarded as a *sociolect*, because the people who use this variety are mostly adolescent “netizens” from Hong Kong. “Netizen” might not be a social class, but it is a similar group within a society. CHKE, associated with this social group, can thus be a sociolect.

As CHKE is used in internet chatting as well as other computer-mediated communication among Hong Kong people, this form, as a variety associated with this situational context of internet communication, can be regarded as a *register* in its broad sense. For the same reason, CHKE can also be viewed as a *style*, as it is a “personal use an individual makes in speech or writing of the language at his disposal” (1972: 223), as Hartmann and Stork put it. Since CHKE is the “personal use” of language on the internet made by many Hong Kong people, it can be seen as a group style.

If *genre* is a message type, as Ferguson (1994) puts it, then CHKE, which is a constellation of speech styles used by a population of Hong Kong people on the internet, could be a genre. Some might argue that, since there is a high order of message type which is computer-mediated communication, CHKE, which is only a style used by Hong Kong adolescent netizens on the internet, is not a genre itself. It is rather a group style (as discussed above) under the genre of internet

communication. However, as Bauman (2001) says, there could be well-defined sub-genres included in a genre. It is reasonable to suggest that CHKE is a genre, and it is a sub-genre in the genre of computer-mediated communication.

From this discussion, it can be seen that, on top of being a *variety*, CHKE can also be a *sociolect*, *register*, *style*, as well as *genre*. A form of language having “multiple identities” sociolinguistically might seem absurd to some people. However, as Ferguson (1994: 25) points out, one must not assume that these concepts are independent. Every utterance (in speaking and writing) can simultaneously exemplify various notions, depending on the perspective from which it is examined. Also, Crystal and Davy (1969: 62) mention that it is not valid to assume that “there is a one-for-one correlation between linguistic features and situation”. While linking to the contexts of the internet and computer-mediated communication, CHKE is also associated with its users, who are Hong Kong people, especially adolescents. Therefore, it is not at all absurd to see CHKE as being a dialect, a sociolect, a register, a style and a genre at the same time, given its relationship with its usage and users.

#### 4.11 CMC Hong Kong English as a variety: a norm perspective

In the above section (§4.10), I have argued that CHKE can be regarded as a linguistic variety using the definitions given by various scholars. Nevertheless, as discussed in §4.9, linguists’ viewpoints on whether a bundle of linguistic features constitutes a variety can be different due to their differences in viewpoint and focus. Although it seems clear that the CHKE features are salient and distinctive enough to be distinguishable from other forms of HKE because they are recognisable to both users and linguists, one might argue that identifying just three unique structural features is inadequate. There are however at least three misunderstandings here: first, that only

structural features count, not differences in functional usage; secondly, that only etic analysis counts, and not emic considerations; and thirdly, that “uniqueness” is the relevant criterion. Probably no feature in any variety is “unique” in the sense of being found in no other variety. What makes features distinctive is their *distribution*, and that distribution must be measured *relative to whatever other variety the one in question would be subsumed within if it is not to be regarded as a distinct variety in its own right*. Here again the *emic* perspective must not be left out of the picture. A linguist might be tempted to regard a feature of HKE or CHKE as not distinctive because it is found in other “Chinese Englishes”, such as Singapore English or Malaysian English. But to speakers in Hong Kong, that is not a relevant consideration. For them the salient distinction is with British (or perhaps American) English, and a feature that distinguishes usage in Hong Kong from such “standard” English usage is distinctive, regardless of whether it is used as well in Malaysia or Taiwan.

Still, on the issue of “how distinctive is distinctive” in deciding whether CHKE features can be seen as a variety, there is little consensus among people in the field of linguistics. While I believe that linguists’ opinions are valuable in determining whether a bundle of features can be regarded as a variety, also important are the beliefs, attitudes, ideologies and practices observable amongst the users of the features themselves. In other words, when one is trying to understand whether a set of features are formally and functionally distinctive enough to be seen as a variety, it is important to consider both linguists’ and speakers’/hearers’ viewpoints. However, very often, little attention is given to the speakers’ or hearers’ opinions when linguists consider whether a collection of linguistic features constitute a variety. This

is possibly due to the fact that, in the field of linguistics, laypeople – the everyday language users who are not professionally trained to analyse language – are sometimes treated by linguists as passive beings who are not capable of making free choices:

Linguistics, the field that gave birth to structuralism, developed its own form of direction/determinism in the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, which the mainstream of the field then rejected; yet the leader of the mainstream in modern times, Chomsky, while denying any version of linguistic determinism in theory, simultaneously insists that all real interpretation of utterances is determined by the utterances themselves, and, which logically follows from this, that supposedly free peoples are in a false consciousness, being actually in the thrall of malevolent governmental and corporate forces that, through language, conspire to manufacture consent. Applied linguistics, meanwhile, is emerging from a period in which ‘linguistic hegemony’ was high on its list of concern – in particular the belief that the current spread of English as a second language in many parts of the world is being forced imperialistically upon peoples who may think they are choosing to learn English or to have their children educated in English, but again are labouring under a false consciousness. But one of the key areas to have emerged within applied linguistics, Critical Discourse Analysis, takes a position very like Chomsky’s described above; while certain other ‘critical’ applied linguistic movements continue to pursue a post-structural (and post-Nietzschean) view in which there is no reality outside discourse.

Little room appears to be left, then, for the belief that human beings *really are* agents who make choices that, while certainly bound up with the context in which they live, and no doubt conditioned by their personal histories, are nevertheless ‘free’ in the crucial sense that they are aware of more than one option being open to them, do not all select the same option (even if a large majority do) and can usually articulate why exactly they have made the choice they’ve made. (Joseph 2006:136-137)

In other words, humans, despite various constraints, are not passive beings who are forced by external factors to behave one way or another linguistically.



Methodologically, unless we assume they are aware of their choices and “can usually articulate why exactly they have made the choice they’ve made” (ibid.: 137), we are dehumanising the speakers whose most human activity, their language, we are striving to understand. Putting this idea in the discussion of determining a distinctive variety, one can say, again following Sapir (1933), that, in considering whether a set of features constitute a variety, while linguists’ learned opinions are useful, they are not so authoritative as to trump automatically what speakers and hearers think and do.

In this chapter, I have focused on what linguists say about variety, and how, according to various scholars’ definitions, the bundle of features that constitutes what I call CHKE can be regarded as a variety because these features are systematically distinctive. In what follows, I focus on the opinions held by users of CHKE regarding these features. To find out whether, in the eyes of its users, CHKE is functionally and formally distinctive, I shall investigate the key research question of whether norms of using CHKE have emerged among those who use it to communicate or encounter it in communication. This investigation will shed significant light on whether CHKE is treated as a distinctive variety by its users. In other words, if norms of CHKE are observed among its users, then it means that these users experience CHKE as something which is not random or indistinguishable from other forms of HKE or English generally. I start my research into this question by looking at the nature of norms, in particular linguistic norms, and propose a model to explain the linguistic norms of an individual.

Very often, when people think of norms, they think of behaviours that generally and usually occur under the same conditions. For instance, it is a norm to tip waiters in a restaurant in the U.S., because most of the customers do so. There are also times when people think of norms as rules that people should follow, regardless of whether these rules are often obeyed or not. This chapter explores the concepts of norms, and investigates different aspects of norms, coming back in each case to their linguistic manifestations.

Firstly, I look at how different scholars analyse norms, and through their research focus on how they understand the concept of norms. Then, from their definitions, I try to determine certain natures of norms that can help us in our understanding of this concept. Having explored the concept of norms, I look at linguistic norms, and attempt to distinguish three kinds of linguistic norms that individuals use to understand and analyse utterances. Finally, some case studies are provided to further explain the functions of these linguistic norms.

### 5.1 Defining norms

‘Norm’ has the following definitions in the *Oxford English Dictionary*:

- a. That which is a model or a pattern; a type, a standard.
- b. A standard or pattern of social behaviour that is accepted or expected of a group.
- c. A value that is used as a reference standard for purposes of comparison.

From the definitions, one can see that the word most relevant to “norm” is “standard”.

A norm itself can be a standard in general (a.); it can be a standard of social behaviour that is acceptable and expected in a group (b.); it can also be a standard value for other values to be compared to (c.).

Ullmann-Margalit (1977) focuses her discussion on a subclass of norms, namely social norms. A social norm “is a prescribed guide for conduct or action which is generally complied with by the members of a society” (1977:12). The key term here is “prescribed guide”. Norms, in this definition, have the power to guide people to behave in certain ways. Moreover, according to Ullmann-Margalit, this guide is prescriptive, which implies that it is given, granted, and upheld by authority.

The author continues her analysis by putting forward the features of “norms of obligation”, which she derives from Hart’s (1961) “rules of obligation”. To explain this difference in terms, Ullmann-Margalit provides the following clarification:

The term ‘norm’ tends to be used mostly by authors whose educational background is Continental, whereas Anglo-Saxon ones seem to prefer the terms ‘laws’ and ‘rules’ to cover more or less the same domain of discourse. (It might be true, though, that there is a difference in connotation between the terms ‘norms’ on the one hand and ‘rules’ and ‘law’ on the other: those of the first seem to be more on the moral side, those of the latter pair on the legal side.) (1977:12)

Under this definition, ‘norms’ and ‘rules’ are very similar and can refer to the same domain of discourse. In common usage, however, ‘norm’ and ‘rule’ are usually quite different. Norms are commonly understood to be more descriptive. Sometimes they can be bounded by morals, which makes norms prescriptive. However, their prescriptiveness is somehow weaker than that of rules. Rules are more prescriptive,

and they are bounded by laws. Ullmann-Margalit may conflate the two terms because “social rules” and “social norms” are somewhat different from rules and norms generally. For her, rules generated from society are very close to social norms. These norms and rules are both prescribed, and are “complied with by the member of a society” (Ullmann-Margalit 1977:12).

When Hart (1961: 10) explains rules that involve social obligations (i.e. obligations that one has in a social group), he says that people who deviate from certain types of behaviour “will probably meet with hostile reaction, and in the case of legal rules be punished by officials”. He continues by saying that “wherever there are rules requiring certain conduct, even non-legal rules like that requiring men to bare their heads in church, something of this sort is likely to result from deviation” (ibid.).

According to Hart, rules are not only regulations explicitly stated by those with social authority. They also include “non-legal rules”, prescribed guides with which people have to comply. Violating them would cause hostile reactions. For instance, in the UK, a man needs to take off his hat when he goes into a church. If he does not do so, he might encounter hostile reactions, such as unfriendly stares from the other people in the church. Therefore, a man taking off his hat when going into a church is regarded as a social rule, even though there will be no legal consequences if he does not do so.

Another essence of social rules is that they have to “show [themselves] often linguistically” (Hart 1961: 10). These statements of rules usually contain words like ‘should’, ‘ought to’, and ‘must’, which “share certain common features in indicating the presence of a rule requiring certain conduct” (ibid.).

Hart's understanding of the term 'social rule' is very similar to what Ullmann-Margalit means by 'social norms'. Unlike how people commonly understand rules, social rules are not necessarily exclusive to official regulations and explicit statements about what one should or should not do. Deontic statements generated and spoken by members of society are also social rules. Violating social rules does not necessarily lead to being arrested, but doing so may bring hostile reactions from other members of society. These two important features of 'social rules', in Hart's terms, are the same as Ullmann-Margalit's 'social norms'.

Differently from Hart and Ullmann-Margalit, Bartsch uses a functional approach to understand norms. She says that "[n]orms introduce correctness concepts:

'Something is correct with respect to this or that norm'" (Bartsch 1987: 59).

According to Bartsch, norms are intimately related to the notion of correctness. They are "the constellations in social reality that create, delimit, and secure the notions of correctness" (ibid.: 70). The essence of norms is their accuracy in describing reality. Norms are to correctly point out people's regular behaviours in society. For instance, if, in the UK, almost every man takes off his hat when he enters a church, then it would be appropriate to say that "In the UK, it is the norm that, when a man goes into a church, he takes off his hat", because this statement correctly states the regular behaviour of people in society.

Bartsch's definition of norms is somewhat different from the norms in Ullmann-Margalit's and Hart's treatments. In Bartsch's proposal, a norm does not necessarily have prescriptive power, whereas, according to Ullmann-Margalit and Hart, this normative power is a necessary condition for a statement to be a norm. In Bartsch's

model, violating a norm would not necessarily cause negative reactions from other members of society. In Ullmann-Margalit's and Hart's models, however, different forms of sanctions are entailed if a norm is violated.

Take tipping waiters in restaurants as an example. For Bartsch, as mentioned above, so long as the statement "people tip their waiter in a restaurant" correctly describes reality, the statement is a norm. Whether one would get sanctions if one did not tip one's waiter is irrelevant. However, for Ullmann-Margalit and Hart, the statement in question would not be a norm if no negative reactions are caused when someone does not tip their waiter.

## 5.2 Social norms, descriptive norms, and conventions

Bicchieri (2006) also researches social norms, and she attempts to capture the concept by formulating its components. Social norms, according to Bicchieri, are informal rules that are public and shared. Unlike formal rules that are supported by formal sanctions, social norms may not be enforced at all. Even if they are enforced, the sanctions are informal (2006: 8). She states that, for a social norm to exist, it has to fulfil two conditions, namely *contingency* and *conditional preference*. Below is a formula she uses to explain these conditions.

Let  $R$  be a *behavioral rule* for situations of type  $S$ , where  $S$  can be represented as a mixed-motive game. We say that  $R$  is a social norm in a population  $P$  if there exists a sufficiently large subset  $P_{cf} \subseteq P$  such that, for each individual  $i \in P_{cf}$ :

*Contingency*:  $i$  knows that a rule  $R$  exists and applies to situations of type  $S$ ;

*Conditional preference*:  $i$  prefers to conform to  $R$  in situations of type  $S$  on the condition that:

(a) *Empirical expectations*: *i* believes that a sufficiently large subset of *P* conforms to *R* in situations of type *S*;

and either

(b) *Normative expectations*: *i* believes that a sufficiently large subset of *P* expects *i* to conform to *R* in situations of type *S*;

or

(b') *Normative expectations with sanctions*: *i* believes that a sufficiently large subset of *P* expects *i* to conform to *R* in situations of type *S*, prefers *i* to conform, and may sanction behavior.

(Bicchieri 2006: 11)

What Bicchieri wants to point out is that, firstly, individuals' recognition of a social norm is essential for that norm to exist. Secondly, for an individual to prefer to conform to such a social norm, they have to believe that many other people also conform to the norm, and that these people expect them to do so as well, or else they could get sanctioned.

The second kind of informal norm Bicchieri discusses is *descriptive norms*. The conditions on which a descriptive norm exists also include *contingency* and *conditional preference*. However, unlike *social norms*, there is only one component in *conditional preference* for *descriptive norms*, which is *empirical expectations*. In other words, the difference between *social norms* and *descriptive norms* is that the latter do not involve other people's expectations. For *descriptive norms* to exist, individuals only need to believe that a certain behavioural rule that is applicable in a kind of situation is also obeyed by many other people. Unlike *social norms*, there are no expectations from other people for the individuals to conform to the rule.

The third notion in Bicchieri's taxonomy of informal norms is *conventions*. Similar to the other two kinds of norms, *empirical expectations* is a necessary condition for *conventions* to exist. What makes it different is that the situation that gives rise to *conventions* is a "coordination game without nonstrict Nash equilibria" (2006: 38). In some situations, it would be best for all people to behave in a certain way. So, weighing the cost and benefit, people rationally choose to behave in that same way, and there is no need to include the consideration of other people's expectations or possible sanctions to maintain this behaviour. It is not even necessary for individuals to recognise that a rule exists (*contingency*), because all rational people naturally choose to behave in that certain way, since doing so would yield the biggest benefit to their individual selves.

### 5.3 The emergence of norms

Approaching the issues of norms from a different angle, Horne (2001) focuses her discussion on people who obey (or disobey) norms, and examines the ways in which different scholars approach the notion of norms. Through summarising the different analyses, she finds that there are three main approaches to explaining the content of normative rules.

The first approach is to *focus on the actions of ego*. Horne explains that "[o]ne widely held view of norms is that they reflect existing patterns of action"; this approach "begin[s] by identifying or predicting ego's behavior" (2001: 5). This kind of theory is based on the premise that individuals act only after considering their own costs and benefits. Many scholars taking this approach see actors as rational beings who attempt to obtain desired results at the lowest cost, or these actors simply imitate those around them. Whatever the reasons for behaving in the same way, gradually,



this pattern of behaviour gains normative power, and people feel that they ought to behave this way given this circumstance.

While this approach is popular among scholars of law and sociology, Horne points out its two shortcomings. Firstly, it fails to explain how patterns of behaviour become normative. These scholars say that, once certain behaviours are adopted by the people, they become associated with a sense of “oughtness”. Nonetheless, they do not clearly point out which behaviours would become normative, and in which way these behaviours gain normativity. Horne acknowledges that, on the issue of a behavioural pattern gaining a sense of “oughtness”, some scholars explain that any action that is observed becomes expected because individuals value certainty, and people would be upset by deviation from what is seen as usual. Nonetheless, this explanation is not realistic, because “all behaviours that are reasonably frequent or consistent will become normative”, and what follows will be that “norms are synonymous with what is typical – there is no distinction between the term as referring to patterns of behavior and as referring to rule” (Horne 2001: 7).

Another weakness of this ego-centred approach is that it is unclear at what point individuals engage in new behaviours. Horne reasons that “[n]ew norms are thought to emerge when the costs of compliance with existing norms become too high relative to the rewards”, but “[t]here... is no explanation of how to weigh concerns about the costliness of the normative action... against concerns with morality or social opinion” (ibid.: 8). In other words, this approach to norms does not take into account how norms can change when there is a change in situation whereby it becomes costly to meet the norms.

The second approach Horne mentions is to understand norms by *focusing on ego's reactions to action of alter*. These analyses focus “on actors’ concerns with the behavior of others” (ibid.: 9). Scholars using this approach say that individuals have to consider not only the consequences of their own actions, but also the behaviour of other people. Norms emerge when individuals notice that certain behaviours are beneficial to themselves. They then develop ways to encourage others to also engage in these behaviours. An example is a norm against drunk-driving. This norm emerges when people object to the behaviour of others (i.e. driving after consuming too much alcohol) that causes negative effects (i.e. car accidents).

The third approach *focuses on negotiation between ego and alter*. Researchers using this approach say that individuals must share common understanding of the situation before they can successfully interact. Usually, these understandings come from individuals’ previous experience, which includes their previous encounters. When a commonality is reached, a norm emerges. Norms, therefore, are a result of negotiations between individuals in new situations, and these negotiations are based on their previous experience. Horne uses Hochschild’s (1989) research as an example. In Hochschild’s study, tensions arise when husbands and wives attach different meanings to the same behaviour. To maintain a good relationship, according to Hochschild, spouses have to negotiate common meanings for their actions.

Having examined the three approaches, Horne says that each of them “seems to identify important processes, yet each also misses essential elements” (2001: 14).

She mentions that these approaches have addressed three important factors that affect

the emergence of norms, though none of the approaches individually has taken account of all three factors. These factors are *individuals' interests in their own behaviour, others' interests, and negotiations between ego and others.*

Horne argues that an explanation of how norms emerge should not depend solely on ego's interest in its own behaviour, or on ego's interest in the behaviour of others.

While a person's behaviour brings consequences — whether costs or benefits — to himself or herself, other people's actions have an effect on that person as well. For instance, in a football team, when a member of the team trains, it not only benefits the individual player, but other team members . So, when considering the emergence of norms, it is more accurate to look at both ego's and alter's interests, as norms are tied to both.

Also important is the role of meaning and negotiation. As Horne has mentioned, although focusing on interests may lead to accurate predictions of the emergence of norms, in some situations it is necessary to be able to recognise the meaning of the norm contents and incorporate negotiation processes. Horne (2001: 17-18) provides an example:

For example, the benefits to an individual of engaging in a behaviour may be equivalent to, but in the opposite direction from, their interests in others engaging in that same behavior. Individuals may not much care what the norm is, as long as people agree. Alternatively, group members may be unsure as to the costs and benefits of a particular behavior, either because they lack information or because society is in a state of flux. Under such conditions, where interests are irrelevant or unhelpful, attention to negotiation becomes important. (Horne 2001: 17-18)

In other words, in cases where people do not have sufficient information as to what behaviours are beneficial or costly, or where they do not agree on the degree of cost or benefit of a certain action, merely looking at people's interests is not enough, because people in these cases have attributed different interests to the same action. Analysts need to look at the meaning of the actions to these people, as well as the role of negotiations.

While Horne has rightly pointed out the important elements of norms emergence, one should note that the term *norm* in Horne's article is not the same as the one in Bicchieri's (2006) discussion. In Horne's analyses, one necessary condition for a norm to exist is its normativity. Since social sanctioning or the potential of social sanctioning is indispensable when a norm is violated (2001: 19-21), the factors affecting the emergence of norms mentioned by Horne are only meant to be applicable to *social* norms — norms that involve social expectations as well as potentials of sanctioning when norms are not met — but not purely descriptive norms and conventions. The title of Horne's article is "Sociological Perspectives on the Emergence of Social Norms", and it is not clear whether Horne takes all 'norms' to be social, or is simply confining his enquiry to norms with social force.

Even so, the factors identified are not necessarily inapplicable to descriptive norms and conventions. As mentioned in §5.2, Bicchieri's study shows that even without expectations or social sanctioning, the generation of descriptive norms and conventions also involves the consideration of self-interest and other people's interests, as well as the possible need for negotiation.

#### 5.4 When is a norm generated?

One can infer from the above scholars' analyses that norms are generated by past experience, and this also seems to accord with the meaning of "norm" in common usage. These past experiences generate an expectation of a pattern of behaviour. Regardless of whether it is self-interests or the consideration of other people's interests that scholars believe to be essential to norm generation, actions have to be repeated under similar conditions to be able to generate a pattern of behaviour, as well as an expectation of a pattern of action.

Kahneman & Miller (1986) disagree and argue that a norm is actually constructed after, instead of before, a relevant event arises. They believe that "events are sometimes compared to counterfactual alternatives that are constructed ad hoc rather than retrieved from past experience" (1986: 136). They challenge the belief that norms are "precomputed structure", rather, they suggest that norms are "constructed on the fly in a backward process that is guided by the characteristics of the evoking stimulus and by the momentary context" (ibid.: 150).

In this framework, people refer to past events in which a pattern of actions is seen when a new but similar event arises. However, Kahneman & Miller (1986) believe that, rather than having a norm already generated in a person's mind before a new event is seen, norms are computed by the person referring to old similar events *after* they have experienced the new event. A norm is constructed by the person when they see that the behaviours in the new event deviate from the ones in the old events. The more the actions in the new event are different from the actions in previous similar events, the clearer the norm becomes.

For instance, when one sees another person laughing during a friend's funeral service, one would retrieve other similar events (e.g. a relative's funeral service, fictional funeral services on TV, etc.), and compute a norm of usual actions in funerals (e.g. crying and/or mourning). It is only then one recognises that laughing is a violation of a norm that says people cry and/or mourn in a funeral.

This viewpoint is quite unconventional. While Kahneman & Miller's approach to norms seems reasonable, it leads to two absurdities. First of all, this framework does not account for the fact that people usually understand some norms of an event even without the need of experiencing an event that is deviant from previous events. For instance, when asked what the norms are of attending a classical music concert, one could come up with norms like "do not eat or drink during the performance" or "do not dance to the music". However, one does not necessarily need to see the audience eating during a performance or dancing to the music to come up with these norms. This framework does not seem to provide an explanation for why people are able to come up with certain norms without needing to encounter the event in which these norms are violated.

Secondly, this framework's explanation of why certain norms are more significant than others seems unreasonable. According to Kahneman and Miller, the more a current event deviates from past events, the more significant the norm would be in a person's mind. Nevertheless, it seems that what makes a norm more significant is the fact that it is easily violated. For example, when asked what the norms are of attending a lecture, people usually come up with norms like "turn off your mobile phone" rather than those like "do not throw shoes at the lecturer". This is because it

is more likely that someone's mobile phone will ring during a lecture than that someone will throw a shoe at the lecturer. Obviously, having a mobile phone ringing in a lecture is less deviant from past related events, mainly because of the likelihood, and thus the frequency, of this event occurring.

### 5.5 Revisiting the definition of norms

This survey of accounts of norms has revealed wide variation in how they are understood and analysed. Ullmann-Margalit (1977) and Hart (1961) see norms as prescribed guides which are complied with by the members of a society. Hart (1961) even equates norms with rules. Bartsch (1987), on the other hand, see norms as denotations that correctly describe reality. Norms, according to Bartsch, do not need to be prescriptive. Bicchieri (2006) suggests that both "prescriptiveness", as described by Ullmann-Margalit (1977) and Hart (1961), and "descriptiveness", as explained by Bartsch (1987), are essential elements of what she called *social norms*. Norms with only "descriptiveness" (which Bicchieri calls *empirical expectations*) and without a sense of "prescriptiveness" (*normative expectations*) are different, and are called *descriptive norms*. Differently from the three earlier scholars, Bicchieri stresses the epistemological nature of norms, which means that the existence of the norms depends solely on individuals' beliefs that the norms are conformed to by most of the people in their society. Whether these norms are really upheld by most of the people in the society is not important.

Horne (2001) approached the concept of norm from a different perspective. She looks at the causes that give rise to norms, and concludes that norms are products of negotiation between self-interest and the interests of others. When norms are generated, they become normative guides for people to comply with. As for Hart,

Ullmann-Margalit and Bartsch, norms involve a sense of normativity for Horne.

However, Horne does not specify whether a sense of “descriptiveness”, which is the essential element of norms in Bartsch’s view, needs to exist for a norm to be generated.

Kahneman and Millar (1986) argued that norms were generated after a relevant event. They said that it was with one’s computation of an alternative to a current event that one could construct a norm of that current event. This alternative was based on one’s past experience. This implies that the essence of norms, according to Kahneman and Millar, lies in past events. Although not exactly the same, this description of norms is similar to Bartsch’s (1987) assertion that norms are statements that describe reality, in other words, what has actually happened.

Examining these researchers’ understandings of the notion of norm, one finds similar, yet different, definitions. While some think that norms have to be normative in the prescriptive sense, others believe that they are more descriptive; while some insist that, without such normativity, norms could not be called ‘social’, others maintain that the unique feature of social norms is that they are shared by others; while some suggest that norms are epistemological, others maintain that they can be independent of what people think.

Since there are so many different opinions concerning what norms are, it would be presumptuous of me to present my own definition as though it were definitive.

Nevertheless, I shall lay out my own conclusions concerning the nature of norms, as they relate to the use of language generally and in the case of HKE and CHKE in particular.



First of all, norms are not universal. People in different communities share different norms. A norm upheld by one community might not be agreed by another. For example, while it is appropriate to ask how much a person's handbag cost in Hong Kong, it is seen as highly inappropriate in Germany. While a community's cultural background, including its history and traditional practices, is the main factor that affects the community's norms, its geographical location also plays a role. For example, in Hong Kong, which is a coastal city, seafood like mussels and squid are seen as normal Hong Kong cuisine, whereas in inland cities like Chengdu, it is much less normal to have mussels and squid in their cuisine. Where these two cities are located has affected what people would normally eat in their respective communities.

Secondly, as people can, and very often do, belong to more than one community, they uphold the norms of all those communities. Almost without exception, a person gets involved in more than one community. For example, as I am writing this, I belong to a group of 13 Ph.D. students who share the same office; I am a member of the Language in Context Research Group; I am involved in a badminton club; and I am also a part of the Chinese community in Edinburgh. All of these communities have different norms. As a result, the norms I have come to learn are a combination of at least the norms of these four communities.

Also, past experiences have an effect on what norms one upholds as well. The communities one belonged to in the past (especially as a child) have an effect on the norms one follows in the present. My background, which includes my family and the schools I went to, has given me norms that I still uphold even though I no longer go to those schools.

This leads us to another point, which is that individuals have different norms, and it is not very likely that two people share exactly the same set of norms. The main reason is that individuals have different experiences, and they belong (and have in the past belonged) to different communities. For instance, to the best of my knowledge, no one else has the same background and belongs to the same combination of communities as mine. This would make my constellation of norms unique.

Moreover, even if two people shared the same combination of communities, they might still hold different norms, because of their differences in awareness. Various factors affect a person's awareness of norms. One of these factors is experience. The more time one spends in a community, the more norms one is likely to be aware of. This makes people's sets of norms more individual. Also, even though people are aware of a certain norm in a community, they may not necessarily choose to uphold it. They may choose to go against it, so that other goals (e.g. manifesting their identity) can be achieved.

The point that norms vary from person to person reflects another nature of norms, which is that they are epistemological. An individual upholds a norm because he/she believes that it is upheld in his/her communities. This seems to indicate that norms exist independently in society. However, as Bicchieri (2006) points out, it is not necessary for a certain norm to be actually upheld by the community in general for it to be recognised by an individual. What is important is the individual's belief that the norm is upheld. In some occasions, a person can believe that a certain norm is met by other people without that actually being the case. This suggests that norms function

in individuals' minds, instead of in the community independently of what people believe. At the same time, beliefs are rarely generated by an individual completely independently of what others in the community believe.

To say that a norm exists in a community means it is upheld by the people in the community. So, rather than saying that norms exist objectively, it would be more reasonable to say they exist inter-subjectively, whether their existence is taken to be prescriptive or, descriptive, and grounded in belief or in behaviour.

### 5.5.1 Norms of obligation and norms of pattern

Underlying all the various definitions of 'norm' (and sometimes 'rule') is a fundamental duality. Norms can be 1) statements that accurately describe the patterns of behaviour of the members in society; and 2) statements of obligation which people are expected to follow, with sanctions entailed if one violates the expected behaviour. Since Ullmann-Margalit regards the latter type as *norms of obligation*, in contrast to this, I shall call type (1) *norms of pattern*.

If an ethnographer observes that the majority of people in China have rice as their daily cuisine, she then is able to generalise these observations to a statement that says "Chinese people usually have rice for their meal". This statement, which describes an aspect of social behaviour, would be a norm of pattern. In this context, if this ethnographer saw a few Chinese people having spaghetti, she would regard them as not following this norm of pattern. However, since one would not expect these spaghetti-eating Chinese people to be sanctioned, they are not violating a norm of obligation.

A statement that can exemplify the second kind of norm is “one does not steal”. In many different communities, people are expected to follow this norm, and those who violate it can be punished. In fact, this norm has been written as a rule of law in many, if not all, countries, and governments enforce the norm by arresting and punishing people who steal. Statements of norms of obligation often appear as imperative sentences, for instance, “do not litter”, and “do not run in corridors”. When these statements appear as declarative sentences, they usually include a modifier to be read in a deontic sense, for example “thou shalt not kill”, and “a man should take off his hat when he enters a church”.

However, whether a statement is a norm of pattern or norm of obligation depends on the context in which the statement is uttered. For instance, one can easily imagine one Chinese person saying “Chinese people have rice for their meal” to another who has taken to eating chips with every meal. In such a context, this statement would be understood as a norm of obligation. If an ethnographer reports on a small village in which everyone is honest and law-abiding, then his statement that in this village “one does not steal” would be interpreted as a norm of pattern. The context in which a norm statement appears allows one to identify the nature of the norm.

Nonetheless, sometimes, even in the same context, people might still understand the nature of a norm in different ways. This is due to people’s differences in attitudes towards the norm. For example, in the same restaurant, one person might understand “one usually tips a waiter” as a norm of pattern, seeing that nine out of ten customers tip their waiters, while another person could interpret this statement as a norm of obligation, thinking that she is obliged to tip, or else would get unfriendly stares from

the staff and fellow customers. The attitudes of the speakers and hearers (and writers and readers) towards the proposition, and the particular functional purposes within which those attitudes operate, play a crucial role in determining whether the norms are norms of obligation or norms of pattern.

## 5.6. Three kinds of linguistic norms

Like many other forms of behaviour, using language is also bound by various norms. Sometimes these norms are norms of pattern, describing people's general linguistic behaviour; and sometimes they are norms of obligation, "telling" people what to say and not to say, and how to say it. I believe that one can distinguish linguistic norms into three kinds. They are, respectively, *formal norms*, *contextual norms*, and *identity norms*. Unlike the above analysis, in which I look at norms mainly from a social perspective, I shall discuss these three types of linguistic norms from an individual perspective. Doing so will allow me to address two important aspects of linguistic norms which I would otherwise have to ignore: people's understanding of the norms upheld in society, and their reactions to these norms. Since there are often discrepancies between the norms which the community upholds and those which a particular person sees and follows, looking at individuals' norms allows me to construct an account of why, in certain cases, norms are not followed by individuals.

### 5.6.1 Formal norms

The first type of linguistic norm is made up of those that regulate the well-formedness of an utterance. These norms are what allow speakers and hearers to decide whether an utterance can be regarded as a part of the language. Utterances like "movie likes watch to Mary" are very unlikely to meet this kind of norm for the English language, and thus it would hardly be regarded as a legitimate English

sentence. I propose to call this type *formal norms*, because these norms maintain well-formedness and allow one to distinguish language from non-language.

Formal norms not only include standard English(es), but cover many non-standard varieties as well. For example, the utterance “he don’t want no tea” would be regarded as non-standard English, or even bad English, by many people; but few people would deny that it is English.<sup>37</sup> One might compare this notion of formal norms to Chomsky’s notion of acceptability. In explaining this concept, Chomsky writes,

[t]he more acceptable sentences are those that are more likely to be produced, more easily understood, less clumsy, and in some sense more natural. The unacceptable sentences one would tend to avoid and replace by more acceptable variants, whenever possible, in actual discourse. (Chomsky, 1965: 11)

In my view, formal norms would include everything that is on the “scale of acceptability” (ibid.), because they regulate a person’s understanding of a language, and provide information as to whether an utterance is part of the language in question. There might be utterances that are more acceptable than others, but so long as they are regarded as acceptable, they would be meeting the formal norms.

### 5.6.2 Contextual norms

Although people would most certainly regard swear words as part of their language, they would be very unlikely to use them on occasions such as a university lecture or

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<sup>37</sup> Some people might regard the utterance as non-English, but most of the time this comment would mean the utterance is not Standard English.

a trial in a law court. The context in which people find themselves can affect how they behave linguistically. It can be said that there are norms which regulate appropriate behaviour in various contexts. I call such norms *contextual norms*.

Before any further discussion, it is important to ask what a context is, and what is it composed of. Hymes (1977) discusses the concept of “speech situation”. He writes,

Within a community one readily detects many situations associated with (or marked by the absence of) speech. Such contexts of situation will often be naturally described as ceremonies, fights, hunts, meals, lovemaking, and the like ... Such situations may enter as contexts into the statement of rules of speaking as aspects of setting (or of genre). (Hymes 1977: 51)

In Hymes’ explanation of a speech situation, he uses the term “context of situation”. This term was established by Malinowski (1923) in his discussion of “primitive” languages that have never had any written record. Malinowski says that, whatever the language being used,

[a] statement, spoken in real life, is never detached from the situation in which it has been uttered. For each verbal statement by a human being has the aim and function of expressing some thought or feeling actually at that moment and in that situation... therefore, utterance and situation are bound up inextricably with each other and the context of situation is indispensable for the understanding of the words. (ibid.: 391)

He also compares and contrasts the two concepts *linguistic context* and *context of situation* to clarify his point. He writes,

... as in the reality of spoken or written languages, a word without *linguistic context* is a mere figment and stands for nothing by itself, so in the reality of a spoken living tongue, the utterance has no meaning except in the *context of situation*.  
(ibid.)

My understanding of “context” is similar to Hymes’s “speech situation” and Malinowski’s “context of situation”. It is those aspects of the surroundings of the speech act that contribute to the hearer’s interpretation of the speaker’s utterance. These include factors such as the physical environment the speaker and the hearer are in, the event in which they are taking part, and their relationship to each other and any others present.

Hymes says that a person within a community would have knowledge of the situation he/she is in, including how one should speak in such a situation. For example, when one is at a high society ball, one would not expect oneself and other people in the context to use foul language.

In other words, a context provides information for the participants so that they know the *appropriate behaviour* in the particular context. I would suggest that this information is a collection of contextual norms, and that each of these norms tells a speaker how he or she should behave verbally. For instance, to a lot of people, it would be a contextual norm that it is not appropriate to say the word *fuck* in a high school English class.

This concept of contextual norms is similar to Myers-Scotton’s (1988/2000) markedness approach to code-mixing. She says that “any code choice points to a particular interpersonal balance, and it is purely because of their indexical qualities



that different languages, dialects, and styles are maintained in society” (2000: 138). Speakers have knowledge of these indexical qualities in the form of, “mental representations of matching between code choices and rights and obligations sets” (2000: 138). In other words, speakers know, in a particular conventionalised exchange, which varieties or forms would be the most suitable. Thus, in a bilingual conversation, they have knowledge of which code is unmarked in a given exchange.

Myers-Scotton (2000) uses this theory to explain code-mixing by Kenyans who speak Swahili, English and their local dialects. In each conversation, while speakers are interacting with each other verbally, they are also negotiating the unmarked code choices. If, during the conversation, they recognise there is a change in the unmarked code, then they will code-switch to the new unmarked choice. The change can be due to various reasons; for example, if they recognise a shared ethnic identity between the speakers, then they may switch from speaking Swahili, the national language of Kenya, to their local dialect.

The above case can serve as an example of contextual norms. People have norms indicating the appropriate linguistic behaviour in a certain situation. That is, the norms “tell” them, as a speaker, what they should and should not be saying in a given situation; and as a hearer, which expressions are appropriate and which are not in such a situation. Of course, contextual norms in my framework are broader than Myers-Scotton’s markedness model, since they indicate not only appropriate code choices, but also choices of words, sentences, and ways of expressions in one language or variety. They are possessed not only by bilingual or multilingual people, but also monolinguals.

Another significant difference between contextual norms and markedness theory is that, while markedness theory tends to focus on speakers, contextual norms emphasise the role of interlocutors as hearers. Markedness theory explains why speakers would switch from one language to another in a conversation. Contextual norms, on the other hand, attempt to illustrate the mechanism by which a hearer evaluates the appropriateness of an expression produced by a speaker.

### 5.6.3 Identity norms

When a person does not behave appropriately in a certain context (e.g. a student swears during class), people tend to interpret their intention in doing so. That student might be extremely angry; they might have had a very bad day; their parents might have been ranting at them; or they may simply be acting rebelliously. When the hearer recognises that the speaker violates the immediate contextual norm, the hearer tries to understand the speaker's utterance using other explanations. I believe that norms are also in play when it comes to this kind of interpretation. However, these norms are quite different from contextual norms, because contextual norms are indications of *appropriate* behaviour in a certain context. I propose to distinguish these norms from the ones above, and to call them *identity norms*.

I use the term *identity* for this kind of norm because all of these interpretations can lead to the hearer's understanding of the speaker's identity. For example, a student who swears in class could be interpreted by their teacher as a bad student, while another student might see them as a "cool" or brave person. What the swearing student says in the context of a class would lead to interpretations about that student's identity by the hearers.

Note that identity norms would not be applicable without the hearer understanding the context; i.e., without contextual norms, identity norms cannot be applied. As mentioned above, contextual norms allow the hearer to understand in what context the speech utterance is produced, and to judge whether the utterance is appropriate for this context. Similar to the judgement of appropriateness, the interpretation of the speaker's identity also needs to be based on context.

For example, when someone utters "she don't want no tea", people would perceive their identity differently depending on the context in which they say the sentence. If it is said to a local person in a café situated in downtown Detroit, then others would probably see the speaker as a fellow local; but if this sentence is uttered in Buckingham Palace to the Queen, than hearers would very likely interpret the person saying it as someone who is either deliberately making fun of the situation, or an uneducated person who knows little etiquette. Of course, exactly how the speaker would be interpreted would depend on how the hearers understand the context.

Some might argue that not all of these interpretations are related to the speaker's identity. For instance, when one invites a friend to the cinema, it is hard to imagine that the friend would use this invitation to understand more of the speaker's identity. However, even a simple invitation like this one can be used for the hearer's construction of the speaker's identity. The friend could interpret the speaker as a friendly and open person, or even a bossy person, depending on the context and tone of the utterance.

In other words, it can be said that all utterances can *potentially* be used by the hearer to understand the speaker's identity. Hearers may or may not use what the speakers

say to interpret the identities of the speakers, but if the hearers want to, they can always apply identity norms to understand the speakers' identities.

## 5.7 Application of the three types of linguistic norms

As identity norms can only be applicable when the hearer has made sense of whether the speaker is speaking in a language and whether the utterance is appropriate in the context, I believe that, although there might not be an absolute order in which formal norms and contextual norms are applied, identity norms have to come after the other two. In other words, only when the hearer has tested the utterance against formal norms and contextual norms could they comment on the identity of the speaker.

However, despite the hierarchy, the three kinds of linguistic norms are equally important. Although they perform different functions, all three of them are indispensable. The following figure explains the general order of norms application:

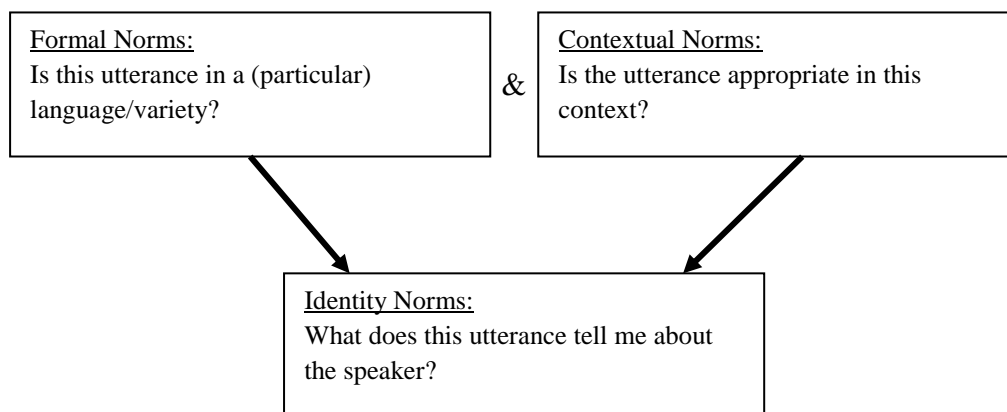


Figure 5.1: the general order of the applications of norms.

### 5.7.1 Case studies

Below I present a few cases which help demonstrate how the three kinds of linguistic norms work. These cases were situations encountered by myself and people I know.

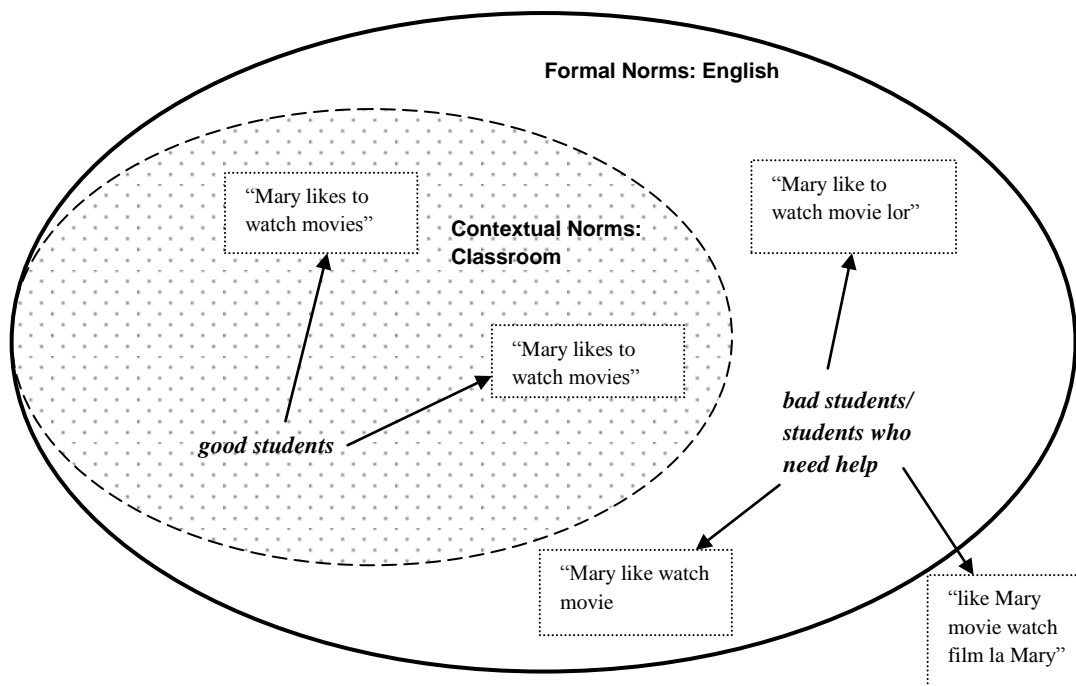


Figure 5.2: the norms of an English teacher in an English classroom in Hong Kong (note: the arrows indicate identity norms).

1) An English teacher in an English classroom in Hong Kong.

Figure 5.2 presents a scenario in which an English teacher in a primary school in Hong Kong encountered some students' utterances when she was teaching English to a class of Primary 2 children. She was teaching the pupils person agreement. In this event, the teacher would expect the students to speak in English. It is expected by the teacher that utterances like "Mary likes to watch movies" meet both the formal norm (i.e. the utterance being English), and contextual norms (i.e. the utterance is

considered being appropriate in the English classroom context, because it is grammatically correct in Standard English).

The teacher would consider the utterance “Mary like watch movie” to be English, but it is not appropriate in the classroom context, where only standard British or American English is allowed. Hence the above utterance meets the formal norms, but not the contextual norms. The utterance “like Mary movie watch film la Mary” would not be considered by this teacher as English, so it does not meet the formal norm either.

The words in italics in figure 5.2 are identity norms. The teacher would link certain utterances to certain identities. When students utter sentences like those in figure 5.2, the teacher would link these utterances to certain identities, and in turn attribute these identities to those students in the teacher’s mind. For instance the speaker of “Mary likes watching films” would be seen by this teacher as having the identity of “good student”, while the one who says “Mary like to watch movie lor” would be constructed as a bad student, or a student who needs help in their English.

2) A student in a linguistic tutorial: meeting the contextual norms but not the formal norms.

Usually, utterances that are seen as appropriate to the contextual norms meet the formal norms as well, because, most of the time, appropriate utterances in whatever context have to be in a language or a variety. However, in some rare cases, utterances that meet the contextual norms do not meet the formal norms.

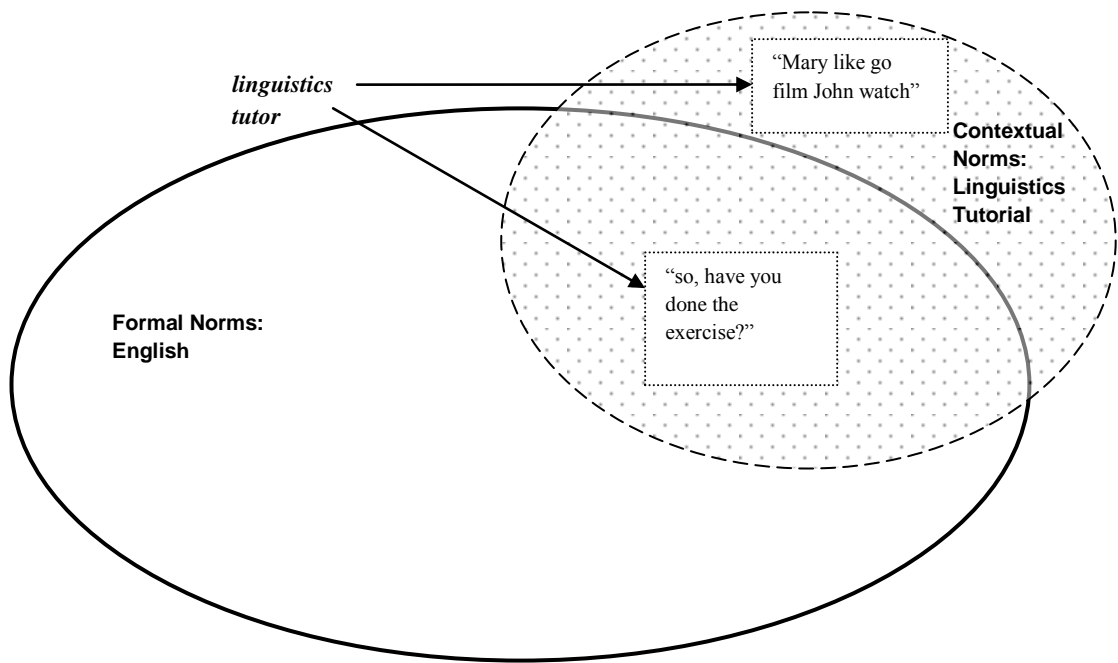


Figure 5.3: the norms of a student in a linguistics tutorial (note: the arrows indicate identity norms).

Figure 5.3 illustrates the norms of a student in a linguistics tutorial, where the tutor demonstrates an ungrammatical sentence to explain some linguistic theory. In the mind of this student, this ungrammatical sentence “Mary like go film John watch”, although not meeting the formal norms, is allowed in the context.

3) An American professor in the University of Hong Kong: miscommunication due to differences in norms.

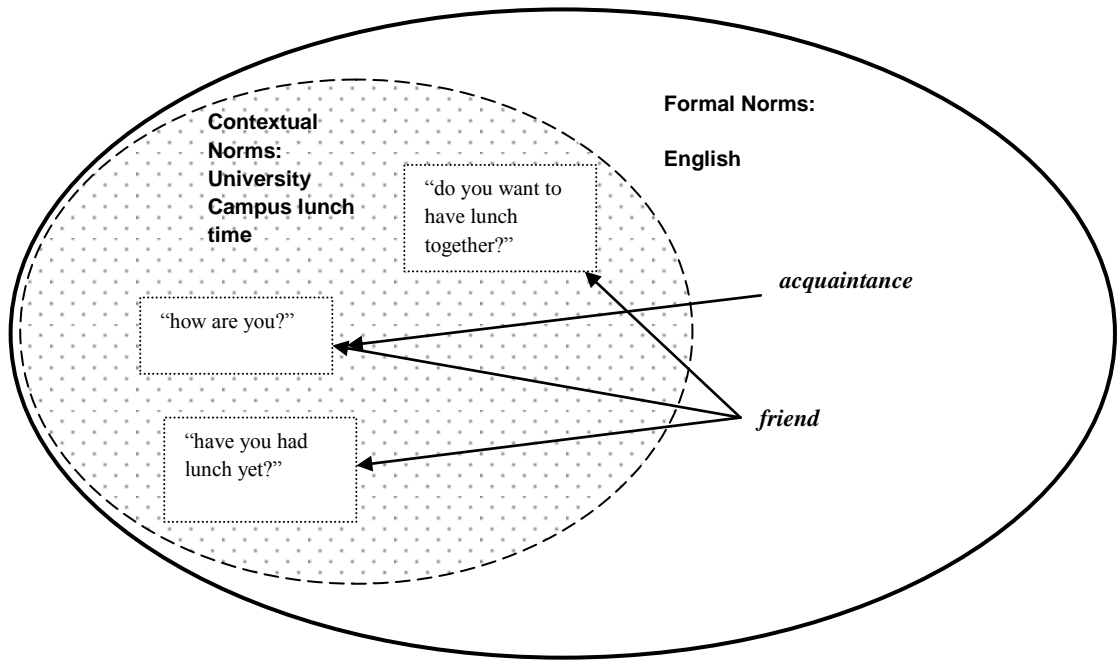


Figure 5.4: the norms of the American professor (note: the arrows indicate identity norms).

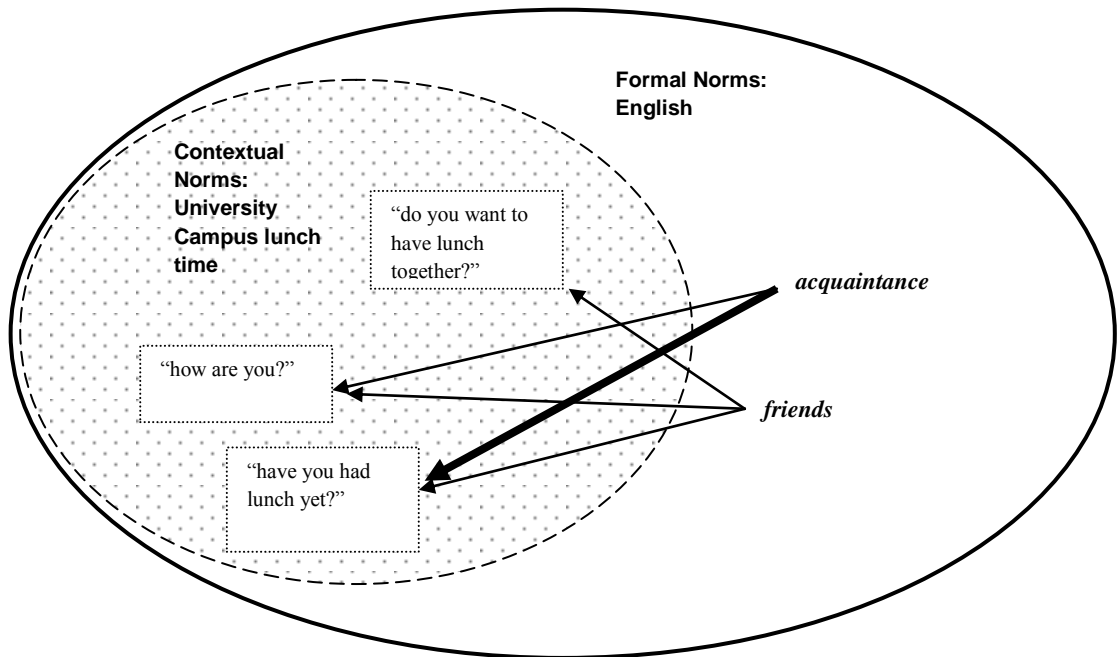


Figure 5.5: the norms of the local professor (note: the arrows indicate identity norms).



Differences in norms between speakers can cause miscommunication, and I would like to use an anecdote to explain this point. In the late 1990s, an American professor at the University of Hong Kong came across his colleague, a local professor, when he was walking in the campus during lunch time. After greeting each other with hellos, this colleague asked the professor, “Have you had lunch yet?”. According to the identity norms of this professor, this utterance would be linked to an identity of a friend who invites the hearer to lunch (figure 5.4). Hence, the professor accepted the invitation and began walking with his colleague toward the Senior Common Room for lunch. Only after an awkward moment when the colleague began walking in another direction did the professor discover that the colleague had already had lunch and was on his way to teach a class.

The cause of this misunderstanding was a difference in norms. In the identity norms of the local professor (figure 5.5) who speaks Cantonese as his first language, the speaker does not need to be a friend of the hearer for him or her to say “Have you had lunch yet?”. In Cantonese, “sik6 zo2 fan6 mei6 a3?” (“Have you had lunch yet?”) functions as a greeting, similar to “How are you?” in English. Hence, borrowing the discourse function from Cantonese, “Have you had lunch yet?” has become a form of greeting to acquaintances in this local professor’s mind. In other words, unlike the American professor, the local professor’s identity norms link this utterance not only to “friends”, but also to “acquaintances”, and the contextual norms link it to greeting rather than invitation. This difference in norms, therefore, caused a misunderstanding between the two professors.

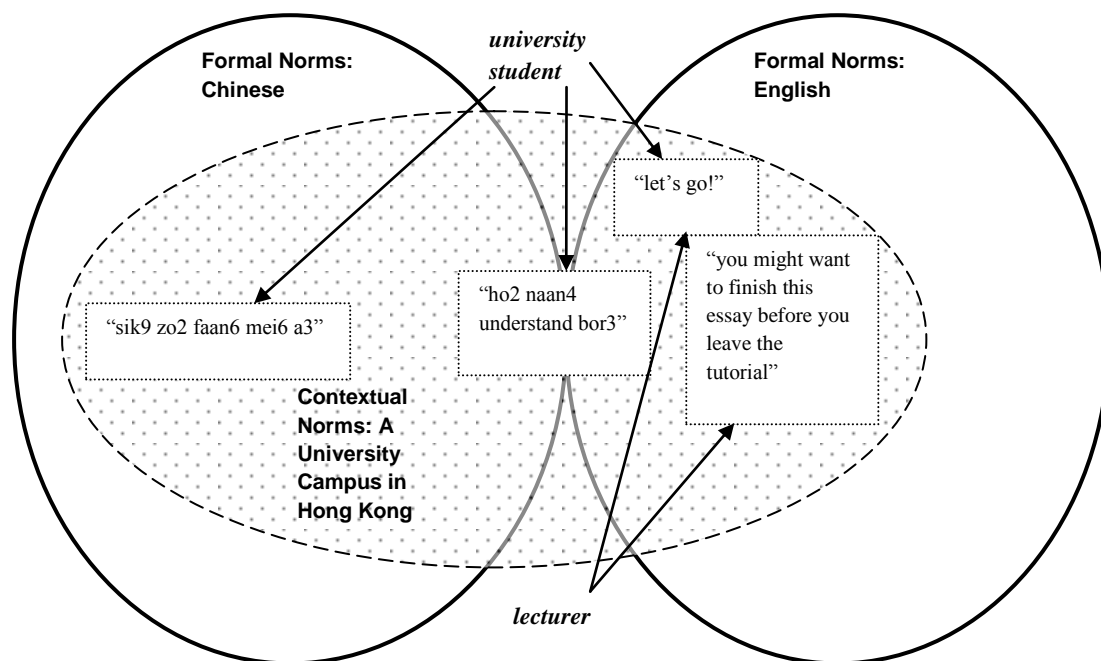


Figure 5.6: the norms of a student in Hong Kong (note: the arrows indicate identity norms).

4) A bilingual speaker in Hong Kong: having two formal norms in application.

In multilingual communities it is commonplace for people to draw on the resources of all their shared languages in communicating with each other. Figure 5.6 illustrates the norms of a student who, in the Hong Kong university campus, would find it appropriate to hear his lecturers speaking in English, and his peers speaking in Cantonese, in English, or a mix of the two codes.

The student would consider the utterance “ho2 naan4 understand bor3” (“it is very difficult to understand”) in English, to be neither an English nor a Chinese utterance, but a Chinese-English mix. To this student it would be normal to use expressions like

this in the context of a university campus in Hong Kong. It is not necessary to have all utterances belonging to one set of formal norms instead of another.

## 5.8 Conclusion

In the previous chapter, I examined the notion of variety, and established that CHKE can indeed be regarded as a variety. Since all linguistic varieties, having their specific sets of features, are likely to have established norms of usage as well, I would like to find out whether such norms have been generated for CHKE. By norms of usage I do not only mean norms of when and where CHKE can and should be used, but also norms of how it should be used and what features can be regarded as belonging to CHKE.

It is because a thorough understanding of the concept of norms is needed before investigating this issue, that I have in this chapter conducted a study of social norms and linguistic norms. Further concepts related to social norms have also been looked at, again so that, when analysing the use of CHKE, it will be possible to say whether social norms, and specifically linguistic norms, are being followed, or whether the use of this variety is not 'normal' at all by the available scholarly definitions.

This chapter has also proposed a theoretical model of linguistic norms, and to see whether this model works requires us to check whether it can give satisfactory explanations of real-life linguistic phenomena. In the next chapter, data obtained from a survey on using CHKE is presented and analysed. I shall apply the linguistic norm model to the data in Chapter Seven, and shall evaluate whether it can successfully explain the data. By doing so, I hope to gain a deeper understanding not only of the phenomenon of CHKE, but also of linguistic norms generally.

### 6.1 About the survey

In order to determine whether CHKE is seen by its users as a variety, one needs to know whether they believe and act as though the set of features that constitutes CHKE is systematically distinct from other varieties. As explained in Chapter One, a key method for determining whether these users see CHKE as systematically distinctive is to observe whether they exhibit norms of using and interpreting this set of features. In order to do this, I have undertaken questionnaire research aimed at teasing out user's beliefs about the normality of CHKE features.

This survey was conducted online. The questionnaire was hosted on a website (see appendix I) and the informants could submit their answers by clicking on the choices provided (for multiple choice questions) or writing in the space provided on the webpage (for open-ended questions). Informants were asked to read a brief passage which was taken from an online conversation between two Hong Kong Chinese. Then the informants had to answer eight questions regarding the normality of the passage.

#### 6.1.1 The passage

The passage in the survey was a small part of an online chat between two Hong Kong people using MSN messenger in 2004. They were given to me by one of the participants of the chat together with her other chat logs when I was collecting data for CHKE analyses. Both participants are 18-year-old females. One participant (A) was studying in the UK, preparing for her A-levels, and the other (B) was studying in

Hong Kong, preparing for her Hong Kong A-levels. The conversation is shown below:

A: back la<sup>38</sup>

B: gum<sup>39</sup> 5<sup>40</sup> ge<sup>41</sup>!!

A: hai<sup>42</sup> ar<sup>43</sup> ! my messenger yau<sup>44</sup> problem ar

A: hai lor<sup>45</sup> ... fat jor<sup>46</sup> ho dor<sup>47</sup> la

A: now i go out to town , eat and eat all the time

B: ..... dun<sup>48</sup> eat so much!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

A: ahahaha ~ but now eating is my entertainment wor<sup>49</sup>

A: otherwise i hv<sup>50</sup> nothing to do ar ! wakakakakak

A: hai wor ! u had grad din<sup>51</sup> recently ><sup>52</sup>

B: wooh<sup>53</sup> u know dat<sup>54</sup>?!

A: hai ar !

A: i saw some photos tim<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> la: end-of-sentence particle, from 啦 (laa1).

<sup>39</sup> gum: Romanised Cantonese, from 咁 (gam2), meaning “so”.

<sup>40</sup> 5: Romanised Cantonese, from 快 (fai3), meaning “quick”. The numerical symbol “5” is used because the English pronunciation of this number “five” is similar to the Cantonese expression “fai3”.

<sup>41</sup> ge: end-of-sentence particle, from 嘅 (ge3).

<sup>42</sup> hai: Romanised Cantonese, from 係 (hai6), meaning “yes”.

<sup>43</sup> ar: end-of-sentence particle, from 啊 (aa3).

<sup>44</sup> yau: Romanised Cantonese, from the verb 有 (yau3), meaning “have”.

<sup>45</sup> lor: end-of-sentence particle, from 囉 (lo1).

<sup>46</sup> jor: Romanised Cantonese, from perfective aspect marker 咗, roughly meaning “already”.

<sup>47</sup> ho dor: Romanised Cantonese, from adjective 好多, meaning “a lot”.

<sup>48</sup> dun: short form of “don’t”.

<sup>49</sup> wor: end-of-sentence particle, from 嘞 (wo3).

<sup>50</sup> hv: short form of “have”.

<sup>51</sup> grad din: short form of “graduation dinner”.

<sup>52</sup> >: this is likely to be a typo. The user might have wanted to type “?”, but pressed the key next to the question mark key instead.

<sup>53</sup> wooh: exclamation, similar to “wow”.

<sup>54</sup> dat: short form/dialectic expression of “that”.

<sup>55</sup> tim: end-of-sentence particle, from 添 (tim1).

A: from Kitty

A: u wore a nice white dress ma<sup>56</sup> ! haha ~ ging<sup>57</sup> lei<sup>58</sup> ? gum dou<sup>59</sup> g<sup>60</sup> ! haha

B: ging ar!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! u r<sup>61</sup> so 8<sup>62</sup> ma!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

B: ya<sup>63</sup> great grad din ar

B: but ngo<sup>64</sup> now mei<sup>65</sup> upload photosssss

A: hehehe ~ thanks thanks ! :P

A: ngo dou yau soo many leavers' ball photo mei upload ar

B: nei<sup>66</sup> always have dat kind of balls ga<sup>67</sup> ??

B: so gd<sup>68</sup> ar u can drink ar!!

A: ng<sup>69</sup>ng .. ng hai<sup>70</sup> ge .. only xmas ball and this leavers' ball je<sup>71</sup>

A: hahaha ~ soo bad lor

A: b4<sup>72</sup> the ball , i was hungry ma , and someone gave me champagne to drink .. then i almost got drunk lor

A: sooo dizzy gum

A: haha

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<sup>56</sup> ma: end-of-sentence particle, from 嘛 (maa3).

<sup>57</sup> ging: Romanised Cantonese, from 勁 (ging6), meaning strong/ powerful.

<sup>58</sup> lei: end-of-sentence particle, from 咧 (le5).

<sup>59</sup> dou: Romanised Cantonese, from adverb 都 (dou1), meaning “also”.

<sup>60</sup> g: Romanised Cantonese, from 知 (zi1), meaning “know”.

<sup>61</sup> u r: short form of “you are”.

<sup>62</sup> 8: Romanised Cantonese, from 八 (baat3), meaning “nosy”. The numerical symbol “8” is used because the Cantonese pronunciation of this number “baat3” is synonymous to the above Cantonese expression.

<sup>63</sup> ya: short form of “yes”.

<sup>64</sup> ngo: Romanised Cantonese, from the pronoun 我 (ngo3), meaning “I”.

<sup>65</sup> mei: Romanised Cantonese, from the aspect marker 未 (mei6), meaning “not yet”.

<sup>66</sup> nei: Romanised Cantonese, from the pronoun 你 (nei3), meaning “you”.

<sup>67</sup> ga: end-of-sentence particle, from 㗎 (gaa3).

<sup>68</sup> gd: short form of “good”.

<sup>69</sup> ng: Romanised Cantonese, from emphatic expression 唔 (ng4/ng6), showing understanding.

<sup>70</sup> ng hai: Romanised Cantonese, from 唔係 (ng4 hai6), meaning “[it is] not the case”.

<sup>71</sup> je: end-of-sentence particle, from 啫 (ze1).

<sup>72</sup> b4: short form of “before”.

This conversational extract has many CMC features. For instance, short forms like, *b4*, *u* and *hv* are used in place of complete forms like, *before*, *you* and *have*. The emoticon *:P* is used in this conversation as well. Also, punctuation marks, especially exclamation marks, are used abundantly to express emotions. There are also features that are specifically CHKE, for example, end of sentence particles like *lor*, *ar*, and *je*; as well as Romanisation of Chinese expressions, for instance *ng hai ge* (meaning “it’s not really”), and *ging lei* (meaning “aren’t I great?”). In two instances (i.e. *gum 5 ge* and *u r so 8 ma*), a numerical symbol is used to represent a Cantonese expression.

For a Hong Kong person who is used to chatting on the internet, it would be quite obvious that it is an online conversation because of its CMC features. It would also be apparent that the conversation is conducted by Hong Kong people who are bilingual in Cantonese and English. This is mainly because of the CHKE features.

### 6.1.2 The informants

The informants were reached using snowball sampling. I started with my friends and family in Hong Kong, whom I knew were Hong Kong people and were familiar with using the internet. I emailed them and asked them to participate in the survey and forward this survey to their friends and family. 112 responses were collected between November and December 2008. However, there was one respondent who accidentally entered 323 in the age column, making it impossible to decide whether she was 23 or 32 years old. Therefore her response was rejected as invalid.

The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 55. 47 were male and 64 were female. While eight of them were high school students or graduates, 70 of the informants

were working on or had obtained an undergraduate degree. The remaining 33 were educated to postgraduate level. Below is a table summarising their personal details.

| <b>Gender</b>          | <b>Male</b>                         | <b>Female</b>                   |                                |                | <b>Total</b> |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|--------------|
|                        | 47                                  | 64                              |                                |                | 111          |
| <b>Education Level</b> | <b>Secondary school/High school</b> | <b>University undergraduate</b> | <b>University postgraduate</b> |                |              |
|                        | 8                                   | 70                              | 33                             |                | 111          |
| <b>Age</b>             | <b>Under 25</b>                     | <b>26-35</b>                    | <b>36-45</b>                   | <b>Over 45</b> |              |
|                        | 48                                  | 49                              | 9                              | 6              | 111          |

Table 6.1: details of the informants.

The vast majority of the informants were under the age of 35. Indeed, those under 35 were six times more numerous than those over 35. One reason is that the network in which I advertised this survey consisted mainly of people under the age of 30. Also there is a tendency that people who respond to this kind of survey are in general quite young. According to a report on internet activities and age groups, “[t]eens and Generation Y (internet users age 18-32) are the most likely groups to use the internet for entertainment and for communicating with friends and family”, while older generations use the internet “less for socializing and entertainment and more as a tool for information searches, emailing and buying products” (Jones & Fox 2009: 6). It appears that the older online population tend to use the internet for practical reasons and for doing business, while the younger generation tend to use the internet for leisure and networking. Research suggests that this kind of practice has been adopted worldwide and includes people who are living in Hong Kong. As this survey was advertised through online social networking, it was not surprising to discover fewer people over the age of 35 responding to it.



### 6.1.3 The questions

The survey aims to seek informants' opinions regarding the normality of what are identified as CHKE features. There were a total of 10 questions that the informants needed to answer in the survey. The first two questions aim to collect informants' basic demographic information, including the place they come from, their age, gender, and education level. Questions 3 to 10 asked for their opinions concerning the passage. These eight questions are of two kinds. Questions 3, 5, 6, 7, and 9 were Likert scale questions, and Questions 4, 8, and 10 were open-ended questions. The survey was, to the best of my effort, conducted anonymously and confidentially<sup>73</sup>.

Question 3 in the survey was as follows:

Q3) Is this conversation different from other forms of English?

- Completely different
- Quite different
- Not too different
- No differences at all

The purpose of this question was to see if the informants could distinguish CHKE from other forms of English, and to ascertain the extent of difference between them. It was predicted that most of the informants could see that CHKE was different from other forms of English.

In Question 4, which was an open-ended question, the informants had to identify what they thought was particularly abnormal. This was the first question in the survey to test whether the informants had certain norms in written English. If the informants saw any feature that violated their norms of written English, they were

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<sup>73</sup> Before I launched the questionnaire, I signed and agreed to a user agreement issued by the website. The agreement stated that the informants' IP address would be kept confidential by the website.

expected to provide their reasons for saying so. The features in the conversation could be violating not only the norms of written English, but also norms of CHKE if the informants had such norms.

Like Question 3, Question 5, 6 and 7 were also Likert scale questions:

Q5) How normal is it for Hong Kong people to have such a conversation?

- Perfectly normal
- Fairly normal
- Fairly abnormal
- Completely abnormal

Q6) Is it normal to use “la”, “ga”, or “ar” in this conversation?

- Perfectly normal
- Fairly normal
- Fairly abnormal
- Completely abnormal

Q7) How normal is it to say “ngo dou you so many leavers’ ball photo mei upload ar”\* in this conversation? (\*the sentence means “I also have many leavers’ ball photos that haven’t been uploaded yet”)

- Perfectly normal
- Fairly normal
- Fairly abnormal
- Completely abnormal

Since, as shown in Poon (2005), in the eyes of its users, CHKE was most likely linked to Hong Kong people, by means of the above questions, I enquired of the informants whether they believed that there were norms associating CHKE features with Hong Kong identity. These questions were put in this order so that the informants might consider the normality of CHKE from different perspectives. First,

they had to consider CHKE generally as a variety, then a specific CHKE feature, and finally an example containing CHKE features. Question 5 concerns the conversation as a whole. Question 6 focuses on end-of-sentence particles, a prominent feature of CHKE. Finally, in question 7, a specific part of the conversation was presented for informants to consider. This specific segment in question 7 was chosen because it has some significant CHKE features, including literal translation from Cantonese expressions (i.e. *ngo dou yau*, which means “I also have”), and end of sentence particles (*ar*).

If the informants answered “fairly abnormal” or “completely abnormal” to any of the above 3 questions, they were asked to provide their explanation in question 8. For instance, if they thought that using CHKE was abnormal in the conversation, then one could assume that they felt that certain norms of English spoken or written by Hong Kong people or certain norms of CMC (even though they were not told that the conversation were conducted on the internet, it was expected that the informants could work out that it was an online exchange because of various CMC features) had been violated. It was hoped that the informants would express what linguistic norms were violated in their answers.

Question 9 is shown below:

Q9) If I told you this conversation was between two native British people, how strange would it be?

- Not strange at all
- A little strange
- Quite strange
- Extremely strange

Given that the conversation contains so many features associated with the English of Hong Kong people who speak Cantonese as their first language, one would assume that informants are likely to consider the prospect that it took place between native British people to be at least somewhat strange.

If their answer to question 9 was “a little strange”, “quite strange”, or “extremely strange”, the informants were asked, in question 10, to explain why they thought it was strange for British people to have such a conversation. I hoped that, through their answers, informants would explain what norms they had in using CHKE, and what norms they thought were violated when CHKE was used by native speakers of English. By conducting this survey, I was hoping to establish whether using CHKE had become a norm of CMC in this online community amongst Hong Kong people and to ascertain whether different age groups had different norms regarding the use of CHKE on the internet.

In this questionnaire, the informants were first asked (in Question 3) whether they could distinguish CHKE from other forms of English by seeing the differences between them. They were also invited to discuss the differences by an open-ended question (Question 4). Then, in order to see whether these differences in their eyes were systematic, they were asked to judge the normality of CHKE in different aspects (in Question 5, 6, and 7), and to express their opinions on why they thought CHKE in any aspect was normal or abnormal (in Question 8)<sup>74</sup>. Finally, they were asked (in Question 9 and 10) to respond to a situation in which a norm of using CHKE was violated (the norm being “CHKE is used by Hong Kong people”), and by

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<sup>74</sup> As discussed in §4.11, if the informants think CHKE features are in some aspect normal, then it shows that they see these features as systematic instead of random.

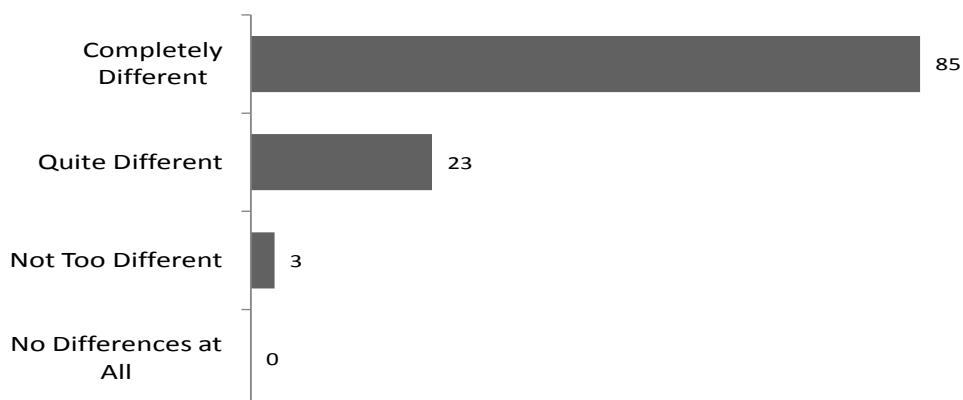
this I could observe whether they recognised there were norms (identity norms in particular) of using CHKE. By means of this survey, I aim to determine whether, in the eyes of the informants, CHKE is distinguishable, systematic, and whether they have recognised any norm of using it.

## 6.2 The results<sup>75</sup>

As questions 1 and 2 in the survey requested information on age, gender, nationality, and education level, and their results have been presented above, this section presents the results of the informants' responses to the passage, starting from question 3.

### 6.2.1 Question 3

When asked whether they thought the conversation was different from other forms of English, 85 of the people said *completely different*, 23 said *quite different*, and 3 said *not too different*.



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<sup>75</sup> The informants are identified by the letter “S”, which means subject, and a number which indicates their order of doing the survey. The first informant who did the survey is S1, and second informant S2, and so on. When quoting their responses, this indication is followed by their age and gender (M/F). For example, if subject number 30’s answer is quoted, his quote will be followed by “(S30-27M)”, which indicates that this informant was a 27-year-old male.

The vast majority of the informants concluded that the conversation containing CHKE features was either *quite different* or *completely different*. Only three informants thought that it was *not too different* from other forms of English, but none of them answered *no differences at all*. It is obvious that all the informants noticed the differences between CHKE and other forms of written English, with the majority thinking that CHKE was very different.

#### 6.2.2 Question 4

When asked whether they saw anything in the conversation that looked particularly abnormal, the informants had varying opinions. While 16 of them concluded it was not at all abnormal, the rest of them commented on the conversation in different ways. Firstly, there were a few informants who said that the whole conversation was abnormal:

every sentence (S20- 29M);

THE WHOLE CONVERSATION IS ABNORMAL (S64- 28F).

Some pointed out certain segments they found abnormal:

ging ar!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! u r so 8 ma!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!  
hai lor ... fat jor ho dor la

gum 5 ge!!..... (S28- 40M);

“gum 5 ge” (S87- 23M).

There are informants who focused on certain features which looked abnormal to them:

ar lor wor ga ma je (S89- 19F);

excessive exclamations (S39- 20F);

the sentence structure (S23- 31F).

Some thought that the English was improper, for instance:

many spelling error (S72- 31F);

Grammar is non-existent. (S42- 23F);

Its street English (S29- 39M);

no proper english is used in the entire conversation and yet the conversation is typed in "english" (S80- 20F).

Two informants even said that it was not English:

it's not english (S16- 21M);

Is not english for sure (S38- 43M).

A number of them mentioned that Chinese elements could be found in the conversation:

The words could not be found in the traditional English dictionary and they are most likely Cantonese Pinyin<sup>76</sup> (S1-28M);

Mix of Chinese words substituted into English phrases that are poor grammar and spelling (S54-30M);

A combination of correct English words with some spellings that suggest the words of spoken Cantonese. (S70-28M).

On the other hand, some people saw the conversation as essentially Chinese/Cantonese, but typed out in English:

Speaking Cantonese Chinese and writing it out in English (S8-26M);

It seems they use 24 lettering to type in Cantonese (S34-47F);

use of Chinese words, but pronounced and spelt in English (S53-20F);

I can understand them all, yet I do know that's not English but simply some Chinese words represented by their pronunciation made of English letters (S91-25F).

A number of informants regarded the conversation as a variety that comprised Chinese and English. Among these people, some used various terms to describe the variety.

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<sup>76</sup> I believe that the informant intended to type "Pinyin". "Pingan" was likely to be a typo.



This is like a language mix with english, number and cantonese (S3- 26F);

sentence structure is weird..  
combining both Chinese and English.. (S14- 23F);

So many chinese english (S2- 23F);

chin-english (S110- 25M);

chinglish (S31- 55F);

Super Chingish!!!! (S37- 28F);

Typical Hong Kong Local English used by the youngsters (S26-  
51F);

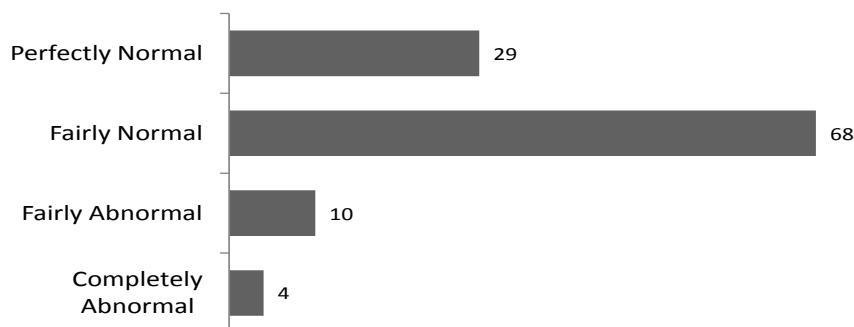
they are using Hongkong English. (S22- 36F).

As mentioned, the purpose for asking this question was to see whether any features in the conversation violated the linguistic norms of the informants. The informants provided more valuable insight than expected. Not only did they point out the features that they found abnormal, they also commented on the variety itself by trying to identify it and stating who was more likely to use it. It is interesting to note that this same group of informants came up with many different opinions with specific reference to the use of improper English, Chinese typed in English, a combination of Chinese/Cantonese and English, or a variety of its own. Although the

informants did not agree on whether the conversation was normal, and whether the bundle of features were English, Chinese or a combination of both, they agreed that this variety was different from other forms of English.

### 6.2.3 Question 5

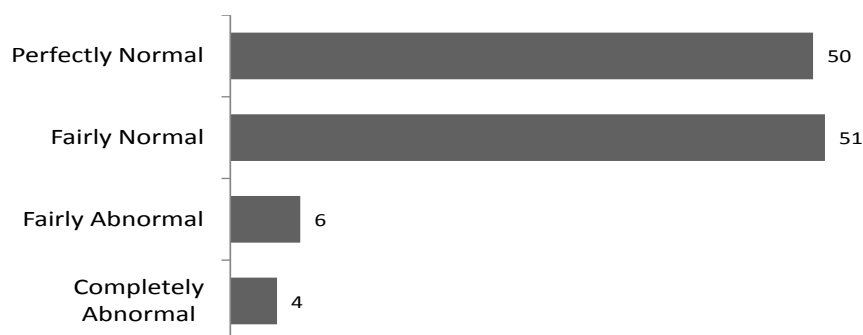
The question asked the informants how normal it was for Hong Kong people to have such a conversation. Among the informants, 29 said it was perfectly normal; 68 answered fairly normal. There were 10 who thought it was fairly abnormal and 4 considered it completely abnormal.



Considering the whole conversation, most of the informants thought that CHKE was at least fairly normal. Only 14 out of 111 informants said it was fairly abnormal or completely abnormal. It seems that the majority of the informants thought that CHKE on the internet did not violate norms and it was quite normal to see CHKE used among Hong Kong people in CMC.

#### 6.2.4 Question 6

This question, as a follow-up to Question 5, asked the informants to comment on a specific feature of CHKE, namely end-of-sentence particles. The informants were asked to evaluate this feature and determine whether they found it perfectly normal, fairly normal, fairly abnormal or completely abnormal. The results are presented in the graph below.



The results show that the number of people seeing end-of-sentence particles, like *la*, *ga*, *ar*, as completely abnormal was the same as Question 5. However, many more informants thought it was perfectly normal, compared to the responses to the last question. Based on the results, one can conclude that end-of-sentence particles appear to have become a generally accepted feature in CMC among Hong Kong people.

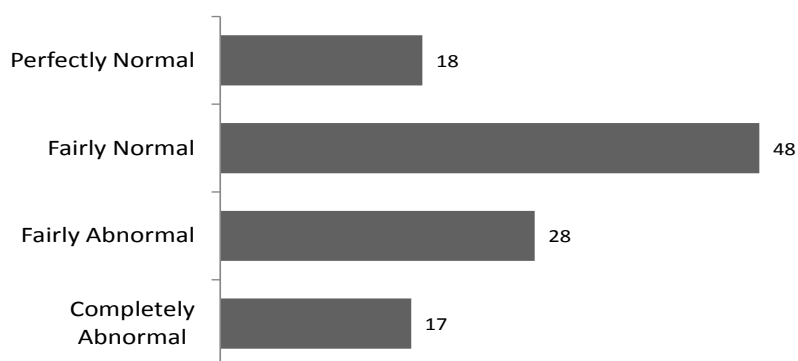
#### 6.2.5 Question 7

This was another follow-up to Question 5. Instead of looking at a specific feature, this question focused on a segment that contained various CHKE features. The segment in question was a line written by participant A – “ngo dou yau soo many

leavers' ball photo mei upload ar". This literally meant "I also had a lot of photos that haven't been uploaded yet".

This sentence contains phonetic translation from Cantonese to English *ngo* (I), *dou* (also), *yau* (have), and *mei* (not yet), and an end-of-sentence particle *ar*. These features constituted about half of the sentence, and these phonetic translations appear not only in nouns (*ngo*), but also in verbs (*yau*), and adverbs (*dou*), making the sentence very difficult to understand if one does not have knowledge of both Cantonese and English.

Unlike with the last two questions, informants were not completely convinced that it was normal to have such sentences written in CMC.



While "fairly normal" was still the most popular choice among the informants, there were fewer people who said the sentence was perfectly normal. Also, a total of 45 people thought that the sentence was either fairly abnormal or completely abnormal, which was more than those who gave the same answers to questions 5 and 6.

### 6.2.6 Question 8

Question 8 asked the informants to comment on the conversation and explain why they thought CHKE was abnormal, if their answers were “fairly abnormal” and “completely abnormal” in the previous three questions. It was hoped that they would elaborate their views on the matter of linguistic norms concerning CMC through answering this question.

Among the informants, there were only two who chose “completely abnormal” for all three questions. These two informants seemed to reject the use of CHKE in all aspects. Below are their comments:

It is completely abnormal because those words used in the conversation are not English. "La" , "ga", "ar", "ngo", "dou" , etc...are English pronunciation of Cantonese which many people refer them as Chinglish. (S65- 25F);

It's bad for our english language in practice...completely abnormality becomes completely normal now. (S56- 44F).

The first informant, S65, saw the features of CHKE as abnormal. According to her, it was not normal to use what she regarded as “Chinglish”. Also, her answer seems to imply that English should be the language used in this context. The second informant said that the use of CHKE was bad for Hong Kong people’s English, but she also acknowledged that CHKE has become “completely normal” now, despite her original belief that it was completely abnormal.

Another three informants answered at least “fairly abnormal” to all three of the questions:

It just gives goosebumps reading this kind of conversations.  
And it happens often enough. I can accept people who type in  
Chinese characters in the middle of a English conversation but  
not these kind of twisted English along with poor grammar.  
(S73- 26M);

it surprise me if this is the language they use in Hong Kong.  
Since I was aboard [abroad] in Canada for more than 10 years  
and do not know this is the 'common' language people are  
using in HK. (S34- 47F);

cuz they are overly hard to understand (S85- 18M).

Similar to S56, S73 wrote that CHKE happened “often enough”. Nonetheless, even if it was used frequently, CHKE was still abnormal to him because it was “twisted English with poor grammar”. From his answer, one can ascertain that it his belief that using English or Chinese in CMC was normal. Mixing the two varieties together was also acceptable according to his norms, as long as they were presented in their respective written forms. His norms would be violated if these written forms were mixed, for instance using alphabetic versions of Chinese words.

S34 confessed that as she had not lived in Hong Kong for more than 10 years, her exposure to this relatively new development of communicating in CMC was rather limited. It was therefore not surprising that she found CHKE fairly abnormal.

S85’s reason for finding CHKE abnormal was that it was hard to understand. It can be seen that the ability to understand was one of the main criteria by which people determined whether the features in question met their linguistic norms. A few other

informants also found the sentence in Question 7 completely abnormal for the same reason:

I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT DID THEY MEAN (S64-28F);

"ngo dou yau soo" is hard to understand, especially it's the start of a sentence. (S99- 27M).

Even though these informants found CHKE in general, and end-of-sentence particles in particular, fairly normal, they said that the sentence was abnormal because they found it hard to understand what it tried to convey.

While there were subjects who found CHKE abnormal in all aspects, the majority had a mixed opinion concerning this variety. As mentioned above in the discussion of Question 5, 14 people found CHKE either fairly abnormal or abnormal. Except for one person, all these informants also thought the sentence shown in Question 7 was abnormal. On the other hand, with only one exception, all the informants who found that specific sentence normal would also say that CHKE as a variety and end-of-sentence particles were normal. As for the rest of the informants, they too tend to consider CHKE in general and end-of-sentence particles normal, but the sentence in Question 7 abnormal.

Various reasons were given by informants for thinking CHKE to be abnormal. Some informants said that it was not normal because certain features of CHKE would be difficult to understand. For instance:

it takes longer to read so it's abnormal (S3- 26F);

the mix of both chinese and english makes the sentence quite awkward to read (S83- 18M).

Some informants said that the sentence was abnormal because it was “not English”:

It is not English (S97- 30F).

Other informants explained what these features were:

Because that's not English sentence structure. It's only trying to use Chinese words' meaning to communicate, but present them in terms of English letters (S91- 25F);

they are chinese, not english (S21- 26M).

These informants recognised that Chinese features had an effect on the variety, but they seemed to think that it should be regarded as a form of Chinese instead of English. There are informants who said that CHKE was abnormal because people should type in Chinese/Cantonese instead, for instance:

because some phrases sound Cantonese. If people really want to communicate those ideas, they would probably type Chinese instead. (S70- 28M);

To avoid miscommunication and to be more efficient to the communication, we usually type Chinese rather than using English alphabets to simulate the pronouciation of the Chinese words. (S75- 30M).



A linguistic norm in CMC can be seen from these comments, and this is to use Chinese characters to convey anything which is supposed to be pronounced in Cantonese. This is further discussed in §7.3 below. Their responses also show that these informants viewed CHKE as a mixture of Chinese and English, instead of a variety of English affected by Chinese, or vice versa.

Differently from the above informants, some people in the survey saw CHKE as a form of English, but not a standard form. Some found CHKE abnormal because “It is not proper English” (S81- 26F), or “Because it is not formal usage of english words.” (S46- 20M); or “cause it's not a normal english” (S72- 31F).

While recognising CHKE as an English variety, these informants did not think it was normal to use it in CMC because it was not proper, formal or normal English. It can be inferred that they consider that only proper/formal/normal language should be used in CMC, but it is unclear what normal means to them. One informant gave an explanation why CHKE was not normal English:

In the conversation, they are not using normal English. If they are just using a "langue" to communicate, it's okay. However, if they are using English, there is no grammar[r] at all. In addition, they use many words that is not English, just the sounds like Cantonese words with no actual meaning. (S44- 31F).

According to S44, whether CHKE is normal depends on what CHKE is. If it is a “langue”, it would be acceptable — though what S44 means by “langue” is quite opaque. If the Saussurean term is intended, it does not make sense in the context, where something like “lingo” or “jargon” or even “pidgin” seems to be called for. However, it would be abnormal if it was an English variety. In other words, this

CHKE is normal as a variety in its own right, but it does not meet the norms of the English language. To this informant, the context in which this variety was used did not have much relevance. The important factor for determining whether the use of CHKE was normal was whether it is a language with a grammar and an unmixed lexicon.

One of the reasons given by informants who regarded the use of CHKE as abnormal was because they themselves did not use it:

because i dont use those (S13- 24M);

it is becuae I am not used to use such kind of language for commmmunicating with my friends. (S23- 31F);

i don't speak like [the sentence in question] 7 (S16- 21M).

Similarly, there were people who thought CHKE was not normal because they believed other people generally did not use it:

i only got 1-2 friends who write this way in MSN/emails. (S6- 27F);

not alot of Hong Kong people will type in the pinyin of a chinese word in their conversation.. especially when the word 'T' is probably quicker than typing NGO... if they really want to say 'ngo dou yau'.. most likely, they would have typed that in chinese already.. (S55- 27F).

These two kinds of informants considered normality in terms of the frequency of usage— as a norm of pattern, as discussed in Chapter Five. Unlike the other subjects, these two did not focus on whether CHKE as a variety was legitimate as a language for use on the internet. What these informants looked at was whether these features appear frequently enough to be considered as normal.

Although informants were only asked to give comments when they thought CHKE was abnormal, a few informants who answered “fairly normal” or “perfectly normal” to all three questions (Questions 5, 6, and 7) wrote down what they thought as well. Some of these informants had such answers because they themselves used CHKE:

coz i've been using those as well (S14- 23F);

It's normal for Cantonese people to chat like that online. I do that too sometimes (S33- 28F).

One informant even briefly demonstrated her use of CHKE in her answer:

This is the way we speak lah in Hong Kong (S96- 55F).

Some other people said that, since Hong Kong people in general used it, CHKE was normal:

It should be the common situation in Hong Kong nowadays. (S1- 28M);

this is how people talk in HK (S35- 52M);

It's normal for Cantonese speakers but abnormal for native English speakers. (S42- 23F);

Person A and B are just typing out the cantonese. 'Hong Kong-ders' use a mixture of English and Chinese in normal daily conversation as well. (S109- 24F).

Similarly to the informants who thought CHKE was abnormal, the above informants also used norms of pattern to evaluate the normality of this variety. However, these informants believed that CHKE was used frequently enough to be considered normal, and so came to a different conclusion.

S109's comment raises an interesting point. This informant said that it was perfectly normal for Hong Kong people to use CHKE and end-of-sentence particles, and she also found the sentence in Question 7 fairly normal. The reason was that "they are typing out the cantonese". Nevertheless, some informants said that they believed CHKE was abnormal for the same reason. For instance, S4 found the sentence in Question 7 fairly abnormal:

Because I think HK people usually mix English and Chinese in a sentence, but the sentence in Q7 is completely a Chinese sentence, but "typed" in English. (S4- 28M).

Looking at his comment, one can see that this informant had no problems with mixing English and Chinese as long as it is spoken. However, when it comes to mixing languages in a written form, in this case typing Chinese sentences in the Roman alphabet, he would find it abnormal. What makes it more intriguing is that

this informant found end-of-sentence particles perfectly normal, despite the fact that these particles were Cantonese words represented alphabetically.

This shows that 1) people have different linguistic norms when it comes to mixing two languages in communication, and 2) some informants consider it acceptable to have some Chinese features typed in English alphabet but not other informants.

Another interesting comment was made by this informant:

Now a days it is very normal conversation for HK people. if the other party is Chinese who speaks the same languages as I do, with those 'la','ga','le', 'gum' make the conversation closer. It has the feeling that we are 'talking' face to face. However, i still prefer to use proper english at msn! (S59- 26F).

Although, as she said in this comment, she preferred to use “proper english at msn [messenger]”, S59 believed that CHKE was normal because Hong Kong people usually used it. She also provided a reason for which CHKE was normally used in CMC as well. If both speakers were Chinese, then CHKE features would “make the conversation closer”, which presumably means that speakers would feel a greater bond with each other. This echoes what accommodation theory says.

Accommodation theory was first proposed by Giles and Smith in 1979. This theory says that when people talk to each other, their speech pattern might converge with or diverge from each other, depending on how the interlocutors perceive each other. If the speakers have a positive view towards each other, or when one speaker has an interest in pleasing the other, their speech patterns tend to converge. On the other hand, if the speakers have a negative view towards each other, or when they want to maintain and display their cultural distinctiveness, their speech patterns could

diverge from each other. In this case, S59's thinking that CHKE would "make the conversation closer" suggests that CHKE might be a product of speech convergence, since perceived similarity enhances a person's likeability, Hong Kong people tend to converge toward each other's ways of speaking or communicating on the internet by using CHKE.

Some informants who thought CHKE was normal had the following comments:

That is the direct translation from Chinese to English (S20- 29M);

They are just Cantonese converted English. They do it because they don't know how to type Chinese. Thus they [are] force[d] to do it this way. (S106-31M).

Both of these informants acknowledged that CHKE was a product of two languages (Chinese/Cantonese and English). To them, this variety was a form of translation or conversion from Chinese to English. Unlike the informants discussed above, these two informants did not consider the Chinese element in this form of English abnormal. S106 assumed that the sender of the message does not know how to type in Chinese, and that typing Cantonese pinyin would be the normal usage in this case.

Below is a similar but different reason provided by another informant:

because both persons speak and understand Cantonese (S77- 30F).

Similar to S20 and S106, this informant appeared to acknowledge that CHKE was affected by Chinese. However, instead of assuming that the participants in the online conversation did not know how to type Chinese, as suggested by S106, S77 implies

that the use of CHKE is normal in a bilingual CMC conversation. This further implies that the participants have chosen to type in CHKE, instead of being forced to do so. Another informant's comment supported this viewpoint:

The conversation above is usually recognized as Chinglish / Hong Kong English. However, it is actually presented by Cantonese instead of real English when it is translated to pure Cantonese and it will look normal if they type all the conversation in real Cantonese (not Chinese/Mandarin), which really exists in written format but is not widely and correctly used. I believe most of the people simply type Chinglish / Hong Kong English since they are more comfortable with English keyboarding but at the same time, they can express with a more intimate language which represent their culture. (S60- 25F).

As this informant mentioned, CHKE was used because “they [were] more comfortable with English keyboarding”. This is similar to what the above three informants said. Nonetheless, if using this variety also allows participants in the conversation to “express with a more intimate language which represent their culture”, this is presumably another way of saying that using CHKE improves the personal bonding between the participants because this variety is culturally unique to Hong Kong and its people.

#### 6.2.7 Question 9

This question asked the informants how strange it would be if this conversation took place between two native British people. The results are shown in the graph below.



As expected, the vast majority of the informants found it extremely strange. There were 10 people who found it quite strange, three said it was a little strange and three felt that it was not strange at all. As mentioned above, since CHKE is normally seen in conversations between Hong Kong Chinese people who speak Cantonese and English, it is hard to imagine native British people, who usually do not have knowledge of Cantonese, conducting an online or offline conversation in CHKE. The small number of informants who found it only slightly strange or less may have been taking ‘native British’ to mean British-born, and assumed that the participants were British-born ethnic Chinese raised bilingually in a majority Chinese community within the UK, even though clearly the great bulk of the informants did not interpret it in this way.

#### 6.2.8 Question 10

If the informants’ answer was either “a little strange”, “quite strange”, or “extremely strange”, they were asked to provide an explanation for this. Although different reasons were given as to why the conversation was strange if it was conducted by



two native British people, many of the informants agreed on two points. First of all, there were Cantonese elements in CHKE:

There is a lot of Cantonese used in this conversation (S30-27M);

Most of the conversation are Chinese and Cantonese (S31-41M).

Secondly, they believed that native British people would not communicate with each other online in CHKE because they had no knowledge of Chinese or Cantonese:

If a native British speaker, they won't say any of the above "Chinglish"(Chinese + Eng) or can say "Cantonish" (Cantonese + Eng). It is totally and extremely strange unless they know Cantonese. (S37- 28F);

It's extremely strange for native British people to converse that way because they won't incorporate Chinese slangs or words in their sentences. At least, I doubt they'll use the word "mei" for "not yet"! (S45- 31F).

These informants considered that a norm would be violated if CHKE was used by British people. The norm is that CHKE is generally be used by Hong Kong people who know Cantonese and English. British people, who normally only speak English, and rarely have Cantonese as a second language, would not use CHKE when communicating with each other.

However, in relation to how CHKE was different from British English, the informants had different views. There were people who thought the grammar was different:

The syntax is different from English spoken by native English speakers. (S18- 28F);

They are using some English words but the grammars and most of the keywords are not really English and native speakres will find it impossible to comprehend. (S61- 27F).

Some said it was the style which was different:

this is Hong Kong style not British style. (S69- 25F);

the type up above are typical web conversational style between local Hong Kong people and is not expected from native british (S5- 40M);

The above conversation is NOT english, it is Chinese-style english. (S101- 29F).

An informant mentioned that this style was not only regional, but also age-related:

it is because it is the communicating style for the youth for HK people, absolutely, cannot believe such conversation from the native British people, as I have no idea for some meanings of the above conversation as well. (S23- 31F).

A few informants said it was medium-oriented:

Because this conversation is using HK style msn language. (S51- 20F);

the above is a totally local HK style of MSN/online conversation. (S74- 32M).

For various reasons, then, the informants believed that CHKE is different from British English, and the vast majority of them agreed that it would be extremely strange for British people with no knowledge of CHKE to use this variety to communicate with each other online.

### 6.2.9 Considering the independent factors

I will now discuss whether factors like gender, education level, geographical location and age of the informants are relevant when considering the usage of CHKE. Since their background information was asked in Questions 1 and 2 in the survey, each informant's gender, geographical location, age and education level are known. Each independent factor mentioned above is analysed to determine whether it has a direct impact on their attitude towards CHKE.

In the following sections, I focus on the informants' answers to Questions 5, 6 and 7, which ask what they think of the conversation as a whole (question 5), some specific features (i.e. end-of-sentence particles) (question 6), and a specific line in the conversation (i.e. “ngo dou yau soo many leavers' ball photo mei unload ar”) (question 7). For each of the three questions, I group their answers into two categories. The first group consists of *perfectly normal* and *fairly normal*, while the second group is composed of *fairly abnormal* and *completely abnormal*. The reason is that the four answers are not in a constellation, as it were. They are in a spectrum instead. It would be appropriate to group the four answers into two groups, namely *normal* and *abnormal*.

### 6.2.9.1 Gender

As shown in many sociolinguistic articles, gender can be a factor affecting people's linguistic behaviour and attitudes (for instance, Trudgill's (1974) study of vernacular [ɪn] in the speech of various social groups in Norwich, and Milroy's (1989) research on the glottalised [p] in the speech of Tyneside women and men from two social classes). I would like to see, in this case, whether the informants' gender plays a role in determining their norms of language, particularly where CHKE is concerned. Of all 111 informants, 47 were male and 64 were female. Below are tables showing how males and females answered questions 5, 6 and 7.

| Question 5 | Male | Female |
|------------|------|--------|
| Normal     | 40   | 57     |
| Abnormal   | 7    | 7      |

| Question 6 | Male | Female |
|------------|------|--------|
| Normal     | 43   | 58     |
| Abnormal   | 4    | 6      |

| Question 7 | Male | Female |
|------------|------|--------|
| Normal     | 25   | 41     |
| Abnormal   | 22   | 23     |

I have done a chi-square test to see whether these distributions significantly different. It appears that the p-values of questions 5, 6, and 7 are 0.89, 0.87, and 0.24 respectively. Since significance is usually marked by a p-value which is lower than 0.05, the p-values of the distributions of these three questions show that gender is not a factor that has a significant effect on how the informants answer the question.

### 6.2.9.2 Education level

It seems plausible that differences in level of education could influence linguistic norms. Among the informants, there were eight secondary school or high school graduates, 70 university students or graduates, and 33 postgraduates. How they answered the three questions is shown below.

| Question 5 | High School | Undergraduate | Postgraduate |
|------------|-------------|---------------|--------------|
| Normal     | 5           | 63            | 29           |
| Abnormal   | 3           | 7             | 4            |

| Question 6 | High School | Undergraduate | Postgraduate |
|------------|-------------|---------------|--------------|
| Normal     | 5           | 65            | 31           |
| Abnormal   | 3           | 5             | 2            |

| Question 7 | High School | Undergraduate | Postgraduate |
|------------|-------------|---------------|--------------|
| Normal     | 2           | 45            | 19           |
| Abnormal   | 6           | 25            | 14           |

The chi-square test shows that, while there is no significance in questions 5 ( $p=0.08$ ) and 7 ( $p=0.09$ ), the difference in distribution in question 6 is significant ( $p=0.01$ ). It means that, while informants who had received undergraduate and postgraduate education tended to think that end-of-sentence particles were normal, those who only had received secondary school education did not. This statistical significance is quite peculiar because the distributions of question 5 and 6 are similar to each other. Also, the patterns of the answers concerning the 3 independent variables are similar too, in the sense that, for each category, more informants thought end-of-sentence particles were normal than abnormal.

One might, however, object that this statistical significance might not be accurate because the number of high school graduates was too small. This could cause an inaccuracy when using chi-square to test significance. In this case, since the distribution of question 6 and across questions 5 and 6 is so similar, it would be prudent to suspend judgement on the value of the statistical significance shown.

### 6.2.9.3 Geographical location

Since all of the informants showed knowledge of CHKE and the survey was specifically carried out on Hong Kong people, it is reasonable to assume that all the informants were Hong Kong people. However, when answering the question “where do you come from”, 94 of the informants said they came from Hong Kong, and of the remaining 17 of them came from Canada, UK, US, and the Philippines. It is understood that the 17 people are Hong Kong people who were residing in countries outside Hong Kong.

I have named the group who came from Hong Kong as “local” and grouped informants who were not from Hong Kong “non-local” Below were the informants’ answers to question 5, 6 and 7.

| Question 5      | Local | Non-local |
|-----------------|-------|-----------|
| <b>Normal</b>   | 81    | 16        |
| <b>Abnormal</b> | 13    | 1         |

| Question 6      | Local | Non-local |
|-----------------|-------|-----------|
| <b>Normal</b>   | 84    | 17        |
| <b>Abnormal</b> | 10    | 0         |

| Question 7 | Local | Non-local |
|------------|-------|-----------|
| Normal     | 52    | 14        |
| Abnormal   | 42    | 3         |

Using chi-square to test the data, it appears that there is no significance found in the distributions in question 5 ( $p=0.36$ ) and 6 ( $p=0.15$ ). However, significance is shown in question 7 ( $p=0.03$ ). For this question, the answers supplied by local Hong Kong people and non-local Hong Kong people are significantly different.

When asked whether it was normal for Hong Kong people to have such a conversation and for them to use end-of-sentence particles, both the local and the non-local participants were inclined to say it was normal. Nonetheless, when it came to considering the normality of a specific line in the conversation which contained numerous CHKE features, while the majority of the non-local group still thought it was normal (82.3%), only slightly more than half of the local population thought that specific expression was normal (55.3%).

It is somewhat surprising that the majority of the non-local group viewed usage of CHKE features as normal, while significantly fewer informants in the local group considered it normal. Because CHKE is usually seen as a variety that was generated locally in Hong Kong, particularly by Hong Kong teenagers, it is odd to see that this CHKE expression is less accepted locally.

One reason for this difference in opinion could be the strong tie between CHKE and Hong Kong identity. Since local Hong Kong people are already in the community from which their very “Hongkongness” comes, they may not need any more specific

markers to mark their Hong Kong identity. Adding to the fact that CHKE is not seen as an overt prestige marker, because CHKE is often linked to improper English or even bad English (as seen in the informants' answers), it is not too surprising to find that local Hong Kong people do not have a strong tendency to regard this expression, with its many CHKE features, as normal.

Differently from the local Hong Kong people, non-local Hong Kong people residing in other communities might experience a bigger need to mark their Hong Kong identity. Even though CHKE is not an overt prestige marker, the need to be seen as a fellow Hongkonger overrides the risk of being regarded as speaking bad English.

Also, since these non-local Hong Kong people were living in countries where English is the native language (except for the one informant who lived in the Philippines, where English is a very prevalent language), it is less likely for them to be seen as not proficient in speaking English. This may explain why the non-locals have a more accepting attitude towards CHKE features compared to the local Hong Kong people.

However, it is noted that the above difference in opinion between the two groups does not mean that local Hong Kong people tend not to accept CHKE as normal. Instead, both groups of people tend to accept CHKE as normal, as we saw in questions 5 and 6 that, for both groups, the majority of the informants said that CHKE as a variety is normal and that end-of-sentence particles are normal as well. Since the difference in opinion comes from this specific CHKE expression, the statistical results suggest that, concerning the normality of this variety, their attitudes differ in degree. In other words, while both local and non-local Hong Kong people



tend to think that CHKE is normal, the non-locals think that the features are normal to a larger extent, and they seem to be more accepting towards the variety.

#### 6.2.9.4 Age

The age of the informants ranged from 18 to 55, with more than 40% of the informants being 25 years old or younger. As the majority of the people who use CHKE are younger, it would be interesting to see whether these likely users of this variety tend to have a more positive attitude towards it. I have put the informants into two groups, the *younger* (25 years old or less), which consists of 48 informants, and the *older* (above 25 years old), which has 63 informants, to see where these two populations regard CHKE differently.

| Question 5      | Younger | Older |
|-----------------|---------|-------|
| <b>Normal</b>   | 43      | 54    |
| <b>Abnormal</b> | 5       | 9     |

| Question 6      | Younger | Older |
|-----------------|---------|-------|
| <b>Normal</b>   | 44      | 57    |
| <b>Abnormal</b> | 4       | 6     |

| Question 7      | Younger | Older |
|-----------------|---------|-------|
| <b>Normal</b>   | 35      | 31    |
| <b>Abnormal</b> | 13      | 32    |

The chi-square test shows no significance in the distributions of questions 5 ( $p=0.54$ ) and 6 (0.82). However, a significant difference is found in question 7 ( $p=0.01$ ). The two groups do not show much difference in terms of their opinions towards the

conversation as a whole and end-of-sentence particles in particular. 89.5% of the younger informants and 85.7% of the older informants found the whole conversation normal; and the majority of both the younger and the older groups found end-of-sentence particles normal as well (91.6% and 90.4% respectively). The difference in opinion manifests itself over the particular line in the conversation.

While both groups had fewer people considering the expression normal, the younger group had significantly more people saying that it was normal (72.9%) compared to the older group, in which just under half said so (49.2%). For many of the older informants, while the conversation as a whole, and end-of-sentence particles as a category, were normal, the specific expression, which contained many CHKE features, violated their linguistic norms. These figures suggest that CHKE is more acceptable to the younger generation, matching their linguistic norms to a larger extent.

It is not surprising that the two groups have different norms for using CHKE. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the set of features in CMC have been generated by people communicating on the Internet and especially by young people who tend to use the Internet to network and socialise with each other. Since CHKE consists of CMC features generated by Hong Kong teenagers online, it is quite normal for these young people — the ones whose usage has given rise to CHKE — to be more accepting of this variety as a normal way of communication. Moreover, since CMC tends to be an identity marker of the younger population, and CHKE is one form of CMC, it makes sense that younger people view CHKE more favorably than the older generation.

Having considered various independent variables, it is found that gender and education level do not significantly affect the informants' norms. On the other hand, informants' geographical location and age do play a significant role in their norms for evaluating actual texts in CHKE. The geographical factor is potentially tied to the different needs felt by locals and non-locals to mark their Hong Kong identity linguistically, while the age factor reflects, on the one hand, the association of CHKE with a youth identity, and on the other, the related historical fact that CHKE has 'bubbled up' from the online usage of the younger generation.

In this chapter I analyse the results of the survey I conducted for this thesis and discuss how they are related to linguistic norms. Among the findings presented is that CHKE is used by Hong Kong people as a set of norms, in a sense to be explained below I shall describe briefly the nature of these norms, and point out the relationship between this set of norms and Hong Kong identity.

### 7.1 Linguistic norms of CHKE

Although none of the informants in the survey used the term CMC-Hong Kong English (or CHKE) to name the medium in which the conversation was conducted, their comments suggest their awareness that a distinct variety was used when these two participants were conversing. As we have seen (p.202), according to some informants, CHKE is not English, or at least is not what they consider to be “proper” English (p.212). Some even said it was actually Cantonese (p.203).

Despite differences in opinion amongst the informants as to whether CHKE is commonly used, the consensus appears to be that CHKE is not the same as everyday English. While the informants found that the distinct features belonging to CHKE do not meet the norms of everyday English, they recognised that these features belong to a system that is unique to Hong Kong people. Various terms were used to designate this bundle of features: street English, Chinglish, Chinese-English. Only one named it as Hong Kong English (p.204), the term used by academic researchers.

## 7.2 CHKE and various theories of norms

In this section, I explore the data in order to determine whether the use of the linguistic system of CHKE meets the definitions of norms proposed by various scholars, as presented in Chapter Five, and whether the informants' responses reflect any of these norms. Then, applying the framework which I developed in §5.6, I discuss whether it is the case that CMC use among Hong Kong people has generated new linguistic norms, or on the contrary, that existing forms of Hong Kong English have simply been transferred into the CMC medium.

### 7.2.1 Hart and Ullmann-Margalit

According to Hart (1961) and Ullmann-Margalit (1977), norms are prescribed guides for conduct or actions that are adhered to by members of society in general. Hart adds that these prescribed guides involve social obligations, and a person deviating from these guides "will probably meet with hostile reaction, and in the case of legal rules be punished by officials" (1961: 10).

Obviously, Hong Kong has no legal rules stating that one has to use CHKE on the internet, so not using CHKE would not lead to any punishment by authorities. However, since social norms can also be generated by members of society, it is possible for CHKE to be regarded as a social norm in the non-legal sense. To determine whether the use of this variety is a social norm, one needs to see, in the answers given by the respondents, if there are deontic statements implying that the use of CHKE is some kind of obligation.

In fact no informant in the survey said that using CHKE was an obligation. However, when asked if the use of CHKE was normal or abnormal, one informant did use the

deontic auxiliary “should”, implying that the use of CHKE is expected in internet communication.

It should be the common situation in Hong Kong nowadays.  
(S1- 28M).

The use of “should” might be taken to show that this informant believes that using CHKE is an obligation. However, while this response can be understood in a deontic sense, it can also be seen as an epistemic statement that CHKE is commonly used in Hong Kong at present. Indeed it might be more plausible to read this comment in an epistemic sense, because, when answering question 5 (which asked how normal it was for Hong Kong people to have such a conversation), the informant said the conversation was “fairly normal”. If he thought that using CHKE should be common in a deontic sense, he would have been more likely to say the conversation was “*perfectly* normal”, given that the conversation was conducted in CHKE and he thinks that this variety should be used, in a deontic sense. In general, the use of “normal” in a deontic sense is more likely to reflect an absolute judgement (such as “perfectly”), while the epistemic sense, being based on observation, is more open to qualification by degrees (such as “fairly”).

The answers of a few other informants imply more clearly that using Standard English in CMC is a norm in Ullmann-Margalit and Hart’s sense. When asked if there was anything in the conversation that looked particularly abnormal, one informant answered:

everything, it shouldn't be counted as an English conversation (S13- 24M).

This answer reflected the informant's viewpoint that the normal variety in this context should be Standard English. He thought everything in the exchange was abnormal because, in order to be "counted as an [E]nglish conversation", it could not include any element that originated from Chinese. This opinion was shared by another informant who gave the following response when asked why she thought the conversation was abnormal:

It is completely abnormal because those words used in the conversation are not English. "La" , "ga", "ar", "ngo", "dou" , etc...are English pronunciation of Cantonese which many people refer them as Chinglish. (S65- 25F).

Like S13, S65 would appear to consider a conversation normal only if it was conducted in an unmixed form. She recognised that the end-of-sentence particles were components of a variety which she named "Chinglish", but she said it was not normal to use this variety in this context of CMC. Her saying that "[i]t is completely abnormal because those words used in the conversation are not English" reflects her feeling that English should be the normal variety to use in this context. From her answer, one can see that this informant's norm was deontic in the sense that the interlocutors are obliged to use "pure" English in CMC if the main ideas are being conveyed in English, and that using CHKE, which is thought by the informant to have Chinese elements, in this context violated this norm, and was therefore completely abnormal.

There was another informant who thought that the use of CHKE was completely abnormal, and he provided the following explanation:

It's bad for our english language in practice...completely abnormality becomes completely normal now. (S56- 44F).

This answer reflects the fact that two norms were in operation when she was evaluating CHKE. On the one hand, she felt that CHKE was bad for “our english language”, which means that a norm in Ullmann-Margalit’s and Hart’s sense is in operation, and this norm was shared by S13 and S65. On the other hand, S56 said that this situation had become completely normal now (despite being completely abnormal in the past). This shows that the informant was evaluating the situation with some other norm than the one which led her to decry CHKE as “bad”. It may have been a norm of pattern that led her to such a conclusion (I shall discuss norms of pattern in §7.4), but this informant’s answer shows that one of the norms she used to evaluate the use of CHKE in this context was deontic in nature, and this norm led her to think that English should be used in the context of CMC. I shall discuss this point further in §7.2.4.

From the answers one can see that, among the respondents, using CHKE in CMC is not a norm in Ullmann-Margalit’s and Hart’s sense of involving a direct social sanction. No informant thought that one was obliged to use CHKE in CMC. In contrast, a few informants’ responses revealed that using Standard English in the CMC context was a norm for them, by these scholars’ definitions. In other words, they thought that one should use English when chatting online, and that using CHKE violated this norm.



### 7.2.2 Bartsch

According to Bartsch (1987), norms are statements that correctly point out people's regular behaviour in society. They are "the constellations in society reality that create, delimit, and secure the notions of correctness" (Bartsch 1987: 70). In other words, norms exist to accurately depict people's regular behaviour in society. By contrast with the definitions provided by the previous two scholars, norms in Bartsch's understanding do not necessarily have normative power. That is, violating a norm would not necessarily expose one to the risk of receiving negative reactions from other members of society. Putting this understanding of norms into the context of using CHKE, I want to discover whether any informant believed that using CHKE was regular behaviour in the online community of Hong Kong people.

When asked why she thought that it would be strange if native British people held a conversation using such forms of English, one informant answered that:

those sentences seem to happen only in Hong Kong people.  
(S14- 23F).

The informant is here expressing a norm based on an observation that it is regular behaviour for native Hong Kong people to use CHKE when communicating with each other. The nature of this norm, which is to correctly point out people's regular behaviour in society, is very similar to Bartsch's definition of norms.

Similarly, one can also see the same norm being applied when informants gave the following two answers when asked the same question:

I don't expect the native English people to know the slang that is specific to the HK teenagers. This kind of language doesn't match with their culture. (S52- 21F);

It should be the Cantonese Pingan used by Cantonese speaker such as Hong Kong people. (S1- 28M).

These comments reveal that the informants see CHKE as a variety commonly used by young people in Hong Kong, and that Hong Kong teenagers using CHKE is a norm in Bartsch's sense. Since the proposition that CHKE was used by native British people violated this norm, she found that it would be extremely strange to have two native English speakers from the UK chatting to each other in CHKE online.

Likewise, this norm can be seen in S1's answer, which says that this variety, with the use of Cantonese Pinyin, should be used by Cantonese speakers such as Hong Kong people, instead of native British people who do not speak Cantonese. It is noted that, although S1's answer here seems to contradict another comment of his mentioned in the previous section (§7.2.1, p.233), I argue that these two comments are actually coherent. This is because he was evaluating two different linguistic systems (HKE and CHKE) when answering the two questions respectively. This issue is further discussed in §7.3.4.

### 7.2.3 Bicchieri

Bicchieri (2006) proposes a framework in which she distinguishes three types of norms that are in similar to but different from each other. She says that all three types are similar in the sense that, unlike formal rules that are usually maintained by authorities, these three kinds of norms are not supported by formal sanction. Also, all three types of social norms are public and shared by members of society.

The three types of norms are social norms, descriptive norms, and conventions. All three types share two necessary conditions. These conditions are, first, the individuals' recognition of the existence of a norm, and, second, the individuals' belief that other people in society also conform to the norm. What makes social norms different from the two other kinds of norms is another condition, which says that the individual believes that other people also expect the individual to conform to the norm. Norms which satisfy the first two conditions but not the last condition are regarded by Bicchieri as descriptive norms.

Putting Bicchieri's framework into the context of using CHKE, I would like to see whether any response reveals the three conditions of social norms. If a response says that 1) the informant sees that using CHKE was normal, 2) he or she believes that other people use CHKE, and 3) he or she believes other people expect him or her to also use CHKE, then using CHKE is a social norm in Bicchieri's sense.

One can argue that the statistics in the survey show that the majority of the informants recognised CHKE as something normal. When answering question 5, most of the informants said that it was perfectly normal or fairly normal for Hong Kong people to have a conversation in CHKE, so one may deduce that they saw the use of CHKE as something normal. The results can be seen as a fulfilment of the first condition of the social norm of using CHKE.

Also, some informants said that people in Hong Kong generally use this variety:

    this is how people talk in HK (S35- 52M);

    HK people speak like that (S58- 27F);

This is the way we speak lah<sup>77</sup> in Hong Kong (S96- 55F);

It's normal for Cantonese people to chat like that online. I do that too sometimes. (S33- 28F).

The above informants agreed that Hong Kong people in general use CHKE in communication. S96 and S33 went further by saying that they would use this variety themselves. All four answers reveal that the informants saw CHKE was used by other members of society, which is the second condition of social norms in Bicchieri's framework.

However, this opinion was not shared by all informants. Two of them disagreed with the notion that the use of CHKE was a general phenomenon:

People from Hong Kong seldom use English-represented cantonese. Either type in Chinese or simply normal English (S92- 27M);

because some phrases sound Cantonese. If people really want to communicate those ideas, they would probably type Chinese instead. (S70- 28M).

Unlike people in the previous group of informants, S92 thought that people in Hong Kong rarely used Romanised Cantonese to communicate with one another. S70 also said that Romanised Cantonese would not be a preferred feature because people would type Chinese characters if they wanted to convey the message in Chinese or

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<sup>77</sup> lah: end-of-sentence particle, from 啦 (laa3).

Cantonese. Since these two informants believed that the use of this variety was not widespread in the community, they would not agree that using CHKE was a norm. Their answer shows that the informants did not have a consensus regarding whether CHKE was a widespread phenomenon in Hong Kong, hence it is difficult to conclude that the use of CHKE fulfils the second condition of Bicchieri's social norm.

Moreover, since no one in the survey mentioned that other members of society expected them to use CHKE in communication, one can conclude that, among the informants, using CHKE is not a social norm in Bicchieri's framework, because it does not fulfil the third condition. Looking at the respondents' answers, I would suggest that the use of this variety was a descriptive norm to some informants.

Although, as mentioned above, two informants disagreed with the proposition that CHKE was generally used in Hong Kong, a number of informants said that this variety was used by Hong Kong people in general. The difference is presumably that when CHKE is used — which may or may not be 'generally' — it is in general Hong Kong people who use it. To these informants, CHKE fulfilled the two necessary conditions of descriptive norms, which are the first two conditions of social norms (i.e., the individuals' recognition of the existence of a norm, and the individuals' belief that other people in society also conform to the norm).

The following comment shows that using CHKE was a convention to this informant:

To avoid miscommunication and to be more efficient to the communication, we usually type Chinese rather than using English alphabets to simulate the pronouciation of the Chinese words. (S75- 30M).

According to Bicchieri, conventions have the two conditions which descriptive norms possess. Differently from descriptive norms, however, conventions also involve Nash equilibrium, which is that people choose to behave in the same way because doing so would maximise their benefit. Hence, individuals would rationally choose to behave in the same way, and there is no need to include consideration of other people's expectations.

S75 said that CHKE was used to avoid miscommunication and foster more effective communication. This reason for using CHKE can be regarded as a case of Nash equilibrium. According to S75, if using CHKE can enhance effectiveness in communication, which means that individuals could increase the benefits to themselves by chatting to each other in CHKE, then people would tend to chat to each other in it to maximise their benefit. The informant believed that this is the reason that CHKE was prevalent among Hong Kong people, and one can say that this informant saw the use of CHKE as a convention. Using this variety is rationally chosen by individuals to maximise their own benefit.

Interestingly, another informant saw the use of CHKE in a completely opposite way:

because it's hard to express out the feeling by using this kind of language. (S110- 25M).

This informant found end-of-sentence particles perfectly normal, but the whole conversation and the expression in question 7 (which asked how normal the particular expression “ngo dou yau soo many leavers' ball photo mei upload ar” was) fairly abnormal. He reached this conclusion because he thought that using CHKE

would hamper one from expressing what one wants to say, thus making communication less efficient. This opinion is the complete opposite to that of the informant before him (S75). As with the notion of CHKE as a descriptive norm, there was no consensus among informants as to whether CHKE was a convention.

The results suggest that no informant regarded the use of CHKE as a social norm in Bicchieri's sense. This was mainly because none of the respondents believed that others expect the respondents themselves to use CHKE. In other words, there was no direct pressure from other people to push the respondent to communicate in this variety. Lacking the third condition that defines a social norm, which says that individuals have to believe that other members of that society expect individuals to conform to the norm, the use of CHKE was not a social norm in the eyes of the informants.

However, some informants treated the use of CHKE as a descriptive norm. All of these informants believed that communicating in CHKE was normal, and they believed other members of society also used CHKE in communication. These beliefs fulfil the two conditions of what Bicchieri regards as descriptive norms. A few informants saw CHKE as a convention because, on top of these two conditions, they saw the use of this variety as a way to increase their benefit, which was to communicate more effectively and efficiently. So they rationally used CHKE as a way to maximise their benefit, making the use of CHKE a convention.

#### 7.2.4 Horne

Horne (2001) focuses her discussions on people who obey or disobey norms, and examines various scholars' approaches to norms. She says that there are three main

approaches to understanding norms: to focus on the actions of ego; to focus on ego's reactions to actions of alter; and to focus on negotiation between ego and alter.

Although these approaches are quite different, they all say that norms involve a sense of normativity. Having analysed the various approaches, Horne argues that the emergence of norms should involve three factors: individuals' interests in their own behaviour; others' interests; and negotiations between self and others.

A number of responses suggest that certain informants were reflecting on their own behaviour. For instance:

coz i've been using those as well (S14- 23F);

This is the way we speak lah in Hong Kong (S96- 55F);

it sounds normal to me, ng hai mei<sup>78</sup>? (S9- 22M);

because i dont use those (S13- 24M);

it is because I am not used to use such kind of language for commmunicating with my friends. (S23- 31F);

i don't speak like [the expression quoted in question] 7 (S16- 21M).

Some informants said that they used CHKE, others that they did not, while still others said that they would use CHKE but not exactly in the way that the

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<sup>78</sup> ng hai mei: Romanised Cantonese, from 唔係咩 (ng4 hai6 me1), meaning "is it not?".



interlocutors in the conversation had. However, they all reflected on their own behaviour in the context of CMC when evaluating whether CHKE was normal. S14, S96, and S9 said that they themselves used CHKE on CMC. S96 and S9 made their point clear by demonstrating their use of end-of-sentence particles and Romanised Cantonese in their comments. S13, S23, and S16 said that they did not use CHKE themselves. Their answers also show that they reflected on their own behaviour.

However, even those who said that they did not use CHKE still found certain aspects of CHKE normal. While S13 said that end-of-sentence particles and the expression quoted in question 7 sounded “fairly abnormal”, he found the CHKE conversation as a whole “perfectly normal”. S23 found the whole conversation and the expression in question 7 “fairly abnormal”, but the end-of-sentence particles “fairly normal”. By contrast with the other two informants, S16 thought that the whole conversation and end-of-sentence particles were “fairly normal”, but found the expression “fairly abnormal”. Their answers seem to imply that, when assessing whether using CHKE was a norm, these three informants took account not only of their own linguistic behaviour, but also other considerations. What they were considering might be, as Horne proposes, others’ behaviour.

Although it is unclear from these data alone whether S13 and S16 actually considered other’s behaviour, another comment made by S23 shows her taking account of other’s behaviour when answering the questions. When asked whether the conversation would have been strange if the conversation had been between two native British people, she answered:

it is because it is the communicating style for the youth for HK people, absolutely, cannot believe such conversation from the

native British people, as I have no idea for some meanings of the above conversation as well. (S23- 31F).

When explaining why she thought it would be strange for British people to chat this way, S23 linked this way of communication to Hong Kong ‘youth’, a group to which she, at age 31, no longer belongs. This shows that when contemplating the normality of CHKE, she reflected not only on her own actions, but also on others’ behaviour. This observation is in line with Horne’s framework for the evaluation of norms.

Other cases in which informants showed that they considered others’ behaviour can be found in the comments quoted in §7.2.2 (p.237), where they were cited to show that the informants saw using CHKE as a descriptive norm. For instance:

    this is how people talk in HK (S35- 52M).

Horne’s point about people considering others’ behaviour ties in with one of Biccheri’s criteria of descriptive norms, which says that individuals believe other people conform to the norm. As seen in §7.2.2, several informants recognised that people in Hong Kong use CHKE when chatting to each other online. Putting these comments into Horne’s framework, one can say that the respondents were aware of other people’s actions and considered them when deciding whether using CHKE was a norm. As in the discussion in §7.2.2, when considering the actions of other members in society, some informants thought that Hong Kong people in general used CHKE, while others thought that it was not used by the general public. Nonetheless, when considering what constituted a norm, they all incorporated others’ behaviour

into their judgements. One informant went further by comparing different groups of speakers:

It's normal for Cantonese speakers but abnormal for native English speakers. (S42- 23F).

Unlike the informants mentioned above, this informant distinguished two groups of online chatters (i.e., Cantonese speakers and native English speakers), and evaluated the use of CHKE separately. Not only did she consider others' behaviour, she also considered it in different contexts, distinguished from one other by the identity of the speakers.

One can also see that the third factor in Horne's framework, which is negotiations between self and others, was considered by some of the informants:

It's normal for Cantonese people to chat like that online. I do that too sometimes (S33- 28F);

I might be wrong, but I believe it is becoming more commonplace for HK people to converse that way (the sample conversation) via instant chat tools. However, it's abnormal to me when you are typing in English (based on the fact that letters are used), but conveying the message in Chinese (the sentence structure and vocabulary is that of a Chinese verbal conversation). (S45- 31F);

Now a days it is very normal conversation for HK people. if the other party is Chinese who speaks the same languages as I do, with those 'la', 'ga', 'le', 'gum' make the conversation closer. It has the feeling that we are 'talking' face to face. However, i still prefer to use proper english at msn! (S59- 26F).

All three informants said that it was common or normal for people to use CHKE, but they had different opinions concerning whether they themselves thought using CHKE was normal or whether they would use it themselves. Despite the different viewpoints, they all demonstrated that they had considered self and others when contemplating how normal CHKE was. From their comments, one can see that they drew their conclusions from looking not only at their own actions, but also at those of others. In other words, these informants formed a viewpoint by negotiating between the opinions they had of their own behaviour and that of others. These responses embody the third factor of Horne's norm framework, according to which negotiation between the two kinds of actions takes place when one evaluates the normality of a proposition.

Putting Horne's proposal into the context of using CHKE, one can see that while some informants considered their own actions in deciding whether using CHKE was a norm, others focused on the others' actions. One can also see that some looked at both, and drew their conclusions by negotiating between the two.

#### 7.2.5 Kahneman & Miller

Unlike conventional thinking, which holds that norms are generated from past experiences, Kahneman & Miller (1986) argue that norms are constructed after, instead of before, a relevant event arises. They say that "events are sometimes compared to counterfactual alternatives that are constructed *ad hoc* rather than retrieved from past experience" (1986: 136). In other words, instead of having a norm in their mind and applying it when a relevant event arises, people compute a norm which is relevant after they have experienced the event.

One can see that many informants understood that CHKE was normally used by Hong Kong people, and they found the hypothetical situation described in question 9 strange because it violated the norm that CHKE was used by Hong Kong people. From looking at the results of the survey, it is impossible to tell whether the informants had formed the norm of using CHKE before or after they saw the question, as it may not have been something they had ever directly thought about before. Still, some informants showed that they did consider alternative scenarios when they were contemplating whether it was normal to have two native British people using CHKE:

They do not need to talk like that unless they are in show business. (S35- 52M);

i dont know...i guess u dont expect them to speak so chinese in such a cooloquial way, unless they have spoken the language for most of their life. (S104- 19F);

their frds teach them?

it happens, this world is not normal

just like there are gay ppl (S13- 24M).

These three informants demonstrated that they had considered certain alternative scenarios which could render the proposition stated in Question 9 normal. It is impossible to confirm whether these scenarios were drawn from the informants' past experiences or, as Khaneman and Miller postulated, were alternatives constructed after they saw the question; however, one can see that these scenarios were rather *ad*

*hoc*, which suggests that the scenarios were constructed at the time of the question by the informants, drawing on related past experience. According to S13, because the world is not normal, it is possible that the interlocutors, who were thought to be British, had their friends teach them CHKE. All three informants appeared to understand that the possibility of native British people using CHKE to communicate with each other was very low, and they said that this proposition was extremely strange. Nonetheless they all managed to come up with scenarios in which this could happen. These answers could serve as evidence to support Kahneman & Miller's framework, which says that norms are "constructed on the fly in a backward process that is guided by the characteristics of the evoking stimulus" (1986: 150).

Nevertheless, one should note that, although there is evidence in support of Kahneman & Miller's theory, it is indirect evidence. If these informants generated *ad hoc* counterfactual scenarios after they had learned about the proposition, this is in line with Kahneman & Miller's proposal that, when people perceive a proposition that is subject to evaluation, they construct similar counterfactual scenarios for comparison so that a norm can be generated and be used to check against the proposition in question. However, their answers do not allow us to determine whether their alternative scenarios (i.e., Hong Kong people using CHKE) were already in their mind before they read Question 9, or were "constructed on the fly in a backward process" (Kahneman & Miller 1989: 150), and if the latter, to what extent actual experience may have informed the construction.

Even if a norm can be computed after the proposition in question is perceived, this norm is not created out of nothing. Instead, as Kahneman & Miller say, there are

resources on which a person draws to compute such a norm. These resources can be a person's past experiences and perceptions of incidents that she has seen. They can even be other norms that this person came up with previously. This implies that the construction of new norms can be bootstrapped onto norms that already exist. This means, further, that one's norms do not necessarily exist independently, but can influence one another.

### 7.3 The three kinds of linguistic norms

Having looked at whether, and in which ways, the survey data can be explained by the frameworks of various scholars presented in Chapter Five, I shall examine to what extent the results of the survey support my theory of linguistic norms. In Chapter Five, I propose a framework of three kinds of linguistic norms that act as references for us to communicate with each other. To examine the validity of my framework, I have to check whether it can satisfactorily explain the data from the survey. Hence, in what follows, I recap these three kinds of norms briefly, apply the framework to explain the results, and see how the notion of CHKE can or cannot be accounted for by these three kinds of norms.

#### 7.3.1 Formal norms

This type of linguistic norm tells speakers and hearers whether an utterance can be regarded as part of a language. These norms regulate the well-formedness of an utterance. When a speaker or hearer wants to evaluate whether a linguistic expression is in a language or a dialect, they use formal norms. These norms often appear as statements like "X is English", "Y can be Catalan", and "Z should be regarded as Xhosa", in which X, Y, and Z are linguistic expressions.

One norm of this type appears clearly in the survey results: that *CHKE is not actually English, but consists of Chinese, in particular Cantonese, elements*:

Because that's not English sentence structure. It's only trying to use Chinese words' meaning to communicate, but present them in terms of English letters (S91- 25F);

There is a lot of Cantonese used in this conversation (S30-27M).

Bolton (2002: 49) has shown how Hong Kong English on the Internet has features derived from Cantonese. Noticing the Cantonese elements in the conversation, the informants recognised that CHKE has features that appear to be close to the Cantonese norm. Although they had different views about whether CHKE could be a variety of English, Cantonese, or a product of a mixture of these two, they saw this variety as a bundle of features, at least some of which consist of Cantonese elements.

This norm, in the framework presented in Chapter Five, could be categorised as a formal norm, since it concerns which linguistic features are regarded as CHKE features and which are not. Using this norm, people judge whether a certain bundle of features can be seen as CHKE. It also says which formal features (in this case, Cantonese elements), are part of the variety (i.e., CHKE).

Another (probably more basic) formal norm of CHKE can also be seen, and it is that *CHKE is an English-based variety*, since it was generated by people typing English (possibly Hong Kong English) on an English keyboard. Even though some informants said it was not English, what they did was to compare HKE to Standard



English, instead of to French or German. This very point shows that these informants recognised that the variety was very close to English, even if they would not acknowledge it as a kind of English.

One must, however, remember that these are not the only formal norms relating to this variety. There are also other norms, maybe not as widely shared by the informants or other Hong Kong people, that form a repertoire of formal norms used by each individual to judge whether a certain linguistic expression or set of expressions can be regarded as CHKE. Although, as mentioned in Chapter Five, for any variety, many of its norms are shared by all its users, some norms are specific to one group but not to another, and some specific to one person but not to another. For instance, some speakers of English see a Scots expression, such as “shoogle”, as being a part of English, while others do not. Judgements about CHKE take place in a similar context. Grammar books and dictionaries serve as means to establish or stabilise norms, but CHKE has no such “authorities” to establish or stabilise it, and thus it is no surprise to see that the formal norms of CHKE differ amongst different users of CHKE.

### 7.3.2 Contextual norms

Contextual norms are norms that regulate appropriate linguistic behaviour in different contexts. Speakers and hearers use this kind of norm to establish whether an expression is appropriate in the context in which it appears. Contextual norms can appear as statements such as, “It’s good to use W in the classroom”, “I’d use X in this circumstance”, and, “If I’m writing, I’ll use Y instead of Z”.

The way in which the survey was conducted meant that the material was given to the informants in a single context, namely a written form (specifically CMC, though they were not explicitly told this). This may inevitably have predisposed them to associate CHKE with the written context, and has meant as well that the possibility of eliciting contextual norms from the informants was limited. In other words, the format of the survey made it clear that a contextual norm of CHKE was in operation, namely that CHKE was a written variety. However, since informants were not told in which circumstance and through which medium the conversation was held, the informants still needed to work out the contextual norms concerning the situation in which, and the medium through which, the conversation took place.

Some informants suggested the context of situation in which this variety is used by commenting on CHKE:

msn English (S81 -26F);

It looks like ICQ/MSN language that is common among the youth community. (S30 -27M);

only new generation live in Hk will understand and hk msn user (S35 -52M);

combining english and cantonese together to form a new language online (S50 -27F).

While S81, S30, and S35 related the language use in the exchange to online chatting programmes like MSN or ICQ, S50 said that it was “a new language online”.

Observing their comments allows one to see a contextual norm, which is that *CHKE is used online*. Without being informed that the exchange was conducted on MSN Messenger on the internet, the informants could identify it as an online exchange just by reading the conversation. It shows the strong link between CHKE and the online context, and it also demonstrates how strongly CHKE is tied to its contextual norms.

### 7.3.3 Identity norms

Identity norms are used by hearers or readers to identify the speaker or writer of a certain expression, in terms of all the personal characteristics that can be indexed in even the most fine-grained linguistic variables. The conclusions drawn can emerge in statements such as, “Only bad students would say X”, “Upper-class people usually speak Y”, and “Old women would never say Z”.

Although, in the survey, a few informants responding to question 4 said that the conversation was abnormal, the informants’ answers to question 9 clearly show that the majority of the informants saw a norm being violated. To these informants, it was extremely strange to have British native people communicating with each other in this variety. According to the answers to question 10, the norm that was violated said that *CHKE is used by Hong Kong people*.

Putting this norm in the framework I propose in Chapter Five, this norm is classified as an identity norm, which means that it is one that establishes a co-relation between speaker identity and linguistic expression. It is used to judge how normal the use of such an expression is based on the identity of the person who uses it. If a Hong Kong person uses CHKE expressions, then this norm is not violated; but if a British person uses them, then it is violated. Conversely, if this linguistic expression is heard or read

by a person who has this norm, then he or she will identify the person using expression as being from Hong Kong.

A comment given by S59 (as seen on p.246) spells out how CHKE features have an identity marking function, which is the basis on which Hong Kong people see CHKE as having such an identity norm. She says that, if both interlocutors are Chinese (it is believed that she means Hong Kong Chinese here as she says CHKE is “very normal conversation for H[ong] K[ong] people”), then the use of end-of-sentence particles can “make the conversation closer” because it gives interlocutors the feeling that they are speaking to each other face to face. To this informant, CHKE is normal because it functions as an indication of bonding, making Hong Kong people (like herself) who use it to communicate with each other socially closer. Although she herself would still prefer proper English, the fact that she recognises that CHKE is normal because of its identity marking function is clear.

Another identity norm can be seen from reading the following comments:

Typical Hong Kong Local English used by the youngsters (S26-51F);

H[a]v[e] Cantonese pin-ying in them, typical HK style English (S86 -24F).

These two informants thought not only that the variety is used by Hong Kong people, but, more specifically, that it is used by local Hong Kong young people. Their belief seems to be backed by a norm, namely that *CHKE is used by Hong Kong teenagers*. This norm, like the previous one, ties a particular identity to the variety, establishing

a co-relation between Hong Kong teenagers and CHKE. Therefore, when these two informants saw the CHKE conversation they said it was typical for Hong Kong teenagers.

This is in line with the survey results found in Chapter Six. The results suggest that the age of the interlocutors is a factor that affects people's opinions on how normal CHKE is. Younger people in Hong Kong tend to be more accepting of CHKE than are older Hong Kong people. Since norms are established through people's observation of actions that happen repeatedly, both the greater acceptability of CHKE by younger people and the identity norm that links the younger population to this variety can be traced to trends in usage.

#### 7.3.4 On abnormality – recognising two sets of norms

Despite the general recognition of CHKE and its norms, some informants seemed to feel that CHKE was abnormal. For instance, when question 4 asked whether there was any abnormality in the conversation, S64 commented:

THE WHOLE CONVERSATION IS ABNORMAL (S64-28F).

However, when question 5 asked whether it was normal for Hong Kong people to have such a conversation, and question 6 whether it was normal to use end-of-sentence particles like “lor”, “ga”, and “ar”, the same informant S64 answered “fairly normal” to both questions. One might find her comments and answers contradictory. However, if one looks at her comments with regard to question 10, which asks why it

would be strange to have British people having this conversation, one can find consistency in her opinion:

THIS IS HONG KONG TEENAGER ENGLISH (S64- 28F).

If it were fairly normal for Hong Kong people to have such a conversation and to use end-of-sentence particles, then it would be contradictory for her to say the whole conversation was abnormal. I believe that, when she described CHKE as abnormal, she was checking its features against the norms of English. Since this bundle of features did not meet her norms of English, she considered the whole conversation as abnormal. However, if it was seen as “Hong Kong teenager English”, and if the exchanges were made by Hong Kong people, then the conversation would be fairly normal by *their* norms, and end-of-sentences particles would not be abnormal either.

Similarly, S44 commented about question 4 that:

Seems all are abnormal. "Cantonese- English" ?! Especially "hai, ngo, jor, gum, ng, dat, ging, lei, dun, nei" are abnormal. (S44- 31F).

Nonetheless, like S64, he found the whole conversation and end-of-sentence particles fairly normal. This apparent contradiction is explained in his comments on Question 8 below:

In the conversation, they are not using normal English. If they are just using a "langue" to communicate, it's okay. However, if they are using English, there is no grammar at all. In addition, they use many words that is not English, just the

sounds like Cantonese words with no actual meaning. (S44-31F).

In this comment, S44 revealed that he was using two sets of norms to judge the conversation. If the norms of Standard English are used to judge it, then it has no grammar, and many of its features are not even English. In other words, the features did not meet his formal norms of English. However, if the bundle of features was not thought of as English, but as a variety (he used the term “*langue*”) in its own right, then it would be fine. These features met his norms of this specific variety. So it was fairly normal to have Hong Kong people conducting this conversation, as well as using end-of-sentence particles in it.

In both cases, the informants found the whole conversation abnormal when they were using their norms of English to judge the features. When they saw it as a variety which was not English (“Hong Kong teenager English” or “a *langue*”), then it would be normal, their norms for these varieties were met. Even though some of the informants found the conversation abnormal as English, they recognised that CHKE should not only be judged using the norms of Standard English, but that it is a variety which contains its own set of norms, regardless of whether they named this variety “Hong Kong teenager English” or simply a “*langue*”.

#### 7.4 Norms of pattern and norms of obligation

As discussed in Chapter Five, norms are divided into two main categories, which I have named *norms of pattern* and *norms of obligation*. Again, it is possible for a norm to be both simultaneously, sometimes with the pattern character more dominant than the obligatory character, and sometimes the reverse. In this section I ask

whether the norms examined above are norms of pattern or norms of obligation, weighing whether one feature is more dominant than the other by looking at the comments made by the informants.

One interesting comment about the patterns and obligations of CHKE norms was:

I might be wrong, but I believe it is becoming more commonplace for HK people to converse that way (the sample conversation) via instant chat tools. However, it's abnormal to me when you are typing in English (based on the fact that letters are used), but conveying the message in Chinese (the sentence structure and vocabulary is that of a Chinese verbal conversation). (S45- 31F).

This informant found it abnormal to use the Roman alphabet to write what is supposed to be Chinese and suggested that CHKE features represented a literal translation of words from Chinese to English. However, she also believed that the phenomenon of using CHKE in Hong Kong is becoming more common. What she wrote revealed that two norms were in play when she was evaluating the normality of CHKE. First, she found that CHKE is common, and showed she was contemplating the variety's ubiquity and whether its patterns of occurrence would make it normal. However, she still considered CHKE as abnormal because it did not meet the norms of the English language as taught to her, which tend to be *norms of obligation*, since she seemed to be judging by norms of Standard English. This is similar to the comment below, in which the "abnormality" appears to refer to CHKE being abnormal English, and "normal" refers to the variety being normal CHKE:

those abnormal looks normal to me indeed.. (S63- 25M).



Other comments suggest that the norms tend to be norms of pattern:

It should be the common situation in Hong Kong nowadays.  
(S1 -28M);

It looks like ICQ/MSN language that is common among the youth community. (S30 -27M).

Identifying the conversation as “ICQ/MSN language”, S30 said that this variety was common among young people. Similarly, S1 mentioned that the situation (of using this kind of language) is common. The adjective *common* strongly suggests that, in the eyes of the informants, the use of CHKE happens frequently and is therefore normal in terms of a norm of pattern.

On the other hand, there seems to be no evidence suggesting that norms of CHKE are norms of obligation. A few comments indicate that norms of Standard English informed decisions about whether CHKE is normal, in the sense of norms of obligation.

the whole thing [i.e. the conversation] is just not right (S94-20M);

if english is the only language i know, i wouldn't be able to understand more than 30% of the conversation. This conversation is consist of a mixture english words and chinese pronunciations not to mention that everything is grammatically incorrect. (S10- 20F);

It's English adulterated with local Cantonese words (S96- 55F).

All three comments indicated that norms of obligation were in use. S94 objected to the entire conversation. S10 said everything in the conversation was grammatically incorrect. S96 even used the value-laden word “adulterated” when describing the Cantonese elements. Studying these comments, one can see that the informants were using norms of obligation, as what they said involved a sense of correctness, and some value judgments as well (especially S96’s comment). However, these norms of obligation were not norms of CHKE; instead, they were norms of Standard English. Informants who found CHKE normal could all relate to its common usage, but none of them linked it to norms of obligation or possible sanctions if they did not use CHKE.

As mentioned in Chapter Five, norms of obligation often incorporate concepts of language standards. Language standards are usually imposed and maintained by authorities such as education departments through schools and other means, including grammar books and dictionaries. Since CHKE is not a standardised variety, it is unsurprising to find no norms of obligation. Moreover, as CHKE is closely related to English, and as it is often regarded as a kind of English, people would tend to use the English language’s norms of obligation, instead of ones specific to CHKE, to evaluate the normality of CHKE.

One must however notice that linguistic norms of obligation do not stem solely from a standard language. This is because norms of obligation can be generated by other means. For example, if a person finds that she needs to show other Hong Kong people her identity as a Hong Kong person online, and that the identity-marking function of CHKE is an effective way to indicate that identity, she might feel obliged

to use CHKE to chat to her fellow Hong Kongers, or she might be sanctioned by having others treat her as an outsider. In this scenario, obligation norms of CHKE would be generated, and users of CHKE might feel that CHKE is normal not only because other people use it, but because they feel that they should use it.

The hypothetical scenario above is not at all impossible. It might be harder for local Hong Kong people to feel the obligation, because the fact that they are living in Hong Kong has already given them enough “Hongkongness”. However, Hong Kong people overseas, especially students studying in western countries, might sometimes feel the need to use CHKE to show their Hong Kong friends that they are still Hong Kongers and that they have not become westernised.

### 7.5 Linguistic norms and identity

Looking at the survey results, I find that identity and linguistic norms are closely related. My study has shown for example that Hong Kong people tend to associate CHKE with Hong Kong teenagers. In the linguistic norm framework, we would say that an identity norm is in these individuals’ minds linking this variety to the Hong Kong teenager identity. Not only does the interaction between language and identity affect the generation of linguistic norms, the norms also play a role in helping a person interpret a speaker or writer’s identity. Below I discuss how the concept of language and identity is intertwined with the other two kinds of linguistic norms.

Contextual norms are also connected to identity, because a listener’s or reader’s judgment of the appropriateness of a linguistic expression in a certain context is one of the factors that help the listener or reader to determine the identity of the person who uses that expression. In other words, if an individual decides that a certain

utterance is appropriate (or inappropriate) using her sets of contextual norms, this judgment could affect how this individual will determine the identity of the speaker of that utterance. For example, if in the conversation excerpt for the survey, participants A and B had been chatting in CHKE before this excerpt took place, and if the conversation had gone as follows,

A: back la

B: It is rather quick, isn't it?,

then I would predict that, since the line which B typed did not meet A's contextual norm for online chats (which means that, to A, what B wrote was inappropriate in this context of situation), A would wonder whether the line was actually typed by B. This was because, not only were CHKE features not seen in the line, the line also used features (e.g., a question tag) that are commonly seen in Standard English. The context of situation expected by A, judging by her past experience and the immediate history of this chat, was that it was a casual online conversation with a good friend from Hong Kong. This line contained English features that were not seen in CHKE (such as this particular question tag), as well as features that were not in line with other parts of the conversation (such as the capital letter at the beginning of the line). Seeing these features, which were not appropriate to the context of situation, A's norms of context were violated. This could lead A to doubt whether the lines were actually written by B. This hypothetical situation illustrates how one's contextual norms could affect one's judgment of other people's identity.

It is possible that, even though A recognised the features that did not belong to CHKE, she might not necessarily have thought that it was not B who wrote the line.

A could just think B was joking with her. So, one might think that judging a linguistic expression's appropriateness to the context (i.e., using context norms) might not necessarily affect a person's perception of the speaker or writer's identity.

However, the concept of identity here does not only include age, gender, or nationality, but also "more personal" components such as friendliness, honesty, and wittiness. These qualities are what an individual would observe when she interacts with someone, and they contribute to the recognition of the identity of the person she thinks she is interacting with. Using the same example, when A notices this line of conversation, A might think that B was the same friend she was chatting to (i.e., given the identity information A had about B, such as age, nationality, gender, and B's being her friend) but certain aspects of B's identity in A's mind might be altered due to this line. For instance, A might decide that B is a sarcastic person, or has a strange sense of humour. The change might be very small, but it is a change that is affected by A's judgment, using contextual norms, of appropriateness in that situation.

Finally, identity is also related to formal norms, because whether one thinks a set of features is a language or a variety partly depends on whether the features are linked to a population that has a shared identity in some aspects. This shared identity can comprise different components. It can be a more generic identity such as age, gender, religion, nationality, or a more specific one such as coming from the same town, being educated in the same school or even going to the same online forum. The link between a set of features and a population is usually established when the population uses the features frequently and consistently. The more frequently and consistently

they use a certain set of linguistic features, the easier it is to see the set of features as a variety. In other words, formal norms arise in people's minds partly because a set of features is linked to the group of people due to their frequent and consistent usage.

A good example is CHKE, whose formal norms have earned recognition because a group of people who have similar identities (i.e., Hong Kong teenagers) have been using CHKE features frequently and consistently. In the survey, these informants did not use the term CHKE to name the set of features, but some of them found another term for it (i.e., "Hong Kong Teenager English"). If these informants did not think that many people consistently used these features, they would be unlikely to give this set of features a name. This suggests that they had in their minds some formal norms of CHKE (or whatever they name it).

From this discussion, one can see that all three kinds of linguistic norms are intertwined with the concept of identity. While contextual norms are one of the factors that affect a person's construction of other people's identities, the interactions between linguistic features and identities could affect the construction of formal norms. Identity norms establish co-relations between linguistic features and identities in one's mind. These co-relations are what scholars of language and identity look at. Since the framework of linguistic norms is an attempt to understand individuals' ways of connecting linguistic expressions to identity, the concepts of linguistic norms might also help the understanding of the interactions between language and identity at a relatively macro, societal level.

## 7.6 CHKE as a variety – a linguistic norm perspective

The discussion above has shown that many informants who participated in the survey were convinced that the use of CHKE was a perfectly normal and acceptable tool for communication, despite their disagreements over the degree of the variety's normality. While some informants thought that the use of CHKE was completely normal in all aspects, a few thought that although certain aspects of this variety were completely abnormal, they regarded CHKE in general as fairly normal. Conversely, while some informants found that CHKE was simply bad English, or not proper English, a few of them did not view it quite so negatively, and linked CHKE to people from a specific social group. Even though these informants had many different opinions on the conversation, as well as the features found in the conversation, the vast majority recognised that CHKE was immensely different from other forms of English.

Although only a few informants used a term to name CHKE, those informants who belonged to the specific social group where CHKE is used predominantly, noticed its specific linguistic features and context, and many informants were able to link these features not only to its context, but also to the identity of the people who used it. This suggests that they recognised that CHKE features were not just random features that appeared solely in the conversation, but that CHKE was a legitimate form of communication shared by people who came from a similar social background. The survey results reinforce the position that CHKE is a variety, which its users recognise as having specific linguistic features that are linked to a specific context and group of speakers. As shown in the examination of various linguists' definitions of variety in Chapter Four, a general consensus among researchers is that a variety is understood

as a set of features that is linked to certain factors. Despite their differences in opinion concerning the scope a variety includes (e.g. while Meyerhoff (2006) says the factors include language and dialect, Trudgill (2003) believes they also include sociolect, register, and even accent), they agree that a variety links a set of linguistic features to gender, class, and other social identity factors. Since it has been shown that Hong Kong people link CHKE to Hong Kong identity (Hong Kong young people in particular), it is safe to claim that CHKE is indeed a linguistic variety according to its users.





### 8.1 Summary

The essential purpose of this thesis has been to find out whether the language use of Hong Kong people in CMC is systematically different from other varieties. This has entailed enquiry into fundamental questions of what it takes to make a distinct ‘variety’ (as opposed to a register, style, etc.), and that in turn has required investigation of the nature of the linguistic norms that define a ‘systematically different’ form of language. I have tried, in a dialectical way, to use the results of my enquiries into CMC by Hong Kong people to inform my answers to the theoretical questions on which, in turn, depend our assessment of the particular form of language used in those communications. In the process, I believe I have made several contributions to the field of linguistics, and these are highlighted in the subsections which follow

#### 8.1.1 The linguistic features of Hong Kong English in computer-mediated communication

I began the study by looking at the sociolinguistics of Hong Kong, with an emphasis on the English language, which was the colonial language before the change of sovereignty in 1997 and has continued to play an important role in the community. Sociolinguistic analyses of Hong Kong English (HKE) have maintained that it has an identity marking function for its users. Against this view, I have presented evidence that this is not the case for HKE generally, but does apply to its use in computer-mediated communication (CMC). To explore this issue further, I looked at the nature of communication on the internet in Chapter Three, where five different internet-using situations are examined, with the focus on the analysis of synchronous

chatgroups, the situation in which specific online features of HKE are abundant. In the English used by Hong Kong people in CMC, there are specific features that are not seen in the English used by Hong Kong people in other contexts. I have presented data taken from online conversations between two Hong Kong people, and have pointed out the specific features that are not seen in HKE spoken or written elsewhere. The analysis shows that these features of Hong Kong English in Computer-mediated communication (CHKE) are specific to online situations, which means that **CHKE is linguistically different from HKE in offline contexts.**

### 8.1.2 The linguistic differences between CHKE and HKE

Having observed the data, I argue that **CHKE is formally different from HKE.** I have categorised the linguistic features of CHKE into three main general features. They are, 1) Romanised Cantonese, 2) literal translation of Cantonese to English, and 3) end-of-sentence particles in Romanised form. Although there are only three kinds of features that mark CHKE and HKE apart linguistically, the fact that these features appear very frequently makes each kind of feature stand out as prominent.

### 8.1.3 The language attitudes of the users of CHKE

In addition to looking at the linguistic distinctiveness of CHKE, I have explored **the attitudes toward CHKE possessed by its users.** I conducted a survey in which 111 informants, who were all Hong Kong people, were asked to judge the normality of and express their opinions on an actual online exchange conducted in a synchronous chatgroup by two Hong Kong teenagers. The online exchange in the survey had numerous CHKE features, and the informants would have to decide whether the online conversation, conducted in CHKE, was normal or not. Also, they were asked

to evaluate the normality if this CHKE conversation were conducted by two native British people, which is not the usual context in which CHKE occurs.

It was found that, even though most of the informants believed that CHKE is completely different or quite different from other forms of English, they did not think that CHKE is abnormal. Rather, many informants thought that CHKE is either perfectly or fairly normal. 87% of the informants said that it is normal for Hong Kong people to use CHKE and 91% said that it is normal for them to use end-of-sentence particles. When asked whether it is normal for sentences filled with CHKE features (including literal translation of Cantonese to English, and Romanised Cantonese) to be used by Hong Kong people, 59% of the informants said that it was.

When presented with a specific expression which was filled with CHKE features and asked whether it was normal, non-local informants (i.e. Hong Kong people who were not living in Hong Kong) tended to think that it was, while their local counterparts did not. Also, from their answers to the same question, it was found that younger informants (i.e. 25 years old or younger) tended to be more accepting of CHKE features than older informants. These findings show that **CHKE is linked not only to Hong Kong identity, but also to generational identity.**

#### 8.1.4 The functional differences between CHKE and HKE

Not only are CHKE and HKE formally different, CHKE is also not the same as HKE functionally. **CHKE has an identity marking function that is recognised by the users themselves.** This is different from HKE, which is not seen by Hong Kong people as having such a function. Looking at the survey results, one can see that the vast majority of the informants found that it would be quite strange or extremely

strange to have two native British people communicating in CHKE. More significantly, many of their responses indicated an awareness that the use of CHKE creates an in-group bond among Hong Kong people engaging in CMC. Even those who had a negative attitude toward CHKE recognised that it is the form of English normally used in CMC by Hong Kong people. This shows that these informants had identity norms which related CHKE features to Hong Kong people.

### 8.1.5 Reanalysing the concept of variety

In order to find out whether CHKE should be regarded as a variety, as opposed to a register or a style or falling into any other category, I have examined the various definitions of terms which linguists use to denote a set of linguistic features. In Chapter Four, terms like language, dialect, sociolect, register and style are studied and discussed. Looking at their definitions, which overlap significantly, one can see that the set of features that constitutes CHKE can be discussed using any of these terms; the choice depends in part on the perspective taken in the particular analytical tradition being followed. Since CHKE is formally and functionally different from HKE, I maintain that **CHKE unambiguously fulfils the criteria for a 'variety'**, a term used by linguists as a 'neutral' designation for any systematically distinct form of language. This is similar to the case of language use in CMC among people in Mainland China. Gao (2006) shows in his study that the Chinese language which Mainland Chinese people use on CMC bear traces of the impact of English. He claims that CMC has given rise to a new variety of Chinese, and that this new variety may "have implications for changes in the standard variety of the Chinese language" (ibid.: 307).

### 8.1.6 Studying the notions of norms, social norms and linguistic norms

Confirmation of this position is sought through an examination of whether CHKE, besides being systematically different from HKE on both the formal and functional levels, has its own specific norms of usage for its users to comply with. Hence, I investigate whether there are norms of using CHKE that are followed within its community of users. For this purpose, **I have proposed a framework of linguistic norms to analyse this variety.**

To start with, I explore the concept of norms and social norms. In Chapter Five, I look at how different scholars understand and describe norms. While doing so, I also discuss the features of norms, the function they have and the role they play in a community. I find that norms have two natures. On the one hand, a norm is defined as a pattern of behaviour that is generally shared by members of society. On the other hand, it is understood as a prescriptive guide for action which is generally complied with by people in society. To account for both senses of norms, I regard the two kinds of norms as *norms of pattern* and *norms of obligation*. It is noted that these two features are not mutually exclusive. Many norms exhibit both features.

Then, I discuss the notion of linguistic norms, which is a sub-group of social norms. I distinguish three kinds of linguistic norms. They are, respectively, *formal norms*, *contextual norms*, and *identity norms*. Formal norms are norms that concern the well-formedness of a language. In other words, they are used to check whether a linguistic expression can be regarded as being in a certain language or variety. Contextual norms are used to see whether an expression is appropriate in a certain context of situation. Identity norms are references for interlocutors to interpret the identity of the speaker or writer of an expression. I believe that, upon hearing a linguistic

expression, a hearer first uses formal norms and contextual norms to see whether this expression is of a language/variety and whether it is appropriate in the context in which the expression was produced. Then, the hearer may apply identity norms to reach conclusions about the person who produced the expression, in terms of where they are from, geographically and socially, their age, gender, level of education, aspirations, likeability, trustworthiness and so on.

Following the presentation of the results of the survey I conducted, I discussed how the results of the survey are related to linguistic norms. I first analysed to what extent the use of CHKE matches the characterisations of norms given by the various scholars whose definitions I discussed previously. Because of the differences in these definitions, the use of CHKE can be a norm according to some researchers but not according to others. Despite the differences, it can be shown that using CHKE is a *norm of pattern* in the eyes of many informants. In other words, these informants thought that the use of CHKE in CMC is a general phenomenon in society. However, none of the informants suggested that CHKE was something people are obliged to use, which means that no informants believed that using CHKE was a *norm of obligation*.

Then, I looked at the data to see whether it shows that the use of CHKE involves the three kinds of linguistic norms (formal, contextual, identity) which I have proposed. Reading their comments, I found that many informants had a set of formal norms defining a set of CHKE features as a linguistic variety. Moreover, they linked the use of CHKE to a specific context, namely CMC, particularly synchronous chatgroups like Windows Live Messenger, MSN Messenger and ICQ, suggesting that they had a

set of contextual norms relating to the use of this set of features. Also, informants had a strong tendency to link CHKE to Hong Kong identity. Many of them thought that CHKE was used by Hong Kong people.

The results suggest that **Hong Kong people have these three kinds of linguistic norms concerning CHKE** and its use. They recognise that **CHKE is a distinctive variety from other forms of English**; they see that this variety is used specifically in CMC, particularly in synchronous chatgroups; and they also link this linguistic variety to Hong Kong people.

## 8.2 Implications

The linguistic framework I have proposed may also explain the discrepancy in understanding CHKE between linguists and the people who actually communicate with each other in this variety. As mentioned in Chapter Four, some scholars do not believe that CHKE is a variety, because, etically, the formal features are not prominent enough for CHKE to be distinguished from HKE, even though I have specified the *Abstand* between the two and shown that CHKE functions very differently from HKE.

Linguists who are native speakers of British or American English, such as Bolton and Joseph, have focused on the features found in the language usage of Hong Kong people that are different from Standard English. Since they, along with other researchers of HKE, are able to identify these features and link them to Hong Kong identity, they see these features as having an identity marking function.

*Contra* these scholars, my studies suggest that Hong Kong people, who are also the users of this variety, see HKE quite differently. Not all of the features which other



scholars see as HKE are regarded by Hong Kong people as being HKE. My previous research (Poon 2005) has shown that Hong Kong people only recognise some of all the HKE features these scholars identify, and that only this subset of features, appearing in the context of CMC has an identity marking function to them. These scholars and I agree that both formal and functional distinctiveness are essential in identifying a linguistic variety. On the functional side — in other words, emically — HKE fails to qualify in the eyes of its own users, who do not see it as functionally distinctive, apart from that subset of HKE used in CMC, which I have designated as CHKE. As I have shown, not only is CHKE formally distinctive, but Hong Kong people recognise it as having an identity marking function. In contrast, they actively deny that HKE generally has such a function. It may, of course, be that CHKE is not the only local variety of English recognised by Hong Kong people; perhaps other functional varieties also exist and are yet to be discovered. The essential point which I have established is that the current scholarly consensus about HKE and identity from an etic point of view is oversimplified and unsustainable.

In my survey, the informants saw that it was normal to use CHKE. They were able to point out the CHKE features in the conversation and linked these features to a specific context (CMC) and identity (Hong Kong people). More importantly, they recognised that CHKE was a linguistic variety. As one of them commented that the language she saw in the online conversation in the survey was “[t]ypical Hong Kong Local English used by the young[st]ers” (S26- 51F).

I believe that this difference in opinion is due to the fact that the linguists, unlike the language users, deny that CHKE is its own variety with its own formal norms. When

looking at the set of CHKE features, these linguists evaluated them as they were purely contextual norms within the set of formal norms of HKE. They saw that these features were used to meet the contextual norms (the context being CMC). However, they did not agree that these features met the formal norms of CHKE, because they recognised no formal norms for CHKE. In other words, in the eyes of these linguists, these features met the contextual norms of HKE, but not the “non- existent” formal norms of CHKE (figure 8.1).

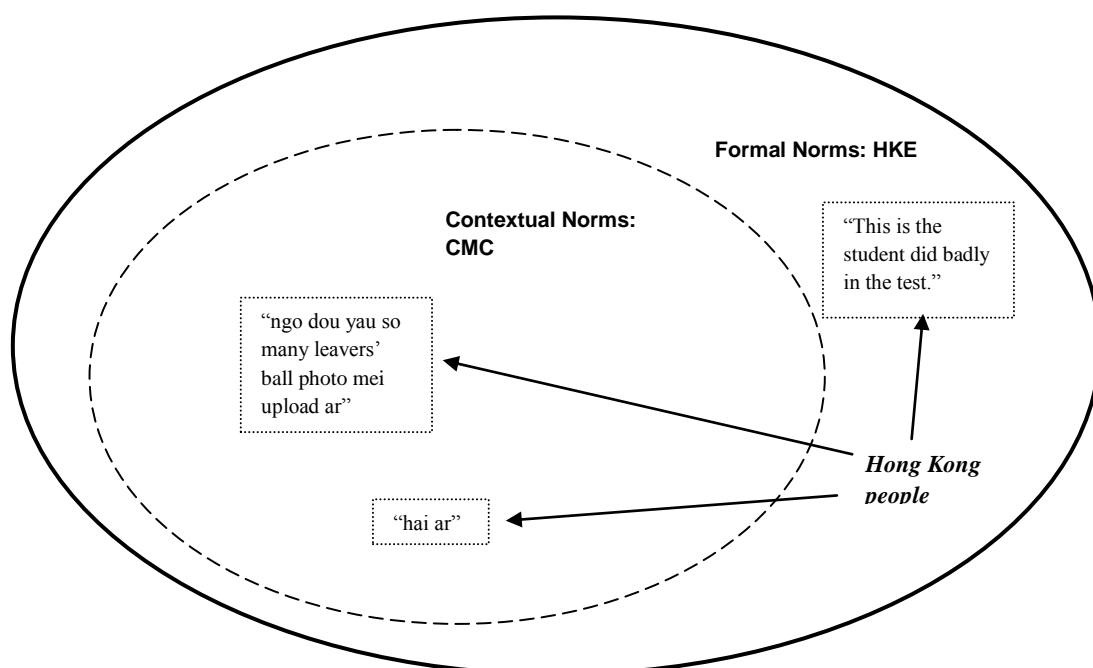


Figure 8.1: the linguistic norms of HKE according to the linguists (note: the arrows indicate identity norms).

Differently, for many informants who regarded CHKE as a variety, CHKE was not only meeting the contextual norms of CMC, it was also recognised as meeting the formal norms of CHKE. This also meant that, on top of having formal norms for English, these informants had, not one, but two sets of formal norms in operation

when dealing with linguistic features that appeared in the English language Hong Kong people use. Firstly, there were formal norms for HKE, and secondly, there were formal norms for CHKE, which overlapped with the contextual norms of CMC to a large extent<sup>79</sup> (figure 8.2). Understanding that the two groups of people were operating with different systems of norms, it was not surprising to see that they came to very different conclusions when deciding whether the features in question constituted a distinctive variety.

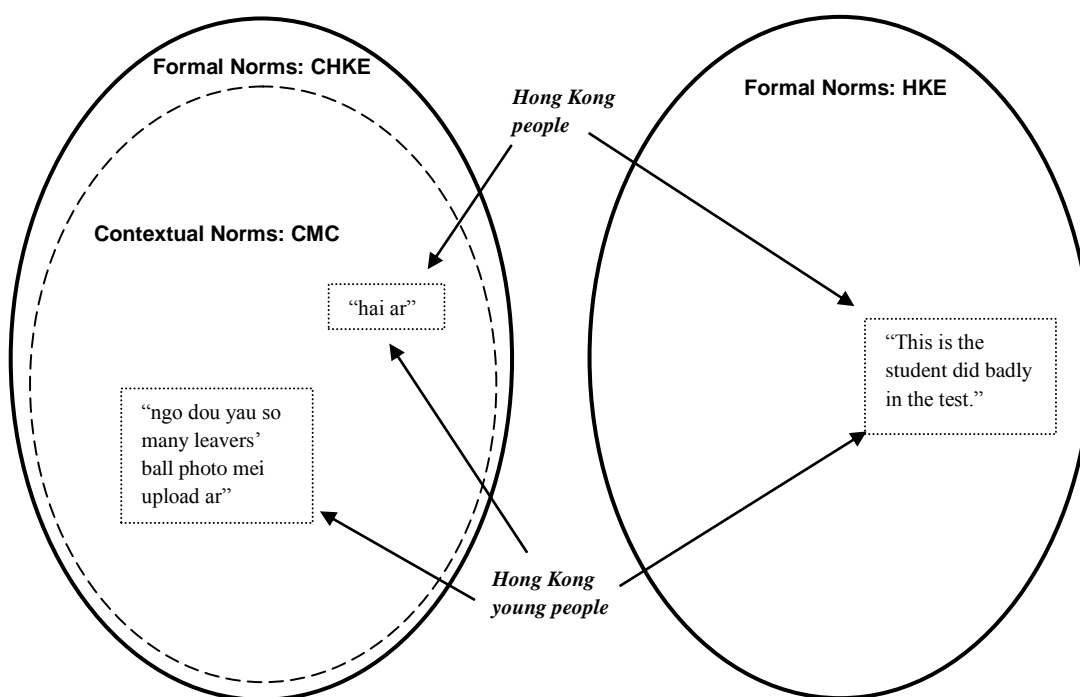


Figure 8.2: the linguistic norms of HKE and CHKE according to the informants (note: the arrows indicate identity norms).

<sup>79</sup> In a few cases in which CHKE is used as examples or as a subject for studies, such as this thesis, CHKE is used in an offline written context, which accounts for the little space in formal norm CHKE that the contextual norm CMC does not cover.

### 8.3 Concluding remarks

In this final section, I would like to look both inward and outward. In the inward direction, I address the limitations of this study. Even though this survey was advertised through the internet, which helped it reach more people from different places more easily, as there was only one person conducting the survey, it has several limitations which I discuss below. In the outward direction, I look at what my findings may mean in the bigger picture. I shall consider the likely future development of English in Hong Kong in the light of the dynamics of CHKE on the internet. Also I shall briefly discuss how the dynamics that have given rise to CHKE might produce more other, even more interesting linguistic norms in CMC in Hong Kong.

#### 8.3.1 Limitations of the study

As this is a survey about language use on the internet, I chose to conduct it online so as to increase the likelihood that the respondents would be familiar with the online setting. Although much effort has been made to ensure that the respondents are from Hong Kong, the fact that it is extremely difficult to monitor who gets access to the online survey means that one cannot be completely sure that the respondents were Hong Kong people. One has to take their word for it. This, I believe, is a limitation which this study shares with most on-line research.

Another limitation concerns the age range of the informants. Of the 111 informants, 96 were aged 35 or younger. As explained in Chapter Six, this was due to the fact the survey was advertised through an online social network. However, the analysis would be more comprehensive if more responses from older people could be obtained. A similar limitation is about the number of non-local people. Of all the

informants, the majority were local Hong Kong people. More Hong Kong people residing in other places answering the survey might shed more light on whether and how local Hong Kong people and non-local Hong Kong people differ in their judgements of and attitudes toward CHKE.

The above two limitations derive from a third, which is the overall size of the sample of people participating in this study. Given that the vast majority of Hong Kong people have access to the internet, almost every person from the city who is younger than 30 goes online regularly, and together with the considerable number of overseas Hong Kong people who use the internet, results obtained from 111 people are at the lower end of what can be considered representative. The relatively small number of informants in the survey is probably the major limitation of this study.

### 8.3.2 Future developments

Seeing that so many young people from Hong Kong communicate with each other through the internet regularly and frequently, one wonders whether CHKE, the product of their communication, would affect their language use in other domains. I have heard several English teachers in Hong Kong voice their concern that the use of language on the internet could lower students' standards of English, which implies that students might write academic English with CHKE features. While there is a possibility of this happening, I believe the chances are slender. Since, as discussed in Chapter Seven, CHKE functions as an identity marker for Hong Kong people, and the need for students to mark their Hong Kong identity in academic settings is minimal, it is unlikely that students will write in CHKE or compose written work with CHKE features. Moreover, in academic settings, students are keenly aware of the need to write in Standard English to achieve high marks. The fact that they can

identify CHKE features means that these are precisely the ones they would *avoid* in order to maximise their chances of academic success. Similar arguments can be made in work settings. With Standard English being a tool to career success, people would tend to avoid writing in CHKE, which might hamper their chances of advancement. Considering these factors, I believe that CHKE will remain an online variety in the future.

Another question concerning the future of CHKE is about the age of its users. Today, CHKE is largely used by the younger population, particularly people who are under the age of 30. One wonders whether this generation will still continue to use this variety online when they grow older. As an online communicator myself, my observation is that people who started using CHKE in their teenage years are still using CHKE to chat online now that they are in their late 20s. This observation makes it appear likely that these people will carry CHKE with them through time and will continue to use it when they grow older. Given the dynamic nature of CMC and the multilingual nature of Hong Kong, one may see new varieties developing among the future young generations, which could make the features of the CHKE seen in my data into a generation marker of the current twenty-somethings.

In fact, among Hong Kong teenagers, one can already see certain new linguistic features emerging on the internet. These features include elements not only of English and Cantonese, but also Putonghua. They are already recognised by the Hong Kong online community and are given the name “Kong Girl Passage” (港女文 – gong2 nui2 man4). As the name of the set of features suggests, it is mainly used by Hong Kong teenage girls who write on blogs or use instant messengers. Below is an

example of what is identified as “Kong Girl Passage”, found on an entry in an internet encyclopaedia tailored for Hong Kong people<sup>80</sup>.

Original: TODAY 放學 MO 野 DO!!  
Phonetic translation: TODAY *fong3 hok6* MO *je3* DO  
Literal translation: today afterschool not-any thing do  
Translation: there was nothing to do today after school

THAN 就 GO 肥珊 HM 諗住打麻雀 LA!!  
THAN *zau6* GO *fei4 saan1* HOME *nam2 ju6 da2 maa4 zoe2* LA  
then undergo go fat-Saan (a person’s name) home think-of play mahjong FP<sup>81</sup>  
then we decided to go to Fat Saan’s home to play a game of mahjong

THAN LING\*2 N 雯本來諗住行路 GO GA!!  
THAN LING LING AND *man4 boon2 loi4 nam2 zu6 hang4 lou6* GO GA  
then Ling-ling and Man originally thinking-of walk road go FP  
then Ling-ling and Man originally thought of going there on foot

BUT 落几滴雨,, SO 舉地刀搭 BUS LA!!  
BUT *lok6 gei2 dik6 yu3*, SO *gui2 dei6 dou1 daap3* BUS LA  
but fall a-few drop rain, so 3<sup>rd</sup>-PERSONS-PLURAL also ride-on bus FP  
but since it rained a bit, they went on a bus instead

THAN MO 耐落近大雨 LO!!  
THAN MO *noi1 lok6 gan6 daai6 jyu3* LO  
then not long fall ASPECT big rain FP  
then not long after it started to rain heavily

禾朝早有 BRING 遮 GA!!  
*wo4 ziu1 zou2 yau3* BRING *ze1* GA  
I morning have bring umbrella FP  
I brought an umbrella with me in the morning

BUT 下晝放低左!!  
BUT *haa6 zau3 fong3 dai1 zo2*  
but afternoon let-go down FP  
but have left it [somewhere] in the afternoon

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<sup>80</sup> <http://evchk.wikia.com/wiki/%E6%B8%AF%E5%A5%B3%E6%96%87>

<sup>81</sup> Key to abbreviation: FP, ‘sentence-final particle’, also known as ‘end-of-sentence particle’.

=□= THAN 落左車禾地就林雨 GO 肥珊 HM LA!!  
 THAN *lok6 zo2 ce1 wo4 dei6 zau6 lam4 jyu3 GO fei4 saan1* HOME LA  
 then down ASPECT car 1<sup>st</sup>-PERSON-PLURAL undergo soak rain go fat Saan  
 home FP  
 then after getting off the bus we went to Fat Saan's home braving the rain

Like other texts written online, this passage has CMC features like emoticons (e.g. “=□=”<sup>82</sup>) and short forms (e.g. “HM”). Although both features in this text are Asian-specific, in the sense that one rarely sees this kind of emoticon and short form in western online texts, this text has general CMC features as mentioned in §3.2.5.

One can also see in this passage that both Chinese and Roman characters are used. Like CHKE, the Roman characters have more than one function. In some cases, they are used to spell English words (e.g. “TODAY” and “BRING”), and in other cases, they are used to spell Cantonese expressions, especially end-of-sentence particles (e.g. “GA” and “LA”). What makes it different from CHKE is that “Kong Girl Passage” also contains Chinese characters. Like the Roman letters, these Chinese characters have two functions. The first function is to write Cantonese, which is a normal function of Chinese characters in Hong Kong. Unlike in many other written contexts, however, for some words a homophonic character is used in place of the actual character. For example, the author of the above passage wrote 刀 (*dou1*, meaning “knife”) instead of 都 (*dou1*, meaning “also”). Given that 都 is a very common character, the possibility of 都 being mistakenly typed as 刀 is slim.

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<sup>82</sup> =□= is similar to what is usually seen in the west as :S.



Perhaps 刀 was typed in place of 都 for the reason that the former is easier to type in Cangjie, one of the most popular Chinese input methods<sup>83</sup>.

The second function, however, is rarely seen elsewhere, and it is to represent Cantonese pronunciation with a Putonghua accent. For instance, for the character 我 (meaning “I”), the Cantonese pronunciation is *ngo1* and the Putonghua pronunciation is *wǒ*<sup>84</sup>. The writer of the passage above uses the Chinese character 禾 (meaning “crops”). The Cantonese pronunciation of this character is *wǒ*, which is similar to the Putonghua pronunciation of 我, meaning “I”. In this passage, the character 禾 is a phonetic expression rather than a semantic expression, conveying what is thought to be an accented Cantonese pronunciation by a native speaker of Putonghua. Another example is the expression 我點算好 (meaning “what should I do”), which is written as 禾典扇巧 in “Kong Girl Passage”:

| Original word | Cantonese pronunciation | Putonghua pronunciation | Character used to express accented pronunciation | Cantonese pronunciation of the “accented character” |
|---------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| 我             | ngo3                    | wǒ                      | 禾                                                | wo4                                                 |
| 點             | dim2                    | dían                    | 典                                                | din2                                                |
| 算             | syun3                   | sùn                     | 扇                                                | sin3                                                |
| 好             | hou2                    | hǎo                     | 巧                                                | hao2                                                |

Table 8.1: phonological details of “我點算好” and “禾典扇巧”.

Writers of “Kong Girl Passage” not only draw resources from English and Cantonese, but also Putonghua. They mix elements of these three languages and “bubble-up” (as

<sup>83</sup> The Cangjie code of 都 is 十一弓中 (“JANL” on an English keyboard), and the code of 刀 is 尸竹 (“SH” on an English keyboard).

<sup>84</sup> Pinyin is used to denote Putonghua pronunciations.

Bolton 2002:49 puts it) a new set of features which is unique and easily identified. Looking at “Kong Girl Passage”, one can see how new linguistic norms on the internet are being generated among Hong Kong people and can predict that more such norms will arise in future. These norms may function as an identity marker for today’s teenagers.

After the handover, with the growing importance of Putonghua in the city, I believe that the ever-changing linguistic situation will become even more dynamic with the official language of the PRC mixed in with the locally spoken Cantonese and the ex-colonial and international language English. “Kong Girl Passage” has given us a fascinating example of how this three-language-dynamics can play out on the internet. Further research is needed to shed light on this interesting issue of “Kong Girl Passage”, as well as the many other linguistic issues in CMC among Hong Kong people, both in its present state and as it develops in the years ahead.

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## Appendices

### Appendix I: The Online Survey

Below is the survey with which I collected the data for this study. I posted this survey on an internet website [www.freeonlinesurvey.com](http://www.freeonlinesurvey.com).

#### MSN conversation Survey

In this survey you'll be reading a conversation and answer several simple questions. Please take a few minutes to familiarise yourself with the conversation before answering the questions. The whole survey should take less than 10 minutes. Thank you for your time!

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| 1) Personal details        |  |
| Where do you come from?    |  |
| What is your age?          |  |
| What is your gender (M/F)? |  |

|                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| 2) What is your education level? |  |
| Primary School                   |  |
| Secondary School/High School     |  |
| Undergraduate                    |  |
| Postgraduate                     |  |

3) **Please read the conversation below:**

A: back la

B: gum 5 ge!!

A: hai ar ! my messenger yau problem ar

A: hai lor ... fat jor ho dor la

A: now i go out to town , eat and eat all the time

B: ..... dun eat so much!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

A: ahaha ~ but now eating is my entertainment wor

A: otherwise i hv nothing to do ar ! wakakakak

A: hai wor ! u had a grad din recently >

B: wooh u know dat?!

A: hai ar !

A: i saw some photos tim

A: from Kitty

A: u wore a nice white dress ma ! haha ~ ging lei ? gum dou g !  
haha

B: ging ar!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! u r so 8 ma!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

B: ya great grad din ar

B: but ngo now mei upload photosssss

A: hehehe ~ thanks thanks ! :P

A: ngo dou yau soo many leavers' ball photo mei upload ar

B: nei always have dat kind of balls ga ??

B: so gd ar u can drink ar!!

A: ngng .. ng hai ge .. only xmas ball and this leavers' ball je

A: hahaha ~ soo bad lor

A: b4 the ball , i was hungry ma , and someone gave me  
champagne to drink .. then i almost got drunk lor

A: sooo dizzy gum

A: haha

-----

Is this conversation different from other forms of English?

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| Completely different  |  |
| Quite different       |  |
| Not too different     |  |
| No differences at all |  |

|                                                                                          |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 4) Looking at the same conversation, Is there anything that looks particularly abnormal? |
|                                                                                          |

|                                                                       |  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| 5) How normal it is for Hong Kong people to have such a conversation? |  |
| Perfectly normal                                                      |  |
| Fairly normal                                                         |  |
| Fairly abnormal                                                       |  |
| Completely abnormal                                                   |  |

|                                                                 |  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| 6) Is it normal to use "la", "ga" or "ar" in this conversation? |  |
| Perfectly normal                                                |  |
| Fairly normal                                                   |  |
| Fairly abnormal                                                 |  |
| Completely abnormal                                             |  |



|                                                                                                                                                                                                         |  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| 7) How normal is it to say "ngo dou yau soo many leavers' ball photo mei upload ar"* in this conversation? (*the sentence means "I also have many leavers' ball photos that haven't been uploaded yet") |  |
| Perfectly normal                                                                                                                                                                                        |  |
| Fairly normal                                                                                                                                                                                           |  |
| Fairly abnormal                                                                                                                                                                                         |  |
| Completely abnormal                                                                                                                                                                                     |  |

|                                                                                                               |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 8) If at least one of your answers to question 5, 6, or 7 is "fairly abnormal" or "completely abnormal", why? |
|                                                                                                               |

|                                                                                                    |  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| 9) If I told you this conversation was between two native British people, how strange would it be? |  |
| Not strange at all                                                                                 |  |
| A little strange                                                                                   |  |
| Quite strange                                                                                      |  |
| Extremely strange                                                                                  |  |

|                                                                                                                      |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 10) If you answered it is a little/quite/extremely strange for native British people to have such conversation, why? |
|                                                                                                                      |

## Appendix II: Background information of the informants

Below are the answers the informants gave to questions 1 and 2, which asked where they came from, how old they were, what their gender was, and what their education level was.

| <b>Informant</b> | <b>Geographical location</b> | <b>Age</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Education level</b>       |
|------------------|------------------------------|------------|---------------|------------------------------|
| 1                | Hong Kong                    | 28         | M             | Postgraduate                 |
| 2                | Hong Kong                    | 23         | F             | Undergraduate                |
| 3                | Hong Kong                    | 26         | F             | Undergraduate                |
| 4                | Hong Kong                    | 28         | M             | Undergraduate                |
| 5                | HK                           | 40         | M             | Undergraduate                |
| 6                | Hong Kong                    | 27         | F             | Undergraduate                |
| 7                | Hong Kong                    | 23         | F             | Undergraduate                |
| 8                | Hong Kong                    | 26         | M             | Undergraduate                |
| 9                | Hong Kong                    | 22         | M             | Undergraduate                |
| 10               | Hong Kong                    | 20         | F             | Undergraduate                |
| 11               | hk                           | 20         | M             | Undergraduate                |
| 12               | Hong Kong                    | 20         | M             | Undergraduate                |
| 13               | Macau                        | 24         | M             | Postgraduate                 |
| 14               | Hong Kong                    | 23         | F             | Undergraduate                |
| 15               | US                           | 22         | F             | Undergraduate                |
| 16               | hong kong                    | 21         | m             | Undergraduate                |
| 17               | hk                           | 21         | m             | Undergraduate                |
| 18               | Hong Kong                    | 28         | F             | Postgraduate                 |
| 19               | Hong Kong                    | 22         | M             | Undergraduate                |
| 20               | Hong Kong                    | 29         | M             | Undergraduate                |
| 21               | HK                           | 26         | M             | Undergraduate                |
| 22               | HK                           | 36         | F             | Secondary School/High School |
| 23               | Hong Kong                    | 31         | F             | Postgraduate                 |
| 24               | hong kong                    | 26         | f             | Undergraduate                |
| 25               | HK                           | 35         | F             | Undergraduate                |
| 26               | Hong Kong                    | 51         | F             | Secondary School/High School |
| 27               | Macao                        | 27         | F             | Postgraduate                 |
| 28               | HK                           | 40         | M             | Postgraduate                 |
| 29               | Hong Kong                    | 39         | M             | Postgraduate                 |
| 30               | Hong Kong                    | 27         | M             | Undergraduate                |
| 31               | Canada                       | 55         | F             | Postgraduate                 |
| 32               | Hong Kong                    | 41         | M             | Postgraduate                 |
| 33               | Canada                       | 28         | F             | Postgraduate                 |
| 34               | Hong Kong                    | 47         | F             | Secondary                    |

|    |                                       |    |      |                                 |
|----|---------------------------------------|----|------|---------------------------------|
|    |                                       |    |      | School/High School              |
| 35 | Canada                                | 52 | M    | Undergraduate                   |
| 36 | Hong Kong                             | 31 | M    | Postgraduate                    |
| 37 | Hong Kong                             | 28 | F    | Postgraduate                    |
| 38 | Markham, Ontario                      | 43 | M    | Postgraduate                    |
| 39 | Hong Kong                             | 20 | F    | Undergraduate                   |
| 40 | Hong Kong                             | 31 | F    | Postgraduate                    |
| 41 | Toronto                               | 26 | F    | Postgraduate                    |
| 42 | Hong Kong                             | 23 | F    | Undergraduate                   |
| 43 | Hong Kong                             | 19 | F    | Undergraduate                   |
| 44 | HK                                    | 31 | F    | Postgraduate                    |
| 45 | Grew up in HK.<br>Currently in Canada | 31 | F    | Undergraduate                   |
| 46 | Hong Kong                             | 20 | M    | Undergraduate                   |
| 47 | Hong Kong                             | 26 | F    | Postgraduate                    |
| 48 | Hong Kong                             | 21 | M    | Undergraduate                   |
| 49 | Hong Kong                             | 19 | F    | Undergraduate                   |
| 50 | Hong Kong                             | 27 | F    | Undergraduate                   |
| 51 | HK                                    | 20 | F    | Undergraduate                   |
| 52 | Hong Kong                             | 21 | F    | Undergraduate                   |
| 53 | Hong Kong                             | 20 | F    | Undergraduate                   |
| 54 | Canada                                | 30 | M    | Undergraduate                   |
| 55 | Hong Kong                             | 27 | F    | Postgraduate                    |
| 56 | Hong Kong                             | 44 | F    | Secondary<br>School/High School |
| 57 | Hong Kong                             | 28 | M    | Postgraduate                    |
| 58 | Canada                                | 27 | F    | Postgraduate                    |
| 59 | Vancouver                             | 26 | F    | Postgraduate                    |
| 60 | Hong Kong                             | 25 | F    | Undergraduate                   |
| 61 | Hong Kong                             | 27 | F    | Undergraduate                   |
| 62 | Hong Kong                             | 28 | F    | Postgraduate                    |
| 63 | hk                                    | 25 | m    | Undergraduate                   |
| 64 | HONG KONG                             | 28 | F    | Undergraduate                   |
| 65 | Hong Kong                             | 25 | F    | Undergraduate                   |
| 66 | hong kong                             | 21 | f    | Undergraduate                   |
| 67 | Hong Kong                             | 21 | F    | Undergraduate                   |
| 68 | Scotland                              | 18 | Male | Undergraduate                   |
| 69 | Hong Kong                             | 25 | F    | Undergraduate                   |
| 70 | Hong Kong                             | 28 | M    | Undergraduate                   |
| 71 | HK                                    | 28 | M    | Undergraduate                   |
| 72 | Hong Kong                             | 31 | F    | Undergraduate                   |
| 73 | Hong Kong                             | 26 | M    | Postgraduate                    |
| 74 | HK                                    | 32 | M    | Undergraduate                   |
| 75 | HK                                    | 30 | M    | Undergraduate                   |
| 76 | Hong Kong                             | 29 | F    | Undergraduate                   |
| 77 | Hong Kong                             | 30 | F    | Undergraduate                   |
| 78 | Hong Kong                             | 23 | M    | Undergraduate                   |

|               |             |     |        |                              |
|---------------|-------------|-----|--------|------------------------------|
| 79            | hong kong   | 24  | M      | Undergraduate                |
| 80            | hong kong   | 20  | f      | Undergraduate                |
| 81            | HK          | 26  | F      | Postgraduate                 |
| 82            | Hong Kong   | 42  | F      | Postgraduate                 |
| 83            | Hong Kong   | 18  | M      | Undergraduate                |
| 84            | Hong Kong   | 28  | M      | Undergraduate                |
| 85            | HK          | 18  | M      | Undergraduate                |
| 86            | Hong Kong   | 24  | F      | Undergraduate                |
| 87            | Hong Kong   | 23  | M      | Undergraduate                |
| 88            | Hong Kong   | 20  | F      | Undergraduate                |
| 89            | Hong Kong   | 19  | F      | Undergraduate                |
| 90            | Hong Kong   | 43  | F      | Undergraduate                |
| 91            | Hong Kong   | 25  | F      | Secondary School/High School |
| 92            | Hong Kong   | 27  | M      | Postgraduate                 |
| 93            | HongKong    | 33  | M      | Postgraduate                 |
| 94            | Hong Kong   | 20  | M      | Undergraduate                |
| 95            | Macau       | 22  | M      | Undergraduate                |
| 96            | Hong Kong   | 55  | F      | Postgraduate                 |
| 97            | HK          | 30  | F      | Undergraduate                |
| 98            | Hong Kong   | 49  | F      | Secondary School/High School |
| 99            | Hong Kong   | 27  | M      | Postgraduate                 |
| 100           | Hong Kong   | 23  | M      | Postgraduate                 |
| 101           | Canada      | 29  | Female | Undergraduate                |
| 102           | UK          | 24  | F      | Postgraduate                 |
| 103           | England     | 19  | F      | Undergraduate                |
| 104           | England     | 19  | F      | Undergraduate                |
| 105           | Sydney      | 22  | M      | Undergraduate                |
| 106           | Hong Kong   | 31  | M      | Undergraduate                |
| 107           | HK          | 27  | F      | Postgraduate                 |
| 108           | Hong Kong   | 23  | F      | Secondary School/High School |
| 109           | Hong Kong   | 24  | F      | Postgraduate                 |
| 110           | Hong Kong   | 25  | M      | Undergraduate                |
| 111           | Philippines | 26  | M      | Secondary School/High School |
| unclassified. | Hong Kong   | 323 | F      | Postgraduate                 |