

**Communication in the professional workplace in post-colonial Hong Kong: the roles  
and statuses of Chinese and English**

Thesis submitted for the degree of  
Doctor of Education  
at the University of Leicester

by

Christopher Frank Green  
English Language Centre  
Hong Kong Polytechnic University  
July, 2001

UMI Number: U150318

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI U150318

Published by ProQuest LLC 2013. Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.  
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This work is protected against  
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.



ProQuest LLC  
789 East Eisenhower Parkway  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

## **Abstract**

This study reports the findings of an investigation into the roles of English, standard written Chinese and Cantonese in the workplace in post-colonial Hong Kong. The study was motivated by the paucity of large-scale, broad-spectrum research into language use in workplace communication in Hong Kong. Previous studies, while helpful and suggestive, have tended either to focus on language use within a single profession, or are small-scale in scope. The findings of this study derive from a questionnaire survey of 3,019 subjects employed in both the public and private sectors and by Hong Kong-owned and foreign-owned organisations. Subjects mostly held junior rank within their employing organisations and were drawn from large, medium-sized and small employing concerns within the five broad professional fields of Business Services, Community and Social Services, Construction and Real Estate, Engineering, and Manufacturing. A multi-method approach to data collection was adopted to achieve triangulation: the quantitative survey data were analysed statistically and are interpreted partly by reference to qualitative data elicited from a focus group interview with participating subjects and five individual case study subjects who kept a written record of their language use over a single typical working week. Results indicate that English continues to function as the unmarked language option for internal and external written communication in both the public and private sectors of the local economy. Chinese professionals who work for foreign-owned organisations in Hong Kong make greater use of English in written communication than do their counterparts in Hong Kong-owned companies. Professionals who work for large Hong Kong concerns manifest a slightly greater need to read or write in English than those who work for small local companies. In terms of spoken communication, Cantonese emerges clearly as the unmarked language option for intra-ethnic communication in informal situations. Cantonese also plays an important role in more formal situations such as business-related telephone calls and job interviews. Use of spoken English is generally restricted to speech situations involving non-Cantonese-speaking participants. However, the need for Hong Kong professionals to speak and listen in English was found to increase with seniority of position and in communicative contexts of relatively high formality.

## **Acknowledgements**

Many people have contributed to the research reported in this thesis. My deepest gratitude must be reserved for the subjects of the study who, despite pressures of work, study and family, gave their time uncomplainingly to participate in the questionnaire survey, the focus group interview and the case studies. I also owe a considerable debt of gratitude to the teachers, too numerous to mention by name here, who helped me administer the questionnaire survey. Deepest thanks are also due to Professor Liz Hamp-Lyons, Stephen Evans and Dr. K P. Kwan, all of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, and to Dr. Dan Robertson, formerly of Leicester University and now of Stirling University, who all gave unstintingly of their time in order to give invaluable advice on issues of questionnaire design, ethical considerations in research and data analysis procedures. An institutional contribution to the study from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University should also be mentioned and this took the form of a small scholarly activities award which funded the employment of a Project Assistant for three months. The Project Assistant, Angie Cheung, helped greatly in processing rapidly and with admirable expertise the very substantial raw data generated by the questionnaire survey. Finally, I want to acknowledge the contribution of my thesis supervisor, Dr. Peter Martin, whose support was always both constantly available and extremely valuable. His high level of supervisory commitment and the quality of his critical appraisals were inspiring.

## Table of contents

### **Chapter One: Introduction to the study**

1.1: Introduction	1-2
1.2: Aims of the study	2-4
1.3: Research questions	4
1.4: Structure of the thesis	4-6
1.5: Background	6-21
Figure 1.1: socio-cultural, individual and learning process variables in bilingual contexts	14

### **Chapter Two: Language in Hong Kong's development**

2.1: Introduction	22
2.2: The role of English in Hong Kong's economic development	22-28
2.3: Language in transitional Hong Kong: the changing roles and statuses of English and Chinese	29-37
2.4: Studies of language use in the professional workplace	37-42
Table 2.1: enrolments at primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong (1955-1997)	34

### **Chapter Three: Design of the study**

3.1: Introduction	43
3.2: Data collection: a multi-method approach	43-60
3.3: The research population	60-64
3.4: Process constraints on the research design	64-66
3.5: Ethical considerations in the study	66-71
Table 3.1: a breakdown of professional areas with numbers of subjects	62
Table 3.2: age, working experience and qualifications of the subjects by percentages	63
Table 3.3: company or organization by sector, ownership and size in percentages	63

### **Chapter Four: Results and discussion part one: language use in the professional workplace**

4.1: Introduction	72-73
4.2: The analysis of data	73-76
4.3: Language use in written workplace communication by sector	76-87
4.4: Language use in spoken workplace communication	87-97
Table 4.1: language use in written workplace communication by sector	76
Table 4.2: factors influencing the use of English and Chinese in written communication	81
Table 4.3: written communication in Hong Kong-owned and foreign-owned companies	83
Table 4.4: written communication in the private sector by company size	84
Table 4.5: factors influencing the use of English and Cantonese in oral communication	88
Table 4.6: language use in spoken workplace communication by sector	92
Table 4.7: spoken communication in the private sector by company size	96

## **Chapter Five: Results and discussion part two: the use of English in the professional workplace**

5.1: Introduction	98
5.2: The use of English in the public and private sectors	98-106
5.3: The use of English by professional area	106-113
5.4: The use of English by rank	113-117
Table 5.1: writing in English by sector	91
Table 5.2: reading in English by sector	102
Table 5.3: speaking and listening in English by sector	103
Table 5.4: writing in English by professional area	107
Table 5.5: reading in English by professional area	110
Table 5.6: speaking and listening in English by professional area	111
Table 5.7: writing in English by rank	114
Table 5.8: reading in English by rank	115
Table 5.9: speaking and listening in English by rank	116

## **Chapter Six: Conclusion**

6.1: Introduction and review of research questions	118-131
6.2: A critical review of the study	132-135

## **Appendices**

Appendix I: the prototype questionnaire
Appendix II: the final version of the questionnaire
Appendix III: transcription of focus group interview
Appendix IV: language logs

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction to the study**

#### **1.1: Introduction**

In this first chapter of the thesis, I begin by outlining the aims of the study and in so doing emphasize the broad scope of the study and its empirical nature. I then go on to present five key research questions which are derived from the aims of the study. These questions provide the pivotal focus points around which much of the discussion in the body of the study is organized. The questions also play an important role in grounding the discussion in Chapter Six (Conclusion), where they are addressed directly.

The research questions are followed by an overview section which outlines briefly the structure and content of the thesis on a chapter-by-chapter basis. I then present a two-part section of background discussion: the first part investigates a number of fundamental issues concerning languages and language use in Hong Kong society while the second explores issues related to bilingualism Hong Kong. This background section is designed to contextualise the empirical study and to ground it within a broadly sociolinguistic theoretical framework. A more specifically diachronic context for the study will be created in Chapter Two.

Investigating the socio-cultural and historical forces which have shaped the patterns of use of Chinese and English in Hong Kong society, and examining the kind of bilingualism these forces have given rise to are essential to developing an adequate understanding of language use in the local workplace - the workplace language ecology cannot be isolated from the wider ecology which, at least in part, determines its character.

It is important to make clear here that the term “Chinese” in the context of this study is defined as the dialect of Cantonese, and standard written Chinese. Although the influence

of Putonghua (the national dialect of the Peoples' Republic of China) appears to be growing in importance in Hong Kong's language ecology, it can be referred to only tangentially within the confines of the study. Similarly, the possible influence of the simplified (Pinyin) characters used in mainland China on the standard written Chinese used in Hong Kong (with its use of traditional or full characters with some localized colloquial additions) cannot be investigated here. That said, the researcher is aware of the important work on Hong Kong's plurilingual future identity carried out, amongst others, by Hyland, 1997; Joseph, 1999, 2000; Tsou, 1996; Wright, 1996.

It is also important to point out at this early stage that the study has a major focus on the role of English specifically in Hong Kong's development and in the professional workplace – a factor especially evident in the first section of Chapter Two and in Chapter Five. This concentration reflects the occupation and interests of the researcher and the fact that the findings of the study may be used to inform curriculum renewal exercises and instructional materials development for workplace English courses offered by the researcher's employing institution, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University's English Language Centre.

## **1.2: Aims of the study**

The major aim of this study is to establish by empirical means a broad picture of patterns of Chinese and English language use in the professional workplace in Hong Kong. The impetus for the study arose from the paucity of empirical data on the roles of Chinese and English in the local professional workplace. There are few existing studies of the roles of the languages in the local professional workplace and those that do exist are either small-scale in scope, and thus able to present only suggestive rather than fully explored findings, or are focused narrowly on the roles of the two languages within single professions. This



study, then, is an attempt to add a distinctive (broad spectrum) dimension to the body of knowledge on language use in professional settings in Hong Kong.

A second aim – intimately related to the first - is to identify by both quantitative and qualitative means the factors which determine the use of one language rather than the other for particular workplace-based communication tasks in both written and spoken modes. In this connection, the factors under investigation will be employing sector (government, government-related and private), ownership of employing organization (Hong Kong or foreign-owned), and size of employing organization (small, medium and large). This enquiry forms the central core of Chapter Four.

Having first examined the broad area of language choice in the professional Hong Kong workplace, a third and more particularistic aim will be to investigate the use of English specifically in the workplace. I will attempt to fulfill this aim by analyzing the use of English by employing sector, by employee's professional area and, finally, by the rank held by employees within their company or organizations. The results of this research are presented in Chapter Five and may be used to inform the curriculum renewal processes mentioned earlier in this section. A further product of the study will be tailored reports presenting the main relevant findings of the study for the twelve academic departments of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University whose part-time students participated in the study. The reports will be offered both for practical reference by Programme Leaders in the academic departments and for the ethical reasons given in Chapter Three.

The fourth and final aim of the study also entails a focus on workplace English use specifically and this is to confirm or disconfirm by empirical means the expert opinion (which has rapidly become received wisdom) which holds that, in general, the Hong Kong workplace makes greater demands on employees' receptive rather than productive skills in English (Luke & Richards, 1982). This assertion has been recently reiterated by Li (1999) who expresses the further view that when productive skills are called upon they are used

mainly for written rather than spoken communication and that, indeed, the unmarked language option for written office-based communication in Hong Kong is English. These English language skill-related issues are addressed throughout the text of this thesis.

### **1.3: Research questions**

Five key, interrelated research questions have been formulated to facilitate a focused exploration of the aims of the study:

1. What are the socio-cultural and historical forces which have shaped Hong Kong's current language ecology in general and language use in the workplace in particular?
2. How do the factors of employing sector, company ownership and company size determine whether English or Chinese is selected to carry out particular office-based communication tasks?
3. How do the factors of employing sector, membership of particular professions and rank within the workplace impact on the use of English specifically in the professional Hong Kong workplace?
4. Does empirical evidence suggest that professional Hong Kong workplaces in general make greater demands on an employee's receptive rather than productive skills in English?
5. In relation to 4, when productive skills are called upon does the evidence support the view that these are used mainly for written rather than spoken communication?

### **1.4: Structure of the thesis**

In overview, the study comprises, in the present chapter, a discussion on the uses of English and Chinese in Hong Kong society and on the development of the Hong Kong bilingual. As I argued earlier, without a consideration of underlying socio-cultural factors,

for example, the overwhelming dominance of Cantonese in the socio-cultural domain, language use in the local professional workplace cannot be adequately understood.

In Chapter Two, I provide further contextualisation for the study by discussing the role of language in the development of Hong Kong's administrative, legal and commercial institutions in three historical periods: the colonial (1840-early 1960s), the transitional (late 1960s-the handover of sovereignty in 1997) and the post-colonial (1998-present). Chapter Two, then, examines the role of language in Hong Kong's development from a diachronic perspective. The chapter also presents in its final section a review of the existing research into language use in the local professional workplace.

Chapter Three reports the (triangulated) design of the study. The discussion begins with an explanation of the rationale for adopting a multi-method approach; an approach which utilizes a questionnaire survey for the gathering of baseline quantitative data, and focus group interviews and case studies (of individual 'language log' keepers) for the gathering of qualitative data. The qualitative data gathering was carried out to add an illuminating and corroborating dimension to the analysis of the baseline data. The chapter concludes with a discussion of ethical considerations in the study.

Chapter Four will present and discuss the first part of the results of the statistical analyses of the data from the questionnaire survey. The main concern of the chapter is to identify how certain factors (employing sector, company ownership and company size) might influence the selection of English or Chinese for particular workplace tasks. Chapter Five presents the second part of the results of the study and discusses how the factors of employing sector, employee's professional area and rank within an organization might influence the use of English specifically in the Hong Kong workplace. In Chapters Four and Five results are partly interpreted by referring to data elicited from both the focus group interviews and the case studies.

The sixth and final chapter addresses the study's five research questions directly and in so doing draws conclusions from the discussions of the previous chapters. Chapter Six also offers a critical review of the study and presents suggestions for the direction of future research into workplace language use in Hong Kong.

### **1.5: Background**

This section is designed to contextualise the study and provide a broadly sociolinguistic theoretical framework for it. This will involve developing a picture of Hong Kong's language ecology and discussing the impact this has on language use in the professional workplace. The section is divided into two parts: the first identifies and examines salient linguistic features of Hong Kong society; for example the overwhelming dominance of Cantonese throughout Hong Kong's history. This part also compares the role and status of English in Hong Kong with that in other countries in an attempt to arrive at an adequate term to describe the function and status of English locally. The development of a Hong Kong form of English is also discussed briefly in this part.

The second part of the background section concerns the nature of bilingualism in Hong Kong. It begins by examining the effect on bilingual development of learning process variables, such as the medium of instruction in Hong Kong's schools and tertiary institutions, and goes on to discuss socio-cultural and individualistic variables central to the development of the Hong Kong bilingual. This part concludes by comparing the bilingual (Chinese-English) situation in Hong Kong with that obtaining in Canada (French-English).

#### **1.5.1: Languages and language use in Hong Kong society**

In line with the aims of this study and its associated research questions, I want to begin by identifying factors which have remained relatively constant over time. In this regard, such a constant is readily identifiable throughout Hong Kong's history: it is that over

the past 150 years about 98% of Hong Kong's population has spoken Cantonese as either the mother tongue or the language of integration for immigrants of Chinese ethnicity. Endacott (1964:20, 1973:12) reports that when Hong Kong was ceded to the British in 1842, the population was enumerated at around 4,000 but that five years later, this had increased to nearly 24,000 – of which slightly less than 2% was ethnically European. The 2% were not all native speakers of English, although English rapidly became established as the *lingua franca* among expatriates.

Bacon-Shone & Bolton (1998:45) present census data from 1911 which show that native Chinese speakers (overwhelmingly native speakers of Cantonese) constituted 98% of the population, while “others” and “not stated” (English was not directly referred to) accounted for the remaining 2%. By 1993, the final census figures reported by Bacon-Shone & Bolton and the most up-to-date available until the results of the recent (March, 2001) census become available, the proportions are remarkably similar with regard to Cantonese and English, but a great of erosion in the use of other South China dialects such as Hakka, Hoklo, and Sze Yap is also reported – the inevitable result of the rise of Cantonese as the first language among Hong Kong's large ethnic Chinese ‘refugee’ population.

The constant and overwhelming dominance of a common mother or integrationist tongue among the population has conferred a unique, if rather limited, role to the use of English in Hong Kong. This uniqueness is demonstrated by the fact that it does not fit neatly into Kachru's (1986, 1997:) concentric circle model of English use world-wide. Kachru proposes three circles (inner, outer and expanding) which represent global patterns of English language use. The inner circle consists of native speaker settings, while the outer encompasses those settings in which English functions as a second language; that is, the language has important societal roles to play as an institutional language or as a *lingua franca* permitting communication among populations with multiple and mutually

unintelligible dialects. The third circle, the expanding, accounts for those global settings in which English plays no societal or institutional roles as such and is learned, usually, as a first foreign language.

The uses of English in, for example, Singapore, India, the Philippines and Malaysia place these countries quite neatly within Kachru's outer circle, since for certain demographic, historical or government-mandated reasons, English plays important roles in these countries. In comparing English in Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong, Platt (1982:384) makes this comment:

In Hong Kong the population ... is overwhelmingly Chinese – and predominantly Cantonese-speaking. Therefore, although English served as an avenue to careers and professions, it did not serve a broad range of functions, and because of its more limited use in Hong Kong, it did not develop the type of systematic characteristics that appeared in the Malayan region.

It is worth noting in passing that the widespread use of English as a second language in the countries of the outer circle tells us little about the penetration of the language among the population at large. Crystal (1997:98) estimates, for example, that about 15% of Indians and 25% of Filipinos have a good command of spoken English. No comparable estimate is available for Hong Kong's population, although the census returns for 1993 do show that 56.7% of the population judged themselves to be bilingual in a dialect of Chinese and spoken English (Bacon-Shone & Bolton, 1998:75). This figure, however, must be treated with great caution; it is the product of a self-report exercise in which subjects were asked only about the number of languages they spoke and not how well they spoke the languages.

In fact, it is likely that the percentage of the population able to speak English with a reasonable degree of facility is very much lower than that reported in the census returns. The census data are probably explicable in terms of Hong Kong people's familiarity with English. Most of the surveyed population will have been at least partially educated through the medium of English and this exposure may well be responsible for the high percentage claiming bilingual status. It seems to be the case that in Hong Kong English has an impressive spread among the population but at a rather low level of command or facility.

This position is a consequence of the fact that there are few reasons for using English in Hong Kong outside of the classroom or workplace because of the dominant use of Cantonese.

Hong Kong, then, cannot be placed within the ambit of Kachru's outer circle, but neither does it, because of the historical and institutional importance of English, belong truly within the expanding circle. These are points I want discuss further here since recent studies of English as a global language have classified Hong Kong variously as an English as a Second Language territory (McArthur, 1998) or as a member of the outer circle of English-using communities (Crystal, 1997). In terms of Hong Kong-based studies, English in Hong Kong is frequently represented as simply an instrumental skill – a means to educational and occupational advancement – and has been variously termed an 'auxiliary language' (Luke & Richards, 1982); 'the language of mobility' (So, 1984), 'the language of power' (Cheung, 1985), and 'a value-added language' (Li, 1999).

It is my view that the international studies of English in Hong Kong cited above have failed adequately to recognize the institutional importance of the language throughout Hong Kong's recorded history, but I concur with Pennycook (1994) that the institutional role of English was played for much of the time only at high levels of power and by only a small percentage of the native Chinese-speaking population.

With regard to local studies of the role of English, I want to argue that the terms which have been proposed to describe English in Hong Kong reflect perhaps better the authors' perceptions of the (high) status of the language *vis a vis* Cantonese and written standard Chinese than they do its institutional role in society; that is, the terms are conceived pragmatically in terms of the utility and instrumentality to the individual of English rather than the language's historical institutional roles in government, law, education and commerce. In the instrumental conception, English is viewed as a language from which the vast majority of Hong Kong people are 'psychologically detached' (Li,

1999). However, given their exposure to English and the requirement to operate in it in the years of secondary schooling and beyond – factors introduced by the imposition of universal compulsory secondary education in the late 1970s - it is likely that this detachment is socio-cultural rather than cognitive in nature for most Hong Kong adults.

The critical observations I have just made apply less to Luke and Richard's term ('auxiliary language') since this is, to some extent, an exception to the individualistic and instrumental conception of the status of English in that it does attempt to reflect the historical and institutional role of English in Hong Kong. Luke & Richards (1982:55) defined English in Hong Kong as "... a non-native language which is reserved for certain restricted functions in society and for use by a restricted section of that society".

This view has its critics, most notably Cheung (1984:281) who has expressed the view that Luke and Richard's characterization lacks the dynamism necessary to capture the true and complex picture of English use in Hong Kong and suggests that their description was more appropriate to the relatively static picture of language use in the colonial period of the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. Certainly, the term 'auxiliary' with its connotations of 'subsidiary' or 'subordinate' fails adequately to capture the immense institutional importance of English prior to decolonisation.

Furthermore, Luke & Richard's contention that the use of English to the early 1980s was restricted to the Anglo-American expatriate community and 'a small group of bilingual Cantonese functioning as linguistic middlemen' (1982:51) is not borne out by the census data on bilingualism in the Chinese community. As we have seen, these data reveal - since the mid-1960s - a steadily accelerating rise in the proportion and numbers of people claiming some degree of proficiency in English (Bacon-Shone and Bolton, 1998). There is, then, a need for a more precise term to represent the role of English in Hong Kong and I want to suggest that the most appropriate term would seem to be the simplest - 'institutional'.



The term appears to be applicable to the three major periods I have identified in Hong Kong's history and which I term the colonial period, the transitional and the post-colonial. The colonial period stretched from the 1840s to the early 1960s and was a time in which English had a salient institutional role but poor spread among the population. The transitional period (mid-1960s-1997) was a time in which English was still the dominant language of government but the spread of the language increased considerably through compulsory universal secondary education in English. The post-colonial period from 1997 to the present has shown itself to be a time in which Chinese is increasingly being employed – as I show in Chapters Two and Four - in government and law but in which English retains a strong presence in business and, to a lesser extent, in education.

In all periods of Hong Kong's recorded history, then, English has played an institutional role but not at a constant level in terms of participation of the population. The term 'institutional', therefore, requires modification for each historical period. I want to suggest that the role of English in the colonial period might be termed 'restricted institutional'; in the transitional period 'expanding institutional;' and in the post-colonial period 'diminishing institutional'

The constant of English as an institutional language must be set against the other historical linguistic constant which was discussed earlier in this section of the thesis – the use of Cantonese as the medium of social and domestic communication by 98% of the population. This factor has meant that, despite its constant institutional role, the form of English which has become, to use Quirk & Stein's (1990:43) term, "institutionalized" in Hong Kong diverges from standard forms of the language through clear inter-lingual influences of the Chinese language (see Bunton, 1991; Newbrook, 1991; Green, 1996 for linguistic characterizations of Hong Kong English). Hong Kong English is neither easily negotiable in international contexts of communication in English, nor is it generally recognized as a non-native-speaker or nativised variety (Luke & Richards, 1982:55; Li,

199:95). In fact, an exonormative approach is taken to establishing the correctness of the English used institutionally and, unsurprisingly, the norms referenced are those of standard British English.. Nevertheless, 'Hong Kong English' is one of the international varieties of English under investigation in the International Corpus of English project and was the focus of a recent special issue of an international journal of world Englishes (Bolton and Lim, 2000). The status of Hong Kong English, then, is clearly a matter of some contention.

Far less contentious is the claim that because of the dominance of a single common language among the vast majority of the population, Hong Kong has never had need of a lingua franca, and where English has been imposed on the population (as in the education system) the responses are frequently the common-sense ones of code mixing and switching between Chinese and English (Gibbons, 1887; Johnson, 1998; Swain & Johnson, 1997). In this connection, the work of Lin (1996:52) is of particular interest in that she sees switching between English and Cantonese as classroom participants' "pragmatic response to the symbolic domination of English in Hong Kong". Code mixing and switching are, among others, ways in which the widespread but shallowly learned status of English is maintained, and the resulting 'Hong Kong English' with its fossilized interlingual forms is the product of this situation.

To this point, I have been discussing broad issues of language and language use in Hong Kong society. In the next section, I narrow the focus of enquiry considerably to a discussion of the development of the individual Hong Kong bilingual.

### **1.5.2: The Hong Kong bilingual**

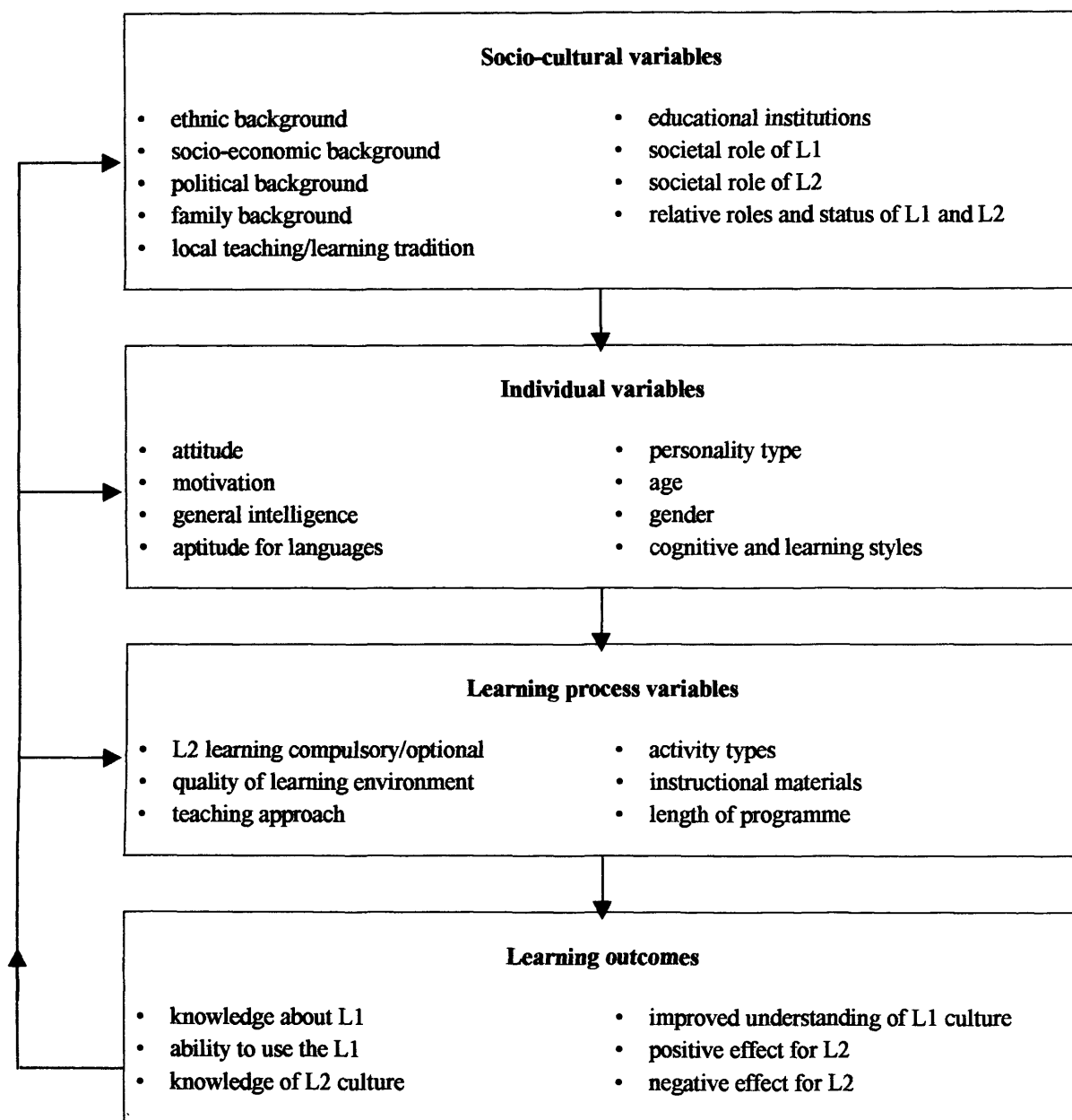
To understand the development of the Hong Kong bilingual, it is necessary to examine two vitally important and interrelated points: that while the government has been content to adopt a *laissez-faire* approach to the medium of instruction in Hong Kong's secondary schools, parents have consistently exhibited a vastly lower degree of disinterest

(see, for example, Tsui, 1992). Recognizing that English is the language of economic advancement and the lingua franca of international communication and trade, a majority of parents (and not just those from the articulate middle classes) have made it clear that they want their children to be educated in English medium secondary schools (primary schools officially employ Cantonese as their medium of instruction). It is also important to note that all eight universities in Hong Kong have a policy of delivering instruction through the medium of English.

However, because of the social and domestic dominance of Cantonese, most students fail to achieve a threshold level of proficiency in English which would allow them to study comfortably in English medium secondary and tertiary environments. The discomfort felt by many students in the bilingual situation in education has been characterized by Swain & Johnson (1997:171) as 'late immersion under stress'. The result of this unpreparedness to study through the medium of English is the pragmatic use by secondary school students and their teachers of Cantonese-English mix, but with reference being made to documents (syllabuses, instructional materials and examination papers) which, with very few exceptions, are written in English only. Similar practices of code mixing in the oral delivery of instruction - allied with reference to materials written in English - are also apparent in Hong Kong's tertiary institutions (Walters & Balla, 1998).

As Figure 1.1 below shows, there is a large number of variables which affect the outcomes of a bilingual education. When the restricted everyday societal role of English in Hong Kong is put together with rather negative learning process variables (learning English is compulsory, the physical learning environment is often poor and teaching approaches are rarely learner-centred) outcomes are predictably disappointing (Johnson & Cheung, 1992; Lai, 1996). These outcomes have in turn prompted the business community's strident criticisms of job applicants' English language standards (see, for example Lee & Lam, 1994; Au, 1997).

**Figure 1.1: socio-cultural, individual and learning process variables in bilingual contexts**



The effects on English language acquisition of the confused language situation in Hong Kong classrooms has been well illustrated by Johnson (1998:183). Johnson cites the very low levels of measured English reading and listening ability recorded by Hong Kong students in their third year of secondary schooling. Johnson points out that the top-scoring students in tests of English reading and listening scored marks equivalent to those of the weakest students in tests of Chinese reading and listening. In turn, the weakest students in

the Chinese tests scored roughly what could have been achieved purely by chance in the English test.

It is not only receptive language skills which appear to suffer in Hong Kong classrooms, productive skills development is also hindered. Johnson & Lee (1987) in a large-scale survey of third year secondary school students found that students were exposed to a great deal of Cantonese-English mix in most subjects and that this factor combined with other constraints such as large class size (typically forty students in a class) and the teachers' unwillingness to assign extensive speaking practice or writing tasks permit few opportunities for students to exercise and develop their expressive powers in English. Speaking practice is widely avoided because of the logistical problems involved in organizing such large numbers of students appropriately and extensive writing tasks are avoided because of the heavy marking load such activities generate.

Thus, while it may be argued that students receive through code mixing a strangely formulated but comprehensible form of input, they have few chances to formulate and express comprehensible output in English. Swain (1990:240) has argued that the importance of comprehensible output has been largely ignored in studies of second language acquisition and that lack of opportunity to express ideas in the second language and receive feedback on the clarity and correctness of that expression can inhibit the development of grammatical resources in the L2. Lin (1996:53) adds a further explanation for the poor development of English language skills in Hong Kong schools: she suggests that the main reason teachers use Cantonese in the classroom is to "annotate" key concepts and terms rather than establish bilingual knowledge of these items. Lin refers to this practice as "Cantonese-annotated English academic monolingualism".

The results of the government's laissez-faire attitude to language in education issues, parents' insistence on English medium instruction for their children, and teachers' and students' practical classroom compromises have naturally influenced or may even have

determined the predominant type of bilingualism found in Hong Kong. Hong Kong Chinese-English bilinguals have been characterized as falling overwhelmingly into the 'subtractive' category (Shek, Johnson & Law, 1991). Shek *et al* present a typology of bilingualism (first outlined by Cummins, 1981) in which four possible outcomes from a bilingual education are identified: the additive, the replacive, the subtractive and the preparatory. Where the result of a bilingual education is of the subtractive kind L2 proficiency is rarely achieved and general cognitive development may be hindered by the use of L2 to deliver subject content. L1 also suffers because the learner will have had too few opportunities to develop linguistic and cognitive skills in that language. The decline in Hong Kong students' L1 abilities may be evidenced in part by the well-attested decline in their ability to read Chinese as fluently as they read English (Tsui, 1992).

Some Hong Kong students do, of course, achieve admirably high levels of proficiency in both Chinese and English and when the linguistic disparities between the two languages, the lack of exposure to English and the complexity of the Chinese writing system are considered, such an achievement must be seen as a major intellectual triumph for the individual. It is also important to make clear - and in doing so I have surveys of university learners of English in mind (Biggs, 1998; Littlewood & Liu, 1996; Richards, 1993) - that negative attitude on the part of English learners appears not to be responsible for the poor linguistic outcomes discussed above. Social and cultural conditions tend to determine, however, that only a small number of individuals develop a high level of proficiency in English, while many accrue no benefits from their bilingual education - their L1, L2 and general educational levels are all lower than if they had been educated in a purely L1 medium.

Bilingual education always costs more than that delivered through the mother tongue and, for this reason, sound justifications have to be made to support the cost-effectiveness of a bilingual education policy. It is probably true to say that Hong Kong, as an international

financial centre and major tourist destination, does require some degree of bilingualism in the general population. The argument becomes more problematic, however, when bilingualism in education is considered and, in particular, whether English should be used as the medium of instruction or whether it should be taught as a separate subject. As I indicated earlier, the argument is further intensified in Hong Kong by the existence of cultural and educational conditions which tend to give rise to an unacceptably high level of subtractive bilingualism.

It was the existence of numerous "victims" of subtractive bilingualism which first prompted the Hong Kong government education department to suggest that a large proportion of Hong Kong secondary school students (about 70%) should be educated across the curriculum through Chinese and study English as a subject only. Only the 30% of students judged most able to benefit from the experience would be taught purely through the medium of English. This policy was formally implemented in 1999. As well as attempting to prevent the development of the subtractive form of bilingualism, this policy also aims to achieve a satisfactory level of preparatory bilingualism through the provision of lessons in which English is taught as a subject. Preparatory bilingualism is regarded as being of potential benefit for those students who will need to utilize English in their future studies or occupations. Since the policy to educate most young people through Chinese was only implemented in 1999, it is too early to comment on its impact on the quantity and quality of English used in the workplace. However, as Kennedy (1989) has pointed out the attempts to deliver curriculum subjects through the national language rather than English in Malaysia and the Philippines have led to a general decrease in English language proficiency in the populations of those countries and so a similar future effect may be expected for Hong Kong.

In an enlightening study comparing the bilingual situation in Canada with that in Hong Kong, Cummins & Swain (1986) explain a number of key differences between the

two settings. A major difference is that Canada has a positive policy of promoting and supporting English-French bilingualism. Canadian business also takes bilingualism seriously and supports and helps to implement language policy. A further and vitally important fact which supports and sustains bilingualism in Canada is that Canadian society is, by decree, integrationist in terms of its different ethnic populations; no matter what an individual's ethnic origins, he/she is first and foremost a Canadian. In terms of the variables and outcomes displayed in Figure 1.1 above, it is clear that Canada provides a far more positive language scenario than Hong Kong.

The *laissez-faire* approach to language education of the Hong Kong government (sustained over the 150 years of Hong Kong's development) stands in sharp contrast to the Canadian government's "hands on" approach to language policy formulation and implementation. The Hong Kong government, and indeed the Basic Law of the Special Administrative Region, has always recognized both Chinese and English as official languages in Hong Kong, but has rarely actively promoted bilingualism among the general population.

Another difference between the two societies is, of course, that Hong Kong is less culturally and linguistically diverse than Canada with, as indicated earlier, 98% of the population sharing the same L1. Also, in socio-cultural terms Hong Kong is essentially a 'dualist' society (Luke & Richards, 1982:51) in which the Cantonese-speaking and non-Cantonese-speaking populations rarely interact outside of the workplace. The motivation to develop a high level of L2 (English) proficiency (as a social *lingua franca*) is, therefore, low or non-existent and opportunities to practise the L2 outside academic institutions and certain workplaces are few. The situation delineated by Luke & Richards echoes Fishman's (1972) notion – itself derived from the pioneering work of Ferguson (1959) – of societies in which there exists 'diglossia without bilingualism'. Luke & Richards (1982:51), however, use the term 'societal bilingualism.'



Hong Kong is a case of societal bilingualism, in which two largely monolingual communities co-exist ... By societal bilingualism we mean that both the Chinese-speaking and English-speaking communities have access to almost all major social institutions in their own language and for the majority of both populations, little knowledge of the other's language is required.

At the time of writing, Luke and Richards may have been correct in speaking of "two largely monolingual communities", although it is doubtful that the Chinese population of Hong Kong was ever as solidly monolingual as the British expatriate one. A more accurate characterization of the situation perhaps is that proposed, without direct reference to Hong Kong, by Saville-Troike (1989:57), who writes of societies which are diglossic but not dinomic; that is, they are bilingual but not bicultural. In this conception, a society may have ready access to two languages but retains a single cultural orientation and identity. In my view, Hong Kong is a clear-cut example of diglossia without true bilingualism and without dinomia.

The final difference between the Canadian bilingual experience and that of Hong Kong lies perhaps in the nature of the two languages (L2s) under consideration, French and Chinese, and their relations to English. For most native speakers of English, French will present fewer learning problems than Chinese since many elements in the lexico-grammars of French and English are cognate. Native speakers of Cantonese find themselves in the same fortunate position when learning Putonghua. It is clearly much more challenging for native speakers of Cantonese to learn English, since the two languages belong to entirely unrelated language families and so share few formal similarities.

The ability of certain types of bilingualism (such as the subtractive variety) to impede the individual's cognitive development has not been fully demonstrated but Cummins & Swain (1986) argue that there is some evidence that, in certain circumstances, 'negative' bilingualism can have such an effect. Cummins & Swain stress the point that a certain threshold level of L2 proficiency has to be achieved for the learner to accrue the cognitive benefits of a bilingual education while at the same time avoiding the disadvantages. They go on to suggest that an effective bilingual education can help to

develop an individual's metalinguistic awareness, enrich concept formation, and stimulate divergent thinking abilities. These rewards are the result of learners in bilingual systems developing an analytical approach to language through the experience of organizing and expressing ideas and information in two languages.

It seems unlikely, however, that apart from a gifted minority, the Hong Kong bilingual will accrue the benefits just outlined. This is because proficiency in the L2 (English) tends rarely to reach the threshold level necessary for an individual to benefit from a bilingual education. Given the type of bilingualism which appears to be fostered by unhelpful cultural and educational factors in Hong Kong, it is not surprising that business leaders complain consistently and publicly about job applicants' generally poor standards of proficiency in both Chinese and English.

In this introductory chapter, I have attempted to present a broad context and sociolinguistic theoretical framework for the empirical study by investigating first the relative roles and statuses of Chinese and English in Hong Kong society and then the development of the Hong Kong bilingual. It was shown that the use of Cantonese as the mother tongue by 98% of the population throughout Hong Kong's development has had profound effects on how English is perceived, formulated and used. I have argued that the dominance of Cantonese in Hong Kong society has been partly responsible – together with factors such as the existence of separate media and social institutions for Chinese and English-speaking residents and the historically elitist status of English in key institutions and sectors of the economy - for the development of a form of English (Hong Kong English) which has limited international negotiability.

I presented a profile of the Hong Kong bilingual and suggested that the local context tends to foster the development of the subtractive form of bilingualism in which proficiency levels in both L1 and L2 suffer from the imposition of a bilingual education. Taken together, these factors have a considerable negative effect on the quality of both Chinese

and English as they are used in the workplace. This has led, in turn, to the employer criticisms voiced by, among others, Au (1997) and Lai (1996).

In the next chapter, a more directly diachronic approach is taken than was the case in the present chapter to providing a context for the empirical procedure which is at the heart of this study. In Chapter Two, I will first explore the role of language in Hong Kong's administrative, legal and commercial development before going on to narrow the focus of the enquiry further by reviewing and critically appraising existing studies of local workplace language use.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Language in Hong Kong's Development**

#### **2.1: Introduction**

Having discussed briefly the key roles of English and Chinese in Hong Kong society, the study will in this chapter focus on the use of the languages in the historical development of Hong Kong's economy and key institutions. The chapter attempts to contextualise the empirical study by, first, presenting a historical perspective on the role of English and how this influenced and was influenced by the development of the Hong Kong economy. The discussion then moves on to a consideration of institutional English language use *vis a vis* Chinese in administration, law and education in the crucial transitional period – the period which undoubtedly witnessed the making of modern Hong Kong.

For purposes of consistency, this discussion is based on the approach established in Chapter One of dividing the history of Hong Kong since the 1840s (when Hong Kong became a colony of Britain) into three broad periods: the colonial (1840s-early 1960s), the transitional (mid 1960s-1997), and the post-colonial (from 1998 onwards). The focus of the study narrows further in the final section of this chapter, which discusses previous surveys of language use in the professional workplace in Hong Kong.

#### **2.2: The role of English in Hong Kong's economic development**

Since the early years of British sovereignty, the use of English in business and the professions has been regarded as one of the keys to Hong Kong's economic development and prosperity. In the first century of colonial rule (1842-1941), when Hong Kong functioned as an entrepot for the China trade (Tsai, 1993), the importance of English in the administrative and legal domains, and in the flourishing commercial sector, provided a

strong inducement to career-minded Chinese to acquire a knowledge of the language, which they could put to work as clerks in government offices, or as interpreters or middlemen for foreign-owned companies based in Hong Kong (Smith, 1985). In order to facilitate the smooth conduct of government and business in the colony, and more generally to advance British political and economic interests in China, the colonial authorities sought to promote the study and use of English in Hong Kong society by devoting most of their resources to an elite group of English-medium schools under the auspices of either the government or various missionary bodies (Sweeting, 1990).

Although it was rarely stated explicitly, the primary aim of the colonial government's language policy during this period was to cultivate a corps of bilingual, British-oriented Chinese who, through their influence in the political and business domains, would help to bridge the vast linguistic and cultural gulf which separated the British governing class and the Chinese majority. Occasionally, however, the aim to cultivate such a corps of Chinese was only too explicit. Delivering a speech (reported in the *China Mail* of 30<sup>th</sup> January, 1880:3) at the colonial government's flagship school for local students, the Central School, the Governor, Sir Hercules Robinson, harangued the assembled student body thus:

There should be the importation in this institution of the best of English customs and English ideas. Hong Kong, boys, as you know, is a British colony and will always remain so, and the sooner the Chinese youth understands this thoroughly and understands that it will be better for his own interests not only to be loyal to Her Majesty the Queen and the British Empire, but to adopt what is best in European ideas and methods of thought, the more advantageous it will be for him.

In the post-World War II period, when Hong Kong was transformed from an entrepot into a leading industrial, business and financial centre (Liu, 1997), the use of English - together with such factors as its industrious and enterprising workforce, favourable investment environment, excellent communications, light-handed government, and the rule of law - has often been cited as one of the essential elements contributing to the territory's economic success. The ability of a significant percentage of Hong Kong's

workforce to communicate in English has proved an important factor in encouraging foreign corporations to establish offices in the territory.

As the territory's international profile has risen, this English ability has enabled Hong Kong companies to conduct business efficiently with partners and clients overseas. Although perhaps only a minority of workers needed to be proficient in English when Hong Kong's economy was dominated by entrepot-related activities (late 1940s-early 1950s) and manufacturing (late 1950s-1970s), the shift towards a service-oriented economy since the early 1980s has created the need for a much larger pool of linguistically proficient professionals, a need which - as was explained in Chapter One - the territory's hard-pressed education system has found difficult to meet.

The important role which English has been perceived to play in Hong Kong's economic development has been a significant influence on the formulation of language policy in education since 1945. Although at various times government-sponsored educational bodies supported the expansion of the Chinese-medium stream *vis a vis* the dominant English-medium stream (Education Commission 1963, 1984; Board of Education 1973; Llewellyn 1982), until the 1990s the government was reluctant to adopt these proposals on the grounds that any diminution in the role of English in Hong Kong education and society might undermine the territory's reputation as an international business centre.

Economic concerns have always dominated Hong Kong's development and English has been perceived to play an instrumental role in the successful functioning of the economy. It has also been largely perceived that the English-language needs of government, business and the professions have been an important influence on educational language policy and so it is perhaps surprising that little research has been conducted into the role of English in the professional workplace in Hong Kong. The paucity of empirical data did not, however, prevent the government launching in 1999 an expensive and widely publicized Workplace English Campaign; an initiative which has the dual aim of increasing

public awareness of the importance of English to the territory's economic well-being, and of enhancing business-related communication skills in the language. According to the chairman of the Workplace English Campaign, Michael Tien, a prominent Chinese businessman, any decline in the use or quality of English in the workplace would undermine the territory's ability to compete successfully on the international stage, and perhaps lead to the perception that Hong Kong was "just another Chinese city" (Regan, 29 February, 2000).

In keeping with other government-sponsored initiatives relating to language in Hong Kong society, the originators of the Workplace English Campaign take it as axiomatic that English is widely used in the business and professional domains, and thus regard English as an indispensable asset which the community should protect and promote. While there is no doubt that English has played an important role in the Hong Kong workplace, particularly in government and the upper echelons of the private sector, surprisingly little is known about the extent to which Chinese professionals and businesspeople use English in written and spoken communication in the course of their work. An ethnic Chinese middle class began to emerge in the 1960s and it was this class - born and educated in Hong Kong, proficient in English, and politically and economically influential - who were to break down the social divide which had separated the European and Chinese communities for the greater part of Hong Kong's history under British rule.

The acquisition of Hong Kong in the mid-nineteenth century was primarily motivated by the desire of British traders for a commercial base on the China coast, where the security offered by British administrative and legal institutions would provide the stable conditions in which trade in China could flourish (Endacott, 1964). In the first twenty years of colonial rule, there was a good deal of uncertainty over Hong Kong's long-term future as a British trading post (Welsh, 1993). Conditions in the colony were chaotic and unstable, lawlessness was a considerable problem, and as a result of the influence of the thousands of Chinese and European profiteers who flocked to the island after its cession to Britain Hong

Kong during this early period had much of the atmosphere of a freebooting frontier town (Legge, 1971). However, from the 1860s onwards, as the entrepot-based economy started to grow, Hong Kong gradually began to develop into an increasingly stable, well-ordered, though somewhat unusual society. Before the Pacific War, this society was made up of a small, but influential European community of officials, merchants and professionals, and a much larger Chinese community which ran the gamut of occupations from tycoon to coolie.

For the most part, the European community, which was divided into numerous non-associating cliques (Lethbridge, 1976), and the Chinese community, which was mainly transient and migratory in character, had little to do with each other. In the late 1850s, Governor Bowring observed that "the separation of the native population from the European is nearly absolute; social intercourse between the races wholly unknown" (cited in Endacott, 1973:122); forty years later Eitel (1895:i-ii) noted the "vast chasm" which separated the social life of the two communities. Such relations as existed between the Europeans and Chinese were mainly confined to business dealings, and were conducted in pidgin English (Brassey, 1879). These early observations on the existence of a separatist society were to be echoed a century later – as we saw in Chapter One – in Luke and Richard's (1982) conception of the dualistic nature of Hong Kong society.

As Lethbridge (1976) notes, although the social gulf between the two communities was beginning to narrow in the inter-war years, when an English-educated elite began to penetrate the European-dominated business and professional spheres, it was not until well into the post-World War II period that the Chinese community, through its newly emerged educated middle class, was able to attain positions of power and prestige in the colonial establishment, which since the 1840s had largely been the preserve of an oligarchy of British officials and taipans (Tsang, 1995).



### **2.2.1: Language, law and administration**

The declaration of sovereignty over Hong Kong in 1842 enabled the metropolitan government to introduce the constitutional arrangements by which the territory would be administered for the greater part of its colonial history. As in other Crown Colonies, government in Hong Kong was vested in a Governor, who was assisted and advised by an Executive Council (a policy-making cabinet), a largely rubber-stamp legislature composed of civil servants and government-appointed businessmen and professionals, and a bureaucracy whose higher echelons were dominated by British officials (Duncanson, 1988). The imposition of colonial rule also resulted in the importation of the English legal system to Hong Kong (Chen, 1989). An important consequence of the pre-eminence of the British in the political and legal domains was that, until well into the transitional period, English functioned as the principal language of government and the law (Chen, 1985).

Although the machinery of government remained firmly in expatriate hands throughout the colonial era, in order to maintain harmony in its relations with the Chinese community, the authorities sought to govern broadly in accordance with the wishes of an elite group of Chinese merchants and professionals who, because of their prestige in the Chinese community, were able to secure the co-operation of the masses for government policies. In the period before the Pacific War, the colonial government ensured that one or two manifestly pro-British members of this Chinese elite sat on the Executive and Legislative Councils (Cheng, 1969). As sessions of both Councils were conducted solely in English, proficiency in the colonial language - together with perceptions of "integrity" and "loyalty" - was a key consideration in the selection of Chinese members (Tsang, 1995).

### **2.2.2: Language in education**

The use of English in the executive, legislative and administrative domains of government, in the legal system, in the professions, and in the European-controlled

commercial sector created a demand for bilingual clerks, translators, interpreters, compradores, and other functionaries to work in the public and private sectors, and this in turn created a strong demand for formal instruction in the language. To satisfy the pragmatic demand for English teaching (and indirectly to anglicise a small section of the Chinese community), the colonial government allocated most of its limited educational budget to a small group of prestigious English-medium schools, whose curricula, methods and examinations reflected tradition and practice in England.

Despite the government's efforts to promote English education - a policy which inevitably resulted in the comparative neglect of the numerically larger Chinese-medium stream - reports on Hong Kong education during the colonial period invariably expressed dissatisfaction at the apparent failure of the English schools to produce a sufficiently large pool of highly proficient Chinese bilinguals (see, for example, Education Commission, 1882; Brewin *et al*, 1902; Burney, 1935).

As a knowledge of English (even a smattering) opened up potentially lucrative employment opportunities in government and business, students in Hong Kong's English stream tended to adopt a highly pragmatic attitude to their education, focusing on its medium rather than its content, and even then only superficially. This pragmatism on the part of students is reflected in the annual report for 1893 written by the headmaster of Victoria College (Wright, 10<sup>th</sup> March, 1894:119):

It would be an exaggeration to suppose that even one-tenth of the Chinese boys who attended this College do so with the object pure and simple of acquiring English education per se i.e. for the mental enlargement and other advantages to be derived from it. Before he can talk English plainly on any other subject, a boy at the bottom of the school will tell you that his aim is to get dollars, to raise his market value.

Although disappointment with English standards in Hong Kong education and society is a recurring theme in government reports in the colonial era (Evans, 2000), there is – as I indicated in Chapter One - a dearth of empirical evidence about the penetration of English in Hong Kong society before the onset of the transitional period.

### **2.3: Language in transitional Hong Kong: the changing roles and statuses of English and Chinese**

Despite the great changes which had characterised the territory's development in the preceding 120 years, as it entered the 1960s Hong Kong society still bore the imprint of the pre-1941 colonial era: an overwhelmingly Chinese society in which political and economic power, together with social and cultural prestige, was monopolised by an English-speaking expatriate and Chinese elite. This colonial society began to fragment in the mid-1960s. The beginnings of this fragmentation can be traced to the riots of 1966 and 1967, which exposed the fragile basis of the colonial regime's power and legitimacy (Scott, 1989), and the gulf which existed between the expatriate-dominated government and its Chinese subjects. According to the Commission of Inquiry into the 1966 riots, this gulf was partly caused "by difficulties arising from the fact that the language of the law and much of the administration is not understood by the bulk of the population" (cited in Miners, 1991:381). As Topley (1999:145) has recently observed, the civil disturbances of the mid-1960s proved to be a significant turning point in the development of Hong Kong society:

The outcome was a deeper appreciation by the Government of the qualities and loyalties of the people of Hong Kong, who themselves saw the government as working for the stability and prosperity which they wanted. It seemed that Hong Kong was developing a true sense of community to replace colonialism. Pressure was put on exclusive clubs to admit Chinese members. Socially and otherwise, Hong Kong would never seem the same again.

An early manifestation of the government's new attitude was the issuance of General Circular 13/68 by the Colonial Secretariat in 1968 requiring government departments to use Chinese in written communication with members of the public "who may not understand English" (cited in So, 1989:41). However, a far more significant development was the enactment - after a community-wide campaign in the early 1970s - of the Official Languages Ordinance in 1974, which declared English and Chinese to be "the official languages of Hong Kong for the purposes of communication between the Government or any public officer and members of the public" (cited in Chen, 1985:22). The enactment of the Official Languages Ordinance resulted in a steady increase in the use of Chinese in

public administration: reports, papers, announcements, notices, forms, and other types of externally-oriented documentation became available in both Chinese and English, while the introduction of simultaneous interpretation services enabled members of various councils, boards and committees to address meetings in either English or Cantonese.

The status of Chinese *vis a vis* English in the government domain was further enhanced by the signing in December 1984 of the Sino-British Joint Declaration, which marked the formal beginning of the colony's transition to Chinese rule. The Joint Declaration (1984:43) stipulated that "in addition to Chinese, English may also be used in organs of government and in the courts" of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, a provision which indicated that in the post-colonial period Chinese would be the primary official language (as English continued to be even after the passage of the Official Languages Ordinance), but also raised doubts as to the precise functions English would fulfil in the new era.

Another area of doubt concerned the ambiguity inherent in the word "Chinese", which the formulators of the Joint Declaration (like those of the Official Languages Ordinance and the Basic Law) chose not to define. Since 1974, the term "Chinese" has been interpreted as Cantonese, the mother tongue of the vast majority of Hong Kong people, and standard written Chinese, which is broadly the written form of Putonghua. However, if political circumstances change, and the high degree of autonomy which Hong Kong currently enjoys is eroded by an intrusive central government, there is no reason why the term "Chinese" could not be interpreted to mean Putonghua and the simplified form of written Chinese which is used in mainland China (Wesley-Smith, 1994).

### **2.3.1: Language use in the public sector**

Although the Official Languages Ordinance accorded English and Chinese equal status in external communications between the government and the general public, English

continued to the primary working language of the civil service before the transfer of sovereignty in 1997. In the mid-1990s, the government established a Working Group to examine the role of Chinese in the civil service, a surprisingly belated initiative given that Chinese had enjoyed co-official status since 1974 and would be the principal official language after the handover. In its description of existing government practices, the Working Group reported that English was the main medium of inter- and intra-departmental communication and records, despite the fact that by the mid-1990s most civil servants (even at the highest levels) were ethnic Chinese (Hong Kong Government, 1995; see also Chan, 1990).

In view of Hong Kong's impending retrocession to China, the Working Group recommended that the civil service make greater use of Chinese in day-to-day internal communication, particularly "when the parties to the communication are conversant in the language" (Hong Kong Government, 1995:14). How far the Working Group's recommendations have been implemented since the handover is not presently clear, however.

### **2.3.2: Language in the legislative and executive domains**

In the legislative domain, Cantonese was first used by Chinese councillors in 1972, but it was not until the final decade of British rule that the language became widely used in council proceedings (Yau, 1997). This shift in the roles of English and Cantonese reflected the changing nature and composition of the Legislative Council in the final years of the transition. In the earlier period, the predominance of English in the legislature stemmed from the fact that its membership was restricted to senior (mainly British) civil servants and a small group of government-appointed (mainly Chinese) businessmen and professionals, whose sympathies and interests largely coincided with those of the colonial administration.

The introduction of a measure of democracy in the final stages of the transitional period - tentatively in the mid-1980s, rather more enthusiastically in the 1990s - resulted in the influx of a significant number of directly elected councillors, who quickly politicised the traditionally acquiescent chamber. Since they were accountable to an overwhelmingly Chinese electorate, most directly elected members chose to use Cantonese in order to emphasise solidarity with their constituents, although on occasions pro-democracy legislators would use English if they wished to reach out to an international audience (via the media) on issues such as human rights and democratic development. As the 1990s unfolded, the use of Cantonese also became increasingly common among appointed and indirectly elected councillors and officials (Yau 1997). Since the handover, proceedings in the legislature have mainly been conducted in Cantonese, although a handful of Chinese members continue to use English to ask questions and participate in debates.

Unlike the Legislative Council, it must be assumed that English continued to be the sole medium of communication in the Executive Council during the transitional period. Since the handover, deliberations in the Executive Council have been conducted mainly in Cantonese, although according to an official in the Executive Council Secretariat, briefing papers are prepared in English and Chinese, and certain agenda items are occasionally discussed entirely in English (personal communication, May 2000).

### **2.3.3: Language in the legal system**

Although the riots of the mid-1960s had been partly attributed to widespread ignorance of the language of the law, it was not until the late 1980s that the government began to address the critical issue of language in Hong Kong's traditionally monolingual legal system. While the preservation of the legal system was a central objective of British negotiators prior to the signing of the Joint Declaration, it is questionable whether the transplanted English system had been just and efficient in the Hong Kong context. In a

recent article on language rights and the Hong Kong courts, Cheung (1997:51) points out that

Colonial subjects were governed by a law that they could hardly read or comprehend. Legislative debates were conducted in a language alien to the majority of the people. Defendants in criminal cases did not have the right to fully understand the trial. The resulting language barrier made a complete mockery of the common law legal system which was supposed to uphold the cardinal legal principles of accessibility and equality.

In fact, it was only in the final years of colonial rule that the first tentative steps were taken in the direction of a bilingual legal system. Until 1995, English was the sole language of proceedings in the higher courts. In cases where a party or witness was not able to give evidence in English, a court interpreter would translate from English into Cantonese, and vice versa. However, counsels' addresses to the jury, and the judge's summing up, directions to the jury and judgement would not be translated. As Chen (1989) has observed, in cases involving non-English speakers, justice, even if actually done, was hardly seen to be done.

Since December 1995, proceedings in the higher courts have been conducted in English or Chinese (according to the preferences of the various participants), and this has resulted in the increased use of Cantonese (Cheung, 1997), although it would seem that at present English continues to be the dominant language of the courts. Perhaps the most notable development in the legal domain in the final decade of British rule was the enactment and publication of new legislation in both English and Chinese (starting in the late 1980s), and the huge and complex task of translating existing legislation into Chinese (Zhao, 1997).

#### **2.3.4: The medium of instruction: policy and practice**

In the early 1960s, education in Hong Kong exhibited many of the characteristics of the "dual" system which had emerged in the first century of colonial rule. This system was organised into two linguistically and culturally distinct streams: an Anglo-Chinese stream

which offered a academic/literary education through the medium of English, and a Chinese-medium stream which looked to the Chinese mainland for its curricula, methods and materials (So, 1992). As the enrolment figures in Table 2.1 below reveal (Education Department, 1955-97), in 1955 a reasonable balance existed within the English stream at primary and secondary levels, and between the English and Chinese streams at secondary level.

However, from the mid-1960s onwards the English-medium secondary stream expanded rapidly at the expense of the Chinese stream, with the result that by the end of the British period over 90% of students were attending schools where the *de jure* medium of instruction was English. While this dramatic shift towards English might appear to run counter to the general trend away from English in other domains, in practice the usual mode of oral instruction and interaction in most Anglo-Chinese secondary classrooms involved – as indicated in Chapter One - mixing and switching between Cantonese - the predominant spoken language - and English - which continued to be the language of instructional materials, assignments and examinations (Johnson & Lee, 1987; Lin, 1990, 1996; Johnson, 1991; Shek *et al.*, 1991).

**Table 2.1: enrolments at primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong (1955-1997)**

Year	Primary Schools		Secondary Schools	
	English-medium	Chinese-medium	English-medium	Chinese-medium
1955	18,920	167,814	24,313	21,105
1960	38,587	338,805	44,284	24,601
1965	56,135	546,524	92,481	43,338
1970	64,596	678,783	145,849	45,226
1975	48,153	625,647	240,391	60,812
1980	Not available	Not available	371,282	55,376
1985	40,748	491,599	358,928	37,556
1990	37,667	447,668	388,951	35,293
1997	32,516	415,987	421,573	25,573

The main reason for this shift from English to Cantonese was the introduction of universal secondary education in the late 1970s, which brought into the traditionally elite



Anglo-Chinese stream large numbers of unacademic students, who understandably found it difficult to cope with an unadapted, grammar-school curriculum in English. Given the academic and psychological problems experienced by many students in the English-medium stream, it was perhaps inevitable that teachers in all but the most prestigious schools would have to use Cantonese in order to make English teaching materials accessible and motivating (Johnson, 1994).

In the past decade, a similar shift appears to have occurred at tertiary level, where (notwithstanding the English-only policy) lectures, seminars and tutorials are often conducted in Cantonese (Flowerdew *et al.*, 1998; Walters & Balla, 1998). Although mixed-mode teaching has been defended by some academics (e.g. So 1992), in the past decade it has been identified by the Education Commission and Education Department as the main cause of the alleged "decline" in English standards, an issue which has been a source of dissatisfaction in the public and private sectors since the 1970s. It was the desire to eliminate mixed-mode instruction, and thereby ensure the consistent use of English or Chinese as teaching media, which led the outgoing British regime to formulate the policy to require around three-quarters of Hong Kong's Anglo-Chinese schools to switch to Chinese, while allowing an elite group of 114 schools to retain English as the medium of instruction (Education Commission, 1990; Education Department, 1989). Although criticized for being divisive and discriminatory, the new scheme was implemented soon after the handover (Education Department, 1997), and thus formalised at the policy level the unofficial shift from English to Cantonese which had been going on in Hong Kong classrooms for much of the transitional period.

### **2.3.5: Language use and language standards**

The controversial policy to retain an elite English-medium stream seems to have been formulated (at least in part) in response to pressure in the late 1980s from Hong Kong's

business and professional communities, who complained that the unsatisfactory English levels of many secondary and tertiary graduates were undermining the performance of the business sector (Poon, 1992). While acknowledging that the education system bears the prime responsibility for enhancing language standards, the private sector has nevertheless been proactive in attempting to improve the quality of workplace English, most notably by the establishment of the Hong Kong Language Campaign in 1988. In a speech to a business symposium in 1990, a leading figure in the Language Campaign, Brian Renwick (cited in Hirvela, 1991:133), set out the English-language needs of the private sector:

We need school leavers who understand what they hear ... We need graduates who can write simple sentences and paragraphs, and whose vocabulary includes important commercial words ... We need particularly, school leavers with some confidence and ability in using the telephone.

The launching of the Workplace English Campaign in early 2000, with aims almost identical to those of the Language Campaign, suggests that these basic needs are still not being met and, more generally, that the education system has failed to arrest the alleged "decline" in English standards. However, what seems to have been overlooked in the debate about low English standards is the language-related data from censuses and other surveys conducted in the past three decades, which show a significant increase in the number and proportion of Hong Kong Chinese who have a knowledge of English. For example, sociolinguistic surveys carried out at Hong Kong University between 1983 and 1993 reveal a marked increase in the percentage of people who claim to be bilingual (from 32% to 56.7%) and who claim to know English "quite well" (from 4.8% to 26.6%) (Bacon-Shone & Bolton, 1998:76-77).

These findings indicate that the trend towards increasing bilingualism which was becoming apparent at the end of the "colonial" period (i.e. 1960s) accelerated rapidly during the "transitional" period (i.e. 1970s-1990s). However, during the same period, it was widely perceived that standards of English in education and the workplace were declining. The source of this paradox appears to lie in the gulf that has emerged in the past three decades

between the needs of society and the number of people with the linguistic skills to meet those needs. This gulf between supply and demand has evolved as a result of the shift in the role of English in Hong Kong since the 1960s. During this period English has changed from being a purely colonial language, whose use was restricted to the small class of "linguistic middlemen", to an important medium of wider communication for perhaps the majority of professionals and other white-collar workers.

This transformation in the role of English has been a function of Hong Kong's economic development in the past three decades; from an emphasis on labour-intensive manufacturing industries, in which the majority of workers had little need for English, to a focus on service-oriented industries, which in many cases required personnel to possess highly sophisticated communication skills in the language. Since this economic transformation coincided with the shift from an elite to a mass education system, it was inevitable that the gap between supply and demand would widen, and that English standards would be perceived to be declining. While there is no doubt that the shift towards a service-oriented economy has placed increasingly high linguistic demands on Hong Kong's professional workforce, surprisingly little is known about the precise nature of these demands. As the next section reveals, language planners and policy makers have been able to draw on only a small body of research into language use in the professional workplace.

#### **2.4: Studies of language use in the professional workplace**

In his recent update of Luke & Richards' (1982) seminal study of English in Hong Kong, Li (1999) devotes one section of his article to an overview of language use in the post-1997 workplace. Li (1999:76) claims that

... in general the kinds of skills needed for English in the workplace are more receptive than productive and, where productive skills are required, needs for writing far exceed those of speaking.

In this respect, Li argues that little has changed from the situation described by Luke & Richards, who claimed that the need for productive language skills in the employment

sector is quite restricted. In his review, Li also reaffirms Luke & Richards' contention that the need for English in the employment sector varies according to the demands of particular occupations and professions.

While the work of Luke & Richards and Li provides a valuable contribution to our perceptions of what English is likely to be used for in the Hong Kong workplace, it can be argued that their statements are pitched at a high level of generality and so are unable to fine tune our understanding of, for example, English language use in different sectors of the economy, or to help us to identify when Chinese is as likely to be used as English for a particular occupational purpose. Luke & Richards and Li, then, present what are essentially conclusions based on expert consideration of the literature rather than findings derived from empirical research. Of course, the limited reference to empirical studies in these two important studies simply reflects the surprising paucity of published research into language use in the employment domain.

In fact, Luke & Richards (1982:53) do cite one (unpublished and now apparently unobtainable) survey of workplace language use: a large-scale questionnaire survey conducted by Westcott (1979) for the British Council. Westcott's study involved a random sample of 3,784 subjects. He found that only 14% of his subjects regularly used spoken English at work and many reported that they were required to do little writing. When writing was required, however, nearly 70% stated that English was the most frequently used language.

Another finding from the British Council survey which was cited in the literature of the 1980s (see, for example, Cheung, 1984:277-278) was the apparent connection between knowledge of English and financial mobility:

More than three-quarters (76.7%) of the lowest income group had no or very little English while almost the same percentage (78.1%) of the highest income group had a good to excellent command of English. There seems to be a directional correlation between income levels and degrees of bilingualism. The more proficient one is in English, the more likely he is to find a well-paid job.

The British Council study was part of a wider survey of language use and proficiency in Hong Kong in the 1970s. The following decade saw the publication of a number of studies which focused exclusively on language use and needs in the professional workplace. As part of his doctoral thesis, So (1984) investigated the roles of English and Chinese in 35 Hong Kong companies in the early 1980s (i.e. before the signing of the Joint Declaration by Britain and China on Hong Kong's post-1997 governance), and found that English was the main medium of written business communication, while Cantonese tended to be the predominant language of spoken communication.

In 1989, Poon (1992) conducted a survey (by means of questionnaires and interviews) of the language needs of professional accountants and company administrators in Hong Kong's business sector. Poon, who distributed 2,000 questionnaires and achieved a return rate of around 25%, found that her subjects reported that English was the usual medium of written workplace communication (e.g. letters, reports, memos, agendas, minutes, contracts). Although written Chinese apparently had an important role (alongside English) in press statements and releases, overall the professionals surveyed by Poon claimed that they had little need to use written Chinese for formal professional purposes. In the area of spoken communication, English was found to play an important (though not dominant) role in more formal situations, such as presentations, negotiations and interviews, whereas Cantonese was the unmarked language choice for informal interactions, such as staff briefings and work-related socialising.

The continued importance of English in written communication led Poon to conclude that the approach of 1997 had not influenced the nature of workplace language use. Similar conclusions were drawn by So (1998) following his questionnaire survey of 347 middle-management personnel from three Hong Kong companies operating in unrelated fields. So's (1998) findings – that English was the unmarked option for all written communication with Cantonese as the unmarked option for both internal and

external spoken communication - were broadly in line with those of earlier surveys by So (1984) and Lai (1988). However, given what is now known about language in the 1984-1997 phase of the transitional period - and in particular the belated moves towards bilingualism in the administrative and legal domains - it is perhaps not surprising that there was little change in business practices in the period between the Sino-British agreement and Poon's study. Any shift from English to Chinese in written communication might be expected to take much longer than five years to accomplish. With this in mind, perhaps a more reliable gauge of the impact of the transition on the roles of English and Chinese in the private sector is Evans' (1999a) questionnaire-based study of language use in the construction industry, which was conducted some months before the handover.

The 150 engineers surveyed by Evans (1999a) reported that English was the primary language of record and formal communication, while written Chinese was apparently restricted to informal communication and bilingual documents such as notices, circulars and newsletters. In a related study, Evans (1999b) found that practitioners in the construction industry tended to spend more time reading workplace documents in English than writing in English, which confirms Luke & Richards' and Li's impression that the Hong Kong workplace places greater demands on receptive rather than productive skills. However, Evans' (1999b) subjects also reported that they were required to write faxes, letters, memos and reports in English on a regular basis, which (at least as far as writing is concerned) casts doubt on Luke & Richards' and Li's claim that the need for productive skills is quite restricted in the employment domain.

In the area of oral communication, Evans's (1999a,b) subjects reported that Cantonese was the unmarked language option for everyday spoken communication (e.g. discussions, telephoning, socialising), although it would seem that spoken English did have a role to play in more formal contexts such as seminars and presentations, and in situations such as business meetings where non-Cantonese speakers were present. Although the

studies of Evans and Poon focused on different professions and were carried out at different times in the transition, their findings are broadly similar, which may indicate that in the 1984-1997 transitional period the roles of English and Chinese in the private sector remained fundamentally unchanged.

Certainly, the past decade has seen an increase in scholarly interest in various aspects of workplace communication relevant to Hong Kong: Bilbow (1997) and Rogerson-Revell (1999) on intercultural aspects of business meetings; Bhatia (1993) on genre in professional settings; Du-Babcock (1998) on code-mixing in business meetings of Cantonese native speakers; Li & Mead (2000) on the specific English language needs of Cantonese native-speaking textile and clothing merchandisers, and Forey & Nunan (forthcoming, 2001) on the use of English in the field of accountancy in Hong Kong. Forey & Nunan's work, which focuses on written communication, is a good example of what can be achieved when academic researchers seek and receive cooperation of very high quality from a professional body (in this instance, the influential Hong Kong Society of Accountants, the HKSA) and, thus, avoid the issues of access which so often make workplace language field research problematic.

Working through the agency of the HKSA, Forey & Nunan surveyed by questionnaire and selective interviews slightly more than 1,000 subjects working either in public accountancy firms or commercial organizations and found that nearly 50% of senior and slightly more than 60% of junior accountants spend 15 hours or more per week writing in English – producing mostly financial reports, letters and memos. Forey & Nunan also cite an interesting statement from one of their interviewees on the uses of Chinese and English – a statement which is discussed in Chapters Four and Six and which resonates with focus group and language log feedback:

In the past, it seems that English is the only important means of communication, but now Chinese – Putonghua – is important too. It is changing now – there are a lot of investments in China, so we must communicate with them in Chinese. But we still have to write in English internally.

The studies reported above are important contributions to our knowledge of language use, but they are all specialist, either in the sense of focusing on one aspect of workplace communication or drawing their data from single professional fields. There is still a dearth of up-to-date information on broad patterns of language use in the public and private sectors in Hong Kong. In particular, there is a clear need for multi-faceted, macro-level studies to provide the "big picture" that is inevitably lacking in the profession-specific studies which have hitherto dominated research in Hong Kong.

The study described in the chapters which follow investigates the functions of English, Cantonese and standard written Chinese in the public and private sectors and in five key professional areas. The study was designed to meet the demonstrated need for macro-level data on workplace language use in Hong Kong.



## **Chapter Three**

### **Design of the study**

#### **3.1: Introduction**

In this central chapter of the thesis, I discuss the various data collection methods, both quantitative and qualitative, employed to achieve triangulation in the study. Data collection methods included a large-scale questionnaire survey of 3,019 subjects, interviews with a mixed-profession focus group, and case studies involving single individuals drawn from the five professional areas central to the study. The questionnaire design, piloting and administration exercises are discussed first and in some detail since the questionnaire survey was the primary means of gathering data for the study.

A rationale is then presented for the inclusion of a focus group interview in the study to gather information on the use of both English and Chinese in the workplace. Following this, the discussion focuses on the role played by the individual case study participants with regard to collecting data on their use of English specifically. I then develop a demographic profile of the research population and go on to present an explanation of the sampling procedures employed in the study. In the penultimate section of the chapter, I discuss in some detail the process constraints experienced in carrying out the relatively complex multi-method approach to data collection. In the final section of the chapter, I discuss fundamental ethical issues raised in the research and how these issues were addressed.

#### **3.2: Data collection: a multi-method approach**

A multi-method approach was taken to data collection in order to achieve triangulation. Triangulation of the “between methods” type used in this study involves using more than a single method to investigate a particular phenomenon. In using more than a single method, researchers strive to increase the validity of research outcomes. An approach to data gathering which combines methods is particularly useful, as Cohen & Manion (1994:239) point out, in studies “where a complex phenomenon requires

elucidation.” Since the present study is indeed concerned with the investigation of a complex phenomenon – different modes of language use within multiple professional areas – I decided to adopt a multi-method approach to the gathering of data.

The approach has the great advantage of permitting both qualitative and quantitative data to be gathered, which permits in turn the cross-checking of data derived by the different means. Thus, for example, the study gathers baseline quantitative data through the administration of a questionnaire-based survey, but focus group feedback is employed in an attempt to gain corroboration from members of the linguistic community under investigation that the researcher’s conclusions are consistent, at least in part, with perceptions within the community itself. Qualitative data are also drawn from a second source: that of individual participants who agreed to keep a “language log” to record their use of English in the workplace over the course of a single typical working week.

In designing the study, I decided that a purely quantitative approach to data gathering would be less likely than a combinatorial approach to yield insights into the phenomena under investigation. However, a purely qualitative approach to language use in the workplace – conducted perhaps through interviews and case studies alone – might well raise questions of validity in a large-scale study such as the one under discussion here. There are two main reasons for this uncertainty. First, quantitative measures, correctly applied, have the potential to allow the researcher to detect patterns and trends which would probably not be discernible – at least, not quickly or clearly so – in the results of qualitative methods. Saville-Troike (1989:184) makes this point with exceptional clarity “... the use of quantitative measures may allow the discovery of patterning in situations which might otherwise merely be seen as random variation.”

My second supporting point for a predominantly quantitative approach in studies such as the present one is that quantitative methods permit, in theory anyway, the generalisation of research inferences to wider populations and in so doing increase the

external validity of a study (Brown, 1995:40). Whether inferences may ultimately be generalisable depends largely, of course, on the representativeness of the researcher's sampling and on the quality of any statistical analyses - factors which are discussed later in this chapter - but the point holds that quantitative methods have a greater potential than the qualitative to bring qualities of objectivity, verifiability and replicability to a study.

It was for these reasons that I decided to collect baseline data by conducting a questionnaire survey and to use the focus group interview and case studies essentially as means of illuminating and corroborating particularly interesting - or contentious - aspects of the analysed baseline data. The study reported here, then, employs a multi-method approach within which the orientation is primarily quantitative and the main data-gathering instrument is a questionnaire. This is in keeping with the aim (stated in Chapter One) to present a broad, multi-profession-based depiction of local workplace language use – a picture not presently available in the literature.

That said, I make no attempt to downplay the explanatory power of qualitative methods. Qualitative methods such as focus group interviews and case studies not only allow for the elucidation and elaboration of quantitative data, they also permit the voices of the subjects to be heard and in so doing reduce the abstractness of research. Qualitative methods, then, have the power to humanise research and, very importantly, bring the real world (the context of the phenomena under investigation) closer for the researcher. This is an important consideration in the present study when, as I explain later in this chapter, access to the workplace is extremely problematic and renders direct observation unfeasible.

The role of qualitative methods in the study, then, cannot be downplayed and neither can the potential drawbacks of quantitative approaches be ignored. I pointed out earlier in this section that a quantitative approach to data gathering such as a questionnaire survey has the potential to increase the external validity of a study, but in fact this is only true if it provides a firm base for internal validity by limiting the variables involved only to those

relevant to the study. Uncontrolled variance will render results which are less generalisable – as indeed will unrepresentative sampling and inappropriate statistical analyses of the gathered data (Hatch & Farhady, 1982:7). The internal validity of a questionnaire-based study is increased when the design of the instrument is respondent-friendly and attempts to reduce potential completion errors.

### **3.2.1: Questionnaire design and piloting**

In designing the questionnaire for this study, I bore in mind Davidson's advice (Davidson, 1970, cited in Cohen & Manion, 1994:92):

Questionnaire design must minimize potential errors for respondents and coders. And since peoples' participation in surveys is voluntary, a questionnaire has to help in engaging their interest, encouraging their co-operation, and eliciting answers as close as possible to the truth.

An initial self-completion questionnaire (see Appendix I) was developed and piloted in a sub-sample of 60 subjects (12 representatives from each of the 5 key professional areas under scrutiny) between late April and early May, 1999. This instrument consisted of four main sections. The first section (Personal Information) aimed to elicit demographic data on subjects' gender, age, highest academic level achieved, years of experience working in their profession, current position in their employing organisation, and type of employing organisation. The second section (Language Use in the Workplace) was designed to discover which communication tasks are carried out in Chinese and which in English.

This section was divided into two sub-sections: one on Written Communication and the other on Spoken Communication. Respondents were required to place themselves on a six-point frequency scale ranging from at one end of the continuum "always English" through the mid-point of "some situations English, some situations Chinese" to at the other end of the continuum "not required to read/write this type of document" or "not required to speak/listen in this situation". Respondents who chose the mid-point on the scale were

asked to give upto three reasons behind the choice of language for producing particular documents or interacting in particular situations.

The third section of the questionnaire (Use of English in the Workplace) set out to gather information on the use of English specifically in workplace settings – a particular focus of the study and one which was discussed in Chapter One. This section was divided into three sub-sections *viz.* Writing in English, Reading in English, and Speaking/Listening in English and subjects were asked to respond to the items in this section by placing themselves on a six-point frequency scale ranging from “never” through the mid-point of “sometimes (once or twice per month) to “always” (almost every day). The fourth and final section (Self-assessment of Communication Skills in the Workplace) was intended to elicit subjects’ self-perceptions of their levels of ability to use English to produce text types common across professional settings and also in a range of common situations demanding the use of speaking and listening skills. The rationale for including this section is discussed later in this chapter.

For this final section, respondents were asked to refer to a six-point scale ranging from “poor” through the mid-point of “satisfactory” to “excellent”. After completing the questionnaire, ten members of the piloting population were asked to give face-to-face group oral feedback to the researcher. The agreement of this sub-set of the pilot population to provide feedback had been sought and gained a week before the administration of the prototype questionnaire. The feedback session was held immediately following the completion of the questionnaire to sample opinion while the instrument was salient in the minds of respondents.

My first question to piloting respondents concerned the comprehensibility of the questionnaire items and whether Chinese translations of each item should be provided in parallel with the English versions. Respondents stated unanimously that there was no need to provide Chinese translations and indeed one respondent pointed out that translating items

such as “letter of complaint” and even “interview” into Chinese would require long and clumsy circumlocutions and that such English terms were used quite naturally – and in preference to their Chinese equivalents - by native speakers of Cantonese in conversation.

Feedback then focused on the length of the questionnaire and the time required to complete it. The final version of the questionnaire (see Appendix II) is shorter by forty items than the piloted prototype and this radical modification reflects strong respondent criticism of the time required to complete the prototype - on average about 25 minutes. This was clearly too long to retain participants’ concentration and so elicit optimally accurate responses. The need to reduce the number of items demanded identification and deletion of redundant or misleading elements on the questionnaire and in this exercise respondents were unanimous in their recommendation to remove the entire final section on self-assessment of communication skills in the workplace. Respondents’ comments revolved around a fundamental issue of coherence: they failed to see the connection between the final section and those which preceded it, which were clearly designed to collect demographic data and information on language use in the workplace. In fact, I had originally included the self-assessment section to facilitate a future correlational study of perceived language ability and the need to carry out particular workplace communication tasks in English.

Participants’ feedback was valuable, then, in raising my awareness that I was attempting to pursue incompatible objectives within the same study. In particular, I was in danger of introducing a new variable – a self-measure of ability in English - not directly related to the central issue of the study. I mentioned earlier in this section that questionnaire-based research has the potential to increase the external validity of a study, but this is only true if it provides a firm base for internal validity by limiting the variables involved only to those relevant to the study. With this important point in mind, I decided not to include the section on self-assessment of English language ability in the final version of the questionnaire.

A further modification to the prototype questionnaire involved the section which aimed to elicit personal information data from respondents. Eight of the ten informants in the piloting focus group pointed out that only reticence engendered by being part of a large piloting group had prevented them from asking the researcher during the completion process exactly what information was being sought by items 5 and 6 in this initial section. These items were intended, respectively, to gather information on respondents' current position (seniority) within their employing organisation and on the basic nature of their organisation (e.g. civil service, private company etc.).

Feedback allowed me to see that in fact the items were too loosely phrased and in the final version of the questionnaire information on seniority was elicited by subjects placing themselves on a three-point scale: junior, middle, and senior; information on the basic nature of the employing organisation was gathered in three categories: government, government-related, and private; ownership of the organisation was categorised as Hong Kong-owned, China-owned, or foreign-owned and, finally, data on the size of respondents' organisation was elicited in the categories of small (fifty employees or fewer), medium-sized (fifty-one to one hundred employees) and large (more than one hundred employees).

Other, more minor, modifications included changes to the first part of the second section of the questionnaire – that dealing with written communication. In the feedback session which followed the piloting of the questionnaire, a number of informants pointed out that they were quite frequently asked to read and complete forms and consult and create records in English. I acted on this information by incorporating these text types into the final version of the questionnaire and, at the same time and following informants' advice that they found it difficult to distinguish between the two, I merged the separate items of "journals" and "magazines" (see item 21 in the final version of the questionnaire). The final change to this part of the section was to delete the separate item of "instructions". As informants pointed out, sets of instructions are commonly found within user manuals and

for this reason, the category of “manuals” but not that of “instructions” appears in the final version of the questionnaire.

Informants also suggested some changes to the part of this section which asked respondents to give up to three reasons which determine the choice of language in reading and writing particular documents and in speaking and listening in particular situations - Items 22 C and D in the prototype questionnaire. Item 22 C proved to be difficult for informants to respond to meaningfully since most simply did not know whether or not English is the main language of communication in their profession.

Item 22 D was deemed problematic because informants felt that, as Hong Kong-born native speakers of Chinese, it would be extremely unlikely that their English would be better than their Chinese language skills. Given that Hong Kong people undertaking programmes of tertiary education and training are likely to have received about thirteen years of prior formal instruction in English – instruction which exhibits a reading and writing emphasis – I remained somewhat unconvinced by the informants’ response with regard to writing. It is perfectly possible for a Hong Kong professional’s written English to be superior in quality to his/her standard written Chinese. However, I became concerned that the whole research population might be puzzled by this item and so it does not appear in the final version of the questionnaire. The deletion of these two items allowed me to introduce as replacements two items which I realized needed to be included in order to gather data on intra- and inter-company language use (see items 27 C and H in the final version of the questionnaire).

Minor changes were made to the second part of the prototype questionnaire’s second section on spoken communication. My informants advised me that I should add a further type of interview to the inventory of speech situations – that of “appraisal interview”, which I was assured is an important genre of interaction in the Hong Kong workplace. This addition was duly incorporated and I made two further changes of my own to this sub-



section. First, item 28 on the prototype seemed to me to lack clarity; it is not clear if the item is referring to work-related or non-work-related socializing – and since most of the latter will almost certainly be carried out in Cantonese – I decided to focus on work-related speaking and this is represented as “discussing work with colleagues” in the final version (see item 32).

This change prompted a further one and this concerned item 31 - “socializing”. As the item stood, the physical context of such interaction was not clear as to whether it referred to socializing within or outside the workplace. Also, any differences in meaning between “chatting” (item 28) and “socializing” were hardly obvious. Ultimately, this problem was solved by adopting the phrasing “socializing with colleagues outside work” (see item 35 in the final version of the questionnaire).

Those respondents who opted for the mid-point of “some situations English, some situations Cantonese” were asked to choose three reasons from a list of ten possible reasons for their choice of language. This represented the researcher’s attempts to identify situations which prompt the use of the two languages. Most of my informants recommended that I delete items 33 C and D in this speaking-related sub-section – the same deletions they had recommended when reviewing the earlier sub-section on language choice in written communication. I complied with both recommendations and was entirely happy to do so since I felt that the reasoning behind the recommendation to delete 33 D (“my English is better than my Cantonese”) was far more compelling for speaking than for writing. In this sub-section and unprompted by feedback, I also made the same deletions and insertions that I had made in the earlier subsection on written communication in order to investigate spoken language use in intra- and inter-company communication.

More radical changes in questionnaire content become immediately apparent if the third section (on use of English in the workplace) of the two versions of the questionnaire are compared. In the prototype, I offered a reasonably refined choice of genres and sub-

genres so that, for example, the main category of letters was divided into eight sub-categories ranging from letters of complaint to arrangement letters. Similarly, reports were divided into eight major types. Other text types were assigned to a separate category (see items 34-60 on the prototype questionnaire). This presentation – designed to elicit relatively refined data – was heavily criticized by informants in the feedback session. The main criticism was that few respondents could be expected to know what the different types of letters and reports were exactly. I had anticipated this kind of problem when designing the questionnaire and had, for example, avoided the use of opaque terms such as letter of adjustment or status reports. The criticism was compelling, however, and I decided to adopt a different approach to eliciting data on writing purposes in English in the final version of the questionnaire.

I first listed major text types such as letters, reports and memos and asked respondents how often they were required to produce the different types, but the following item asked respondents to identify the main reasons for writing letters, memos, faxes and e-mails in English at work e.g. to complain, to confirm, to arrange etc. The next item on the questionnaire asked for information on the types of reports written in English at work e.g. progress, feasibility, recommendation etc (see items 39-52 on the final questionnaire). This new presentation of items was, I believe, quite an effective response to informants' criticisms.

The next sub-section (that on reading in English) was modified in line with those changes recommended earlier for written communication to include "records" and "forms" and the merging of "journals" and "magazines" to form a single item (see items 66, 68 and 70 on the final questionnaire). In the sub-section on speaking and listening in English, I incorporated the changes recommended earlier for spoken communication (see items 76 and 79 on the final questionnaire).

The questionnaire finally employed in the study and administered in October, 1999, consisted of 80 items which were arranged within a reasonable respondent-friendly format in that the instrument refers to constructs familiar to participants: the four language skills and common workplace text types and situations and, unlike the prototype version, includes filters to expedite the completion process (see, for example, items 6 and 8 in the final version). The completion process was further expedited by the fact that the questionnaire does not invite respondents to write comments on any of the items. While this lack of provision for comments may lend the questionnaire something of the appearance of an inventory, it did meet with the approval of the group of respondents whose feedback constituted a crucial component in the piloting process. In fact, the decision not to invite comments was predicated to some extent by lingering concerns about the time required to complete the questionnaire.

I explain in the following section how teachers and subjects gave up valuable contact time to complete the questionnaire and asking students to write comments – even on a very limited number of the items – would have led to the completion process taking up a completely unacceptable amount of time. It is interesting, although perhaps not surprising to note that more than two-thirds of the participants involved in the piloting of the questionnaire praised its lack of provision for comments. More important perhaps is the fact that I was able to gather comments from representatives of the various professional categories involved in the study on all questionnaire items in the focus group interviews held in the week following the administration of the questionnaire. The reduction in the number of items in the questionnaire and its lack of provision for collecting comments meant that the final version was found to require on average just 15 minutes to complete.

The 80 items on the final version of the questionnaire are organised into three main sections: the first section seeks personal data to help develop a demographic profile of respondents; the second focuses on language use in the workplace and consists of separate

sub-sections on written and spoken communication; the third section concentrates on gathering data on the use of English specifically in the workplace and was divided into subsections on writing, reading, and speaking and listening. I decided to include separate sections for writing and listening (and not for speaking and listening) because clearly there are many situations in which reading and writing do not go hand-in-hand – frequently only reading is required - but this is not the case with speaking and listening. Respondents were asked to respond to the items on the questionnaire by completing a separate (computer-readable) form.

As I explained earlier in this chapter, the questionnaire required subjects to report on their use of English, Cantonese and written Chinese in the workplace using a 6-point frequency scale which ranged from “always English” (point 1) to “always Chinese/Cantonese” (point 5). Those subjects who opted for the indeterminate point 3 on the scale (“some situations English, some situations Chinese/Cantonese”) were asked to clarify their response by answering supplementary questions which sought to identify the factors which influenced their choice of language in various situations. It should be noted that I have to this point left unexplained the sixth point on the scale: the “not applicable” response of not required to read/write this type of document or speak/listen in this situation at work. It was clearly necessary to supply this possible response - see Davidson’s (1970) strictures above with regard to eliciting answers as close as possible to the truth – but responses falling into this category had to be coded as missing data in the analysis since, as non-scalar data, they could not be included in the calculation of means.

### **3.2.1.2: Questionnaire administration**

With regard to the administration of the final version of the questionnaire, since slightly more than half of the targeted research population was studying part-time in the

evening at the researcher's employing institution, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, it was possible to distribute the questionnaires through the aegis either of teachers of English working in the researcher's own department – all students study English as a mandatory subject at the Polytechnic University irrespective of their major subject - or through easily accessible teachers whose (content) specialisms were being studied by participants. It should be noted here that student participants were permanently grouped into classes based on their major subject (Accountancy, Marketing, Electrical Engineering etc) even for English lessons and this organisation proved convenient in the sampling procedure which is described later in this chapter.

Thirty-two teachers (25 English specialists and 7 teachers of content subjects) responded positively to my e-mail appeal for volunteer survey administrators, and I held a briefing session for them in late September, 1999 to explain the aims of the survey and how to administer the questionnaire. I chose to approach these particular cohorts of teachers to participate in conducting the survey because all were responsible for teaching part-time students who themselves worked full-time in occupations which could be categorised under the five broad professional areas central to this research *viz.* Business Services, Community and Social Work, Construction and Real Estate, Engineering, and Manufacturing (see Table 3.1 below).

The teachers all agreed with my suggestion to allow subjects class time in which to complete the questionnaire – previous internal Polytechnic University surveys had suffered disappointing return rates as a result of subjects taking questionnaires away to complete. The use of class time to gather research data does raise certain ethical questions, however, and these are addressed in the final section of this chapter. The involvement of the teachers greatly aided the logistics of the survey: using teachers who were mostly known to me enabled me to control the administration process and ensure as far as possible that all teachers gave similar instructions to subjects about how the questionnaire should be

completed. Completing the questionnaire in class time meant that teachers were present to explain any queries subjects may have had about particular items. Taken together, these arrangements certainly ensured that the return rate was far higher than it would have been had subjects taken the questionnaire away to complete – as I explain below.

As I also explain later in this chapter when discussing issues of sampling in the study, an attempt was made to survey equal numbers of subjects in each of the five main professional categories being sampled. At the same time, there was also an attempt to extend the scope of the study to include representation of additional professional areas (for which the Polytechnic University could not provide potential subjects) by administering the questionnaire to subjects studying in part-time mode at other tertiary institutions in Hong Kong. Institutional regulations meant that the researcher was unable to approach these subjects directly with the result that the questionnaire was distributed through the agency of relevant subject teachers working in the other tertiary institutions, who were not able to dedicate class time to the completion of the questionnaire. The result of this was that the return rate from the other tertiary institutions was very low (less than 10% compared to an internal Polytechnic University return rate of almost 100%). In total 3,019 questionnaires were distributed (about half of them within the Polytechnic University and half within the other tertiary institutions) and 1,472 returns were eventually analysed – yielding an overall return rate of about 48%.

### **3.2.2: The focus group interview**

Having discussed in some detail the rationale for employing a multi-method approach to the gathering of data, and the design, piloting and administration of the main means of gathering quantitative data, I now want to describe the qualitative methods employed in the study and justify their inclusion. In this connection, I turn first to the focus group interview, after which I discuss the five case studies of language log keepers. It

should be noted here that focus group members were not required to keep language logs or vice versa. In this way the individual burden involved in contributing to the research was minimised – an important consideration when it is recalled that all subjects were in full-time employment and were also undertaking a programme of part-time study in a local tertiary institution which demanded physical attendance on at least two evening per week.

The focus group interview was held in the week following the administration of the questionnaire in October, 1999. To form the group, two subjects from each of the five professional areas surveyed were selected randomly and were approached by the researcher via e-mail. I intended originally to form separate professional groups rather than a single mixed-profession group; homogenous groups would certainly have brought a sharper collective focus to the issues raised. Time and manpower constraints (only the researcher was available to lead the interviews), however, determined that the mixed mode of grouping was the only feasible way to proceed. Ultimately, however, only five of the ten subjects approached were able to volunteer their time. Fortunately, I was able to recruit one representative from each of the five professional areas central to the study.

The mixed-profession focus group was asked to attend a single session of one hour in their own time to discuss their experiences of workplace language use. The group was interviewed by the researcher and the discussion, which was audio-taped and subsequently transcribed (see Appendix III), enabled me to explore in some depth certain items on the questionnaire. Focus group feedback data have been incorporated into the discussion of results presented in Chapters Four and Five of this thesis.

Two basic approaches to group interview are readily identifiable: the non-directive, and the focused; in the former, the interviewees are minimally constrained by an imposed structure and are encouraged to respond freely to loose prompts provided by the interviewer. The focused interview, by contrast, is controlled in a rather more structured

way by the interviewer, who wishes to elicit illuminating feedback on issues he or she deems to be particularly important (Cohen & Manion, 1994:287-288).

I chose to use the focused form of interview since the time available to me was limited in that focus group participants were interviewed in the evening, following a normal day's work and a two-hour class. I led the discussions and aimed to elicit information based on the questionnaire items. The interview, then, was focused but it was certainly not constrained and participants were free and open in their responses. Watts & Ebbutt (1987, cited in Cohen & Manion, 1994:287) make the point that group interviews can be restrained events, particularly if the participants do not know each other. However, this was not a concern for me since most of the participants already knew each other quite well and this pre-existing bond allowed group members to relax and express their views openly.

### **3.2.3: The case studies**

While the focus group interview proved to be a reasonably effective way of eliciting data from participants concerning the use of both Chinese and English in the workplace, I felt that it would counter-productive, within the discussions of both languages and within strict time constraints, to attempt to create a special focus on the use of English. Clearly, however, a method was needed which would enable me to sample how English specifically is used in different professional areas since the investigation of English use in the professional workplace is one of the focal points of the study and for this reason I wanted to learn more than was possible through the questionnaire survey about the kind of communicative occupational activities for which individual employees are required to operate in English.

It seemed appropriate to adopt a case study approach to the gathering of this kind of data. Case studies have the advantage of bringing to research an element of reality and provide a means of both confirming the findings of quantitative research and presenting



alternative interpretations of quantitative data (Adelman, Jenkins & Kemmis, 1980, cited in Cohen & Manion, 1994). Adelman *et al* also point out that case studies are capable of supporting generalisations from the particular individual subject to a class of similar subjects.

The case studies reported here are, however, based on five individuals keeping a record (a “language log”) of the tasks for which they were required to use English over the period of a single, typical working week. Such brief and simple exercises do not, obviously, constitute a ‘rich’ form of case study and for this reason the data gathered in the language logs, while potentially corroborative of the results of the quantitative component of the study, cannot provide a basis for extrapolation to wider populations. Nor can the case studies be described more properly as journal-keeping activities since journal keeping usually demands quite detailed self-descriptions of actions taken and nearly always requires writers to reflect on their actions. I did not ask my log-keepers to analyse or reflect on any aspect of their use of English – I simply asked them to record or log and describe briefly in terms of listening/speaking and reading/writing the tasks they carried out in English in a single typical working week (see Appendix IV for copies of the five language logs).

The approach adopted to the case studies seemed to be appropriate for my purposes given the primarily quantitative nature of the study and the extreme difficulty of recruiting subjects willing to volunteer to keep written records of their language use. This reluctance is not surprising; the participants in the study were all busy professionals with study and also, in most cases, family commitments to attend to. The case study participants were recruited by randomly selecting and approaching by e-mail individuals from each of the five professional categories – excluding as mentioned earlier those participants who had already given time to the focus group interview. This process had to be repeated numerous times before I recruited the required number of log keepers.

I attempted, then, to recruit single log keepers from each of the five professional areas central to the study. This proved impossible, however, and ultimately two log keepers were drawn from each of the Business Services and Community and Social Services areas and one from the Engineering area. This means that the Construction and Real Estate, and Manufacturing sectors are not represented in the case study exercise.

In an attempt to enrich the case studies and to facilitate the collection of a reference archive of text types processed in English, I initially asked case study subjects if they could provide me with copies of the documents they dealt with on a regular basis at work. However, issues of confidentiality determined that none of the subjects were able to comply with this request. Despite the limitations just outlined, the data collected through the language logs, which were mostly kept in the last week of April, 2000, have proved extremely enlightening and have been incorporated quite comprehensively into the discussion of results in Chapter Five.

Having to this point explained the reasons for adopting a multi-method approach to data gathering and having discussed the particular instruments employed to gather data, I want in the section which follows to present a demographic profile of the research population, its composition in terms of the five professional categories outlined above, and a discussion of its representativeness as a sample. Process constraints on research design and outcomes are also discussed.

### **3.3: The research population**

Subjects were all ethnic Chinese professionals (710 men, 762 women) of varying ages employed at different levels of seniority in a range of professions in the public and private sectors. The sampling frame chosen for the grouping of subjects was provided by five key occupational areas, originating in and employed by the Hong Kong SAR government's Census and Statistics Bureau. Although the sampling process may be seen in

its initial stages as an instance of simple convenience sampling (Cohen & Manion, 1994:88) – in that subjects were students in the researcher’s institution and thus constituted a “captive audience” close at hand – in fact, it may be argued that drawing subjects from within five recognised professional areas provided a means finally of implementing a random stratified sampling procedure (Woods, Fletcher & Hughes, 1986:52). This is an important point since pure convenience sampling is a non-probability form of sampling i.e. inferences are not generalisable to the wider population, while stratified sampling does introduce the potential for such extrapolation.

The sampling procedure employed was a direct result of the fact that accessing the professional workplace to gather data is no easy matter, particularly with respect to the inevitable time constraints operating on both researchers and working professionals. Issues of confidentiality are also of great concern to companies and organizations. Such issues include those of a commercial nature in the Business Services area, and those related to the government-mandated protection of privacy of personal data in the area of Community and Social Services. For these reasons most of the subjects of the study were drawn from employed professionals undertaking (in part-time mode only) courses of study leading to further and higher qualifications in their particular professional areas at my employing institution, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. The inevitable “trade-off” for ease of access to subjects is the introduction of a possible bias in the sampling caused by surveying only that sub-set of the whole population undertaking a programme of English language instruction or other instruction through the medium of English. This issue is addressed further later in the chapter.

The professional areas sampled were: Business Services, Community and Social Services, Construction and Real Estate, Engineering, and Manufacturing and Table 3.1 below provides a breakdown of these broad areas and also shows the numbers of subjects drawn from each particular area.

**Table 3.1: A breakdown of professional areas with numbers of subjects**

Professional area	Breakdown	Number of subjects
Business services	Accounting	290
	Law	19
	Marketing	123
	Banking and financial services	134
	Total N=566	
Community and social services	Medicine	3
	Dentistry	10
	Health care management	13
	Nursing	147
	Social work	128
	Educational administration	26
	Total N=327	
Construction and real estate	Building services engineering	175
	Property valuation	38
	Facility management	30
	Total N=243	
Engineering	Electronic engineering	10
	Electrical engineering	28
	Manufacturing engineering	99
	Total N=137	
Manufacturing	Power generation	43
	Plastics technology	40
	Textiles and clothing	119
	Total N=202	

Subjects were mostly engaged in part-time, professional training programmes (at Higher Diploma, Bachelor's Degree or Master's levels) at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. It can be seen from Table 3.2 below that most of the subjects were under thirty

years of age, had less than eleven years of working experience, and possessed some form of post-secondary academic/professional qualification. It was also found that most of the subjects occupied junior (42%) or middle-management (47%) positions in their respective organisations. Only a minority (11%) reported that they were in the senior ranks of their professions.

**Table 3.2: Age, working experience and qualifications of the subjects by percentage**

Age of subjects		Years of working experience		Academic level	
Under 25	29%	Under 5	38%	Form 5 ('O' level)	13%
25-30	39%	5-10	32%	Form 7 ('A' level)	12%
31-35	17%	11-15	16%	Certificate	9%
36-40	9%	16-20	8%	Higher Certificate	14%
41-45	3%	21-25	4%	Diploma	12%
46-50	2%	26-30	1%	Higher Diploma	23%
Over 50	1%	Over 30	1%	Bachelor's Degree	14%
				Master's Degree	3%

Table 3.3 below shows the percentages of subjects drawn from the broad sectors of employment: government, government-related and private. The term government-related is used to refer to those organizations closely allied to areas of governmental public provision but which operate in a largely autonomous way. An example of such an organization in Hong Kong is the Hospital's Authority. Table 3.3 also displays additional information on the ownership and size of subjects' companies and organizations.

**Table 3.3: Company or organization by sector, ownership and size in percentages**

Sector type		Ownership		Size	
Government	8.5%	Hong Kong owned	62.8%	Small (<50 employees)	30.4%
Government-related	20.9%	China owned	2.8%	Medium (51-100)	17.0%
Private	70.6%	Foreign	34.4%	Large (>100)	52.6%

Table 3.3 reveals that about 8% of the subjects worked for the government and 21% for government-related organizations. The vast majority (more than 70%), however, were employed in the private sector. Of those who worked in the private sector, about 63% of the subjects reported that they worked for Hong Kong-owned companies, while 35% indicated that they were employed by foreign-owned concerns. Almost one third of the

subjects indicated that their company was "small" (i.e. less than 50 employees), 17% worked for "medium" size companies (i.e. 51-100 employees), and slightly more than half worked for "large" companies (i.e. over 100 employees).

### **3.4: Process constraints on the research design**

It will be readily apparent from the demographic data that the study cannot claim to represent equally the employing sector types, their ownership or size. Nor can it be claimed that the study provides equal representation of the five professional areas elaborated in Table 3.1 and for these reasons it will not be claimed that the findings of the study are with any degree of certainty generalisable from the stratified samples presented here to wider populations of professionals. In fact, strenuous efforts were made to address these constraints by attempting to achieve equal numbers of subjects in the five professional areas surveyed – I aimed initially to recruit 600 subjects in each area - and indeed to widen the research to include other professional categories. These efforts involved extending the enquiry to include subjects other than those studying at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University in, for example, the medical, dental and legal fields (the Polytechnic University does not provide medical, dental or legal training).

As I explained earlier in this chapter, to sample these categories the questionnaire had to be distributed through the agency of other tertiary institutions and the return rate was very low (less than 10% overall), rendering it unfeasible to include the medical, dental and legal fields as separate entities in the study. An example may prove instructive here: using the auspices of another tertiary institution in Hong Kong, the questionnaire was distributed to four hundred law professionals undertaking part-time study for further qualifications. However, subjects were not given class time in which to complete the questionnaire and the result was that just nineteen returns were eventually made. These were then subsumed under the category Business Services (see Table 3.1 above). The eleven returns received

from the medical and dental categories combined were subsumed under the Community and Social Services category.

Having summarized the efforts made to achieve a balance of numbers in the five professional categories and having noted the difficulties involved in these exertions, it is important to make clear that it may still be claimed, since numbers in each professional category total more than 100, that the results of statistical analyses based on the categories are likely to be reliable enough for the purposes of inter-category comparison if not for extrapolation to wider populations (Brown, 1995:95; Cohen & Manion, 1994:89; Kwan, 2000, personal communication; Robertson, 2000, personal communication).

There will be, then, certain limitations to the outcomes of the study, but none of the factors outlined above invalidate the design of the study or its outcomes since the study is attempting to present a broad picture of language use in the professional workplace - and broad pictures cannot take shape without access to a wide range of subjects. The nature of the study meant that it was necessary to sample sub-categories of professions within the five major areas (see Table 3.1 above) and this factor in turn determined that it was not feasible to gather data through the agency of professional bodies, as Forey and Nunan (forthcoming, 2001) were able to do, for example, for the single professional field of accountancy.

The fact that the subjects of the study were mostly undertaking part-time courses of professional development and certification explains, at least in part, some of the demographic biases demonstrated by the research population. Professionals undertaking further studies are likely, of course, to be relatively young and junior in status, and indeed the data in Table 3.2 show that nearly 70% of subjects were under the age of 30 and that 70% had ten or fewer years of working experience. Another interesting demographic factor and one consistent with factors just discussed is that only 17% of subjects had achieved an educational level of first degree or above. The highest level reached by the remaining subjects was that of Higher Diploma (achieved by about a quarter of this segment of the population).

The discussion above noted the difficulties frequently encountered by researchers when they attempt to access workplaces and in particular the problems posed by the need for both businesses and government departments to safeguard confidentiality; the former for commercial reasons and the latter for reasons associated with the protection of personal data. The discussion also made reference to personal data elicited from subjects on, among other factors, age, status and highest educational level achieved. Such discussions raise general issues about the ethics of research processes and the use researchers make of the data they gather. In the next section – the final one in this chapter - I identify central ethical considerations in the study and explain how they were addressed.

### **3.5: Ethical considerations in the study**

I classify the ethical considerations in the study into those which are broadly institution-related and those which are participant-related. I use the term “institution-related” to refer to the requirement for researchers to comply with the rules governing research in their particular employing institutions. In my case this meant complying with the requirement of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (as stipulated in the Staff Handbook for the academic year 2000-2001) that potential research subjects must be given accurate information on the aims of a study and on the uses to which data gathered in the study will be put.

Potential subjects also have the right, without prejudice and without giving reasons, to refuse an invitation to participate in a project. My university also requires every subject who volunteers to participate in research to sign a form in which he/she acknowledges that his/her participation is indeed voluntary and that participation can cease at any time the subject wants it to. The form also assures participants that, unless the researcher is informed to the contrary, their contributions to the research will be treated confidentially and anonymously. The Polytechnic University, however, has no standard pro-forma.



Individual researchers create an appropriate form (following the guidelines just summarized) and then seek permission from their Faculty Research Board to carry out the research.

It is part of the Faculty Research Board's brief to enquire into the ethical issues involved in the proposed research. This system, while time-consuming for researchers, does allow for a degree of flexibility in the terms of the way a researcher can phrase the statements on his/her personal form to safeguard participants and, at the same, permit the use of maximally efficient data gathering mechanisms for particular projects. In this study, the required statements on research aims and the use of data, and the statement of permission to be signed by participants formed a detachable preface to the questionnaire (see the cover pages of Appendices I-IV). Participants were given the opportunity to read the statements and ask any questions before signing and returning the permission forms.

Subjects were also given time to ponder their involvement; as Hamp-Lyons (2000, personal communication) pointed out to me, distributing a questionnaire without prior announcement and allowing subjects only a few minutes to decide whether to participate in a study or not puts unacceptable pressure on subjects to "volunteer". It is, therefore, essential to build into research design a reasonable time lag between seeking subjects' willing participation and actually beginning the data gathering process. With this advice in mind, I arranged for the teachers who had agreed to administer the questionnaire to distribute the information and permission form I designed for the study in the first lesson of the semester and administer the questionnaire to those agreeing to complete it in the second lesson i.e. a week later.

In the first lesson, potential subjects were shown a PowerPoint presentation of the various sections of the questionnaire in order to allow them to become familiar with its demands and to take notes if they wished to. However, they were not permitted to take copies of the questionnaire out of the classroom. This arrangement appeared to be

successful in that none of the subjects studying at the Polytechnic University who were approached to take part in the study withheld their permission and no questionnaires were completed out of class.

While complying with institution-related ethical considerations is a relatively straightforward and entirely necessary matter, such compliance does not constitute a completely sufficient set of ethical safeguards. As mentioned earlier in this section, it is also necessary to pay close attention to participant-related issues. Such issues will involve consideration of the demands made on the time of those who volunteer to participate in a study, the opportunity costs of the involvement, their status as informants, and any stake they hold in the expected outcomes and products of the research.

In designing the study, use of participants' time was a major concern for me. I have already explained that potential subjects were all busy professionals in full-time employment undertaking part-time but demanding award-bearing courses of study, and this is to say nothing of their family and other commitments. It was this concern, together with the problems in accessing the workplace already described, which prompted me to ask the teachers who administered the questionnaire to allow subjects class time in which to complete the questionnaire. While permitting the questionnaire to be completed in the classroom and within the time allocated to teaching was convenient and led to a far higher return rate than that achieved when subjects were required to complete the questionnaire outside of class, it is nonetheless a factor which carries an opportunity cost for both subjects and teacher-administrators.

In completing the questionnaire in class both sacrificed important teaching-learning time; although the final questionnaire took on average just fifteen minutes to complete, the pre-completion processes of instruction-giving and answering subjects' queries together with the post-completion collecting of the questionnaires stretched the time required to about thirty minutes for most classes of participants. In fact, five teacher-administrators

reported to me that they would need to make up the lost teaching time at some stage in the semester.

In initiating action which causes such sacrifices, researchers need to be able to demonstrate the potential value of their projects (see Cohen & Manion, 1994:348). In my case, this justification involved addressing three sets of stakeholders: the subjects, teachers of English who administered the questionnaire, and teachers of content subjects who had also volunteered to administer the questionnaire. In my statement of research aims to subjects I pointed out the potential value of the research in informing the design of future English courses to achieve a closer fit between course aims and student needs - admittedly a benefit to future students rather than the participants themselves. In my briefing to English teachers I pointed out the potential of the study to underpin curriculum renewal initiatives related to professional English courses for part-time students, and in my briefing to subject teachers I explained that all twelve of the Polytechnic University departments represented in the research through affiliated student participants would receive a report outlining the main findings of the study in general and the implications of the findings for workplace communication needs of affiliated students in particular.

In this way, I aimed to create stakeholders in the research and indeed findings have already been disseminated in the form of reports to the participating departments of the Polytechnic University. In addition, it seems likely that the research will lead to selective curriculum renewal in the English courses offered to part-time students. The stakeholding in the study recently added a community dimension when the Director of the SAR-wide English in the Workplace Campaign requested a copy of the findings of the research.

To this point, I have discussed only those ethical issues raised by the questionnaire survey and not those connected to the focus group interview or case studies. I mentioned earlier in this section the status accorded to subjects in research. If the status of the subjects is perceived by them to be high i.e. their role is that of expert informants, then it is likely

that motivation to participate in the research will be relatively high. In recruiting volunteers for the focus group interview, I approached two randomly selected subjects from each of the five professional areas via e-mail. The e-mail explained that the purpose of the focus groups was to gather data by listening to, questioning and recording participants' first-hand experience of language use in the workplace and that membership of the group would require dedicating one hour of out-of-class time to the interview. Within three days five of the ten individuals approached agreed in very positive terms to take part in the interview. It became clear in talking to this group that they perceived membership of the group - despite the randomness of their selection - as high in status. This appeared to be because they were viewed and treated by the researcher, quite appropriately, as expert informants.

Much less enthusiasm, however, was demonstrated by the subjects I approached to participate in the language log-keeping exercise. I attempted to recruit by e-mail single log keepers from each of the professional areas central to the study. In the e-mail I explained the purposes of the log and its importance in allowing the researcher to draw closer to the context of the workplace and learn what kinds of written and spoken tasks individuals in different workplaces were required to accomplish in English. More than sixty e-mails were sent before I finally obtained five volunteers and even then it proved impossible to recruit from all five professional areas and, as I explained earlier in chapter, the areas of Construction and Real Estate, and Manufacturing are not represented in the case studies.

It seems likely that reluctance was encountered because of the requirement in keeping a log to write on a daily basis, and possibly because the individual keeping a log is being asked to adopt the role of expert informant on language use in his/her occupation in a far more low-profile, non-interactive way than is the case with focus group representatives. Researchers who intend to make use of case study language log keepers in future studies will need to think carefully of ways through which the status of the log keeper might be raised, and this might well involve paying participants.

In this central chapter of the study, I have attempted to link the forgoing chapters, which stated the aims of the research and developed a theoretical framework and context for it, with those which follow and present the results of the data gathering exercises. In doing so, I have described in some detail the multi-method approach adopted in order to gather data capable of addressing the aims and research questions presented in Chapter One. I discussed key methodological issues: the gathering of baseline quantitative data through a large-scale questionnaire survey, the attempt to collect illuminating and corroborative qualitative data through a focus group interview and individual case studies of language log keepers, the sampling procedures employed *vis a vis* the research population, the process constraints experienced in gathering data and, finally, key ethical considerations in the study. Having reviewed the chapter, I will now go on in the next two chapters to present the results deriving from the processes described in the present chapter.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Results and discussion part one: language use in the professional workplace**

#### **4.1: Introduction**

In this chapter, I present the results of the analysis of data gathered by the questionnaire survey relating to the uses of both Chinese and English in the professional workplace. The results are tabulated and expressed as means and are discussed where relevant with reference to the literature, the qualitative information elicited from the focus group interview and to information gleaned by personal communication with officials of the Hong Kong SAR government's Official Languages Agency.

The chapter begins with a brief description of how the survey data were analyzed. It then presents a review of the results for the use of both the English and Chinese languages in the professional workplace in Hong Kong. The discussion here will be concerned with identifying factors which influence - in terms of the deployment of language skills - the use of English or Chinese by employing sector (government, government-related, and private), by company ownership (Hong Kong or foreign-owned), and by company size (small, medium, or large).

The scene-setting discussions in the present chapter, based on demographic data gathered by the survey and focused on the use of both languages, will be followed in Chapter Five (the second part of the results and discussion section of this thesis) by a narrowing of focus to permit a detailed consideration of the results for the use of English alone. This concentration reflects the study's special focus on English, and the need (described in Chapter One) to gather data which may be used to inform the designing and resourcing of English language programmes of instruction in my employing institution. These results will be analyzed first in terms of the use of English language skills by employing sector, then by professional area (Business Services, Community and Social

Services, Construction and Real Estate, Engineering, and Manufacturing), and finally by the rank held by employees within their company or organization.

#### **4.2: The analysis of data**

Since the questionnaire sought mostly information on the frequency with which respondents undertook particular workplace tasks in English or Chinese, I decided that the most appropriate analytical procedure to adopt would be that of first calculating and then comparing the mean frequencies of particular groupings of the research population. This permits a comparison of the mean frequencies of the five professional areas listed above with, for example, respect to writing particular text types (see Chapter Five, Table 5.4). Other groupings are those related to company/organisation type, ownership, and size (see, for example, this chapter, Table 4.1 with regard to company/organisation type). Comparison of means, then, is organised around certain independent variables which are deemed central to the aims of the study.

It is important to reiterate here a point made in Chapter Three: that one of the independent variables (professional area) is composed of five groupings of professions within which further sub-groupings are represented (see Chapter Three, Table 3.1), and that the five macro-groupings provide a sampling frame (Woods et al, 1985:52) across which means may be compared in a way which increases the level of confidence in the findings of the study. Means have not been calculated or compared for the sub-groupings – the sub-specialisms of Engineering: electronic, electrical and manufacturing engineering, for instance - since numbers here are either too small or lack the equivalence of size needed to carry out valid comparisons. For my research population, then, at the level of comparing means across the five broad professional areas, it can be argued that the comparison of means will produce reliable results, but as I pointed out in Chapter Three when discussing the design of the study, I am not claiming that the results will be generalisable to wider

populations. They may, however, be suggestive, worthy of further exploration and indeed useful for informing the design of special purpose English courses, and for reporting to the twelve Polytechnic University departments whose students participated in the study preliminary data on their students' use of language in the workplace.

Comparing means is a straightforward procedure in itself but requires two prior steps to be taken to ensure that the comparisons are meaningful (Woods *et al*, 1985; Brown, 1995): the first step was alluded to above and requires examination of the statistical implications of the sample size of each grouping. The second step involves analysing the variance within and between the groupings. Sample size appears not to present a problem for the present analysis since numbers in all the possible groupings, apart from one, exceed one hundred subjects and hence are amenable to statistical manipulation which should produce reasonably reliable results (Brown, 1995:95; Kwan, 2000, personal communication). The exception is the grouping of subjects employed by China-owned companies which comprised less than 3% of the total research population of 1,472 subjects; that is, 36 individuals. For consistency of analysis, I decided to group these subjects where necessary under the category "foreign-owned" and discard the separate category of "China-owned" (see this chapter, Table 4.3).

More crucial perhaps than sample size for a valid inter-group comparison of means in this study is the second pre-comparison step: that of ensuring similarity of variance of distribution within and between groupings. Equality of variance can be tested by applying the Levene test component of the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). Provided the Levene test shows that there is no statistically significant difference in the variance of the groups, then inter-group comparison will be meaningful. The Levene test was applied to all groupings involved in the comparison of means and no statistically significant differences were detected.



After calculating and tabulating mean responses, chi-square tests were carried out to test the significance of the relationship between variables. This was done by testing the null hypothesis that the two variables (row and column) are independent of each other, and that no relationship obtains between them. A chi-square statistic was then calculated based on expected and observed frequencies in each cell of the table. The p-value associated with the test could then be generated from the appropriate chi-square distribution. When the p-value is smaller than the selected significance level (in this case 0.05), the null hypothesis may be rejected and the conclusion drawn that the two variables are dependent. The results of the chi-squared tests are summarised as footnotes to the relevant tables. All statistical analyses were carried out in SPSS (version 10.0 for Windows).

In concluding this section on data analysis, a word is in order about the frequency scales used in the questionnaire. It will be recalled that the frequency scale used to distinguish the uses of Chinese from those of English asked subjects to select one of six possible choices: 1=Always English, 2=Usually English, 3=Both languages, 4=Usually Chinese, 5=Always Chinese 6=Not required to read/write this text type or speak/listen in this situation. As I explained in Chapter Three, those subjects who opted for the indeterminate point 3 on the scale were asked to clarify the response by answering supplementary questions which sought to identify the factors which influenced their choice of language. I also explained that the relatively small number of responses falling into the “not applicable” category of point 6 had to be coded as missing data since, as non-scalar data, they could not be included in the calculation of means.

The scale used on the questionnaire to gauge the frequency with which subjects carried out particular workplace tasks in English specifically consisted of six points: 1=Never, 2=Seldom (once or twice a year), 3=Not very often (once or twice every 6 months), 4=Sometimes (once or twice per month), 5=Often (once/twice per week), 6=

Always (almost every day). For ease of reference, the two frequency scales are reprinted where relevant as footnotes to the tables in Chapters Four and Five.

In the next section, I go on to present and discuss the results of the comparison of means of the uses of both Chinese and English in the professional workplace. As indicated earlier in this chapter, the results are discussed where relevant with reference to the literature, the qualitative information elicited from the focus group interview and information gleaned by personal communication with officials of the Hong Kong SAR government's Official Languages Agency. We begin by examining the findings relating to language use in written workplace communication in terms of employing sector.

#### **4.3: Language use in written workplace communication by sector**

Table 4.1 below summarises the findings relating to the language of written communication in government departments, government-affiliated organisations, and private companies. It will be noticed that although there is some degree of variation in language use among the three sectors, taken as a whole the findings clearly indicate that English is still the principal language of written communication in the post-1997 workplace (see "overall" column).

**Table 4.1: Language use in written workplace communication by sector**

Text Type	Government	Government-related Organisations	Private companies	Overall
E-mails	1.62	1.88	1.55	1.62
Letters	2.14	2.39	1.93	2.06
Faxes	1.84	2.53	2.11	2.18
Memos	1.67	2.42	2.16	2.18
Legal documents	1.60	2.13	1.84	1.89
Reports	1.77	2.33	1.87	1.97
Agendas	1.94	2.56	1.97	2.12
Minutes	1.90	2.59	2.02	2.15
Records	2.08	2.53	2.16	2.24
Notices	2.35	2.77	2.39	2.47

Scale: 1=Always English, 2=Usually English, 3=Both languages, 4=Usually Chinese, 5=Always Chinese. Chi-square tests were conducted to test the dependency between the categorical variables of text type and sector. These tests confirmed that without exception the variables are not independent ( $p < 0.05$ ).

It would appear that e-mails (mean 1.62), legal documents (mean 1.89) and reports (mean 1.97) are the text types most frequently written in English. Focus-group discussions revealed that the use of English in e-mails between Chinese professionals (in both inter- and intra-company communication) stems from the fact that it is easier and quicker to send messages in English than in Chinese. In this case, the nature of the technology appears to be an important factor in determining language choice.

Another factor which apparently influences the use of English in e-mails (and indeed other types of business writing) is the emphasis on English (and comparative neglect of written Chinese) in the local education system at secondary and tertiary levels, and in professional training programmes (which in many cases have been validated by professional bodies based in United Kingdom). In consequence, many Chinese professionals feel that they are able to write more effectively in English than in Chinese for academic or business purposes. The almost exclusive use of English in legal documents indicates that the shift from monolingualism to bilingualism in Hong Kong's legal system has yet to gather momentum.

When this issue was raised in the focus group it became apparent that the use of English in the legal system was an important determinant of language choice in formal workplace documents, a point which appears to be borne out in Table 4.1 where documents at the formal end of the continuum (reports, letters, minutes) are reported to require the highest levels of English use. According to the focus group informant from the construction industry, legal documents prepared by the government, such as contracts and specifications, continue to be produced exclusively in English. The following brief exchange between the researcher and the informant from Construction and Real Estate is drawn from the transcript of the focus group meeting (see Appendix III, page 12):

Informant: ... Legal agreement and contracts are in English. But for talk about, we use Cantonese.

Researcher: So, legal documents are written in English but are discussed in Cantonese ...

Informant: Yes. And also the technical specifications and instructions for building also in English.

While the overall findings in Table 4.1 indicate that English is the usual medium of written business communication, a close of analysis of the means from the three sectors reveals a number of interesting differences. In the first place, it appears that professionals working in government departments make slightly greater use of written English than their counterparts in the private sector. This might be regarded as a somewhat surprising finding given the administration's policy to promote Chinese in the civil service (and in other domains), but it does seem to be consistent with a recent account of public-sector practices provided by the government's Official Languages Agency.

In response to an enquiry about internal communication in the civil service, an official in the Agency reported that "English is still the primary working language in most of the Policy Bureaux and front-line Departments". This official also stated that around half of the departments in the government are "charting and reviewing progress in using Chinese in official business", and "results obtained so far indicate a general trend towards greater use of Chinese". Regarding external communication, "all incoming correspondence in Chinese is replied to in Chinese to avoid any possible language barrier and as a matter of courtesy", and for the same reason Chinese is used "when communication is initiated by the Government and the addressee is known to understand Chinese" (personal communication, 7 June 2000).

The policy to use Chinese (when appropriate) in external communication may account for the fact that letters (mean 2.14) have a higher mean (indicating an orientation towards the Chinese end of the scale) than all the other text types, with the exception of notices (mean 2.35), which are generally bilingual documents. The trend towards written Chinese in the public sector was confirmed by the construction professional in the focus group, who reported that there is an increasing tendency to issue certain documents in Chinese or in bilingual versions (see Appendix III, page 12).

This informant observed that since the handover the government departments with which she has dealings have shown a greater sensitivity towards workers (generally at the lower levels) whose reading skills in English are either very limited or non-existent. This sensitivity is manifested in the production of documents in Chinese and in both Chinese and English (e.g. instructions, notices). Before the mid-1990s, such documents were invariably written in English, regardless of the English proficiency of the recipients. Most informants who have dealings with government departments emphasised that the shift towards greater use of Chinese in the public sector was not at the expense of English: in essence the new approach involves the addition of Chinese to English documents rather than the replacement of English with Chinese.

It would appear from the data displayed in Table 4.1 that professionals working in the quasi-governmental sector make greater use of written Chinese (though not of course to the exclusion of English) than practitioners in government departments and private companies. Half of the text types listed under this sector have means of over 2.50 - faxes, agendas, minutes, records, notices - which indicates a tendency towards the mid-point on the scale. The use of Chinese in certain situations can be perhaps attributed to the fact that many organisations in the government-related sector are engaged in various kinds of community and social services (e.g. health care and social work), and therefore practitioners in these professions are often required to communicate directly with members of the public, of whom the vast majority are, of course, Chinese. It is worth noting that some of the organisations in the government-related sector, notably the Hospital Authority, were at one stage government departments, and so it is possible that their current language policies and practices are still to some extent based on those which were in force when they were officially part of the civil service.

The following exchange between the researcher and the focus group representative from the area of Community and Social Services – she actually works in the government's

Social Welfare Department – emphasises the importance of Chinese for front-line professionals (see Appendix III, page 6):

Researcher: What about you, Betty? You work for the government, so you must write memos surely.

Informant: Yes, but this um ... the language, maybe English and er ... in Chinese ... it depends. In Hong Kong, we write memo internal or em ... we will use English, but em ... we have our clients for social welfare and for them we write letters and case studies in Chinese ...

Researcher: That is the policy of your department?

Informant: Yes, it's ... er ... whole government. People .... Clients must read what the officer writes. It's a data protection.

Although most of the subjects reported that the various text types shown in Table 4.1 were "always" or "usually" written in English, a close analysis of the responses reveals that for each item a certain percentage of the subjects in each of the three sectors (especially those in government-related organisations) opted for point 3 on the scale, which indicates a roughly equal use of English and Chinese. In some cases (e.g. notices) this suggests that the document is bilingual, but in others (e.g. letters, memos, faxes) that there would be some situations where English is used, and others where Chinese is used. At this point it would be helpful to examine the responses of those subjects who opted for "both languages" (point 3) since this information offers an insight into the factors which influence Chinese professionals in their language choice.

#### **4.3.1: Factors influencing the use of English and Chinese in written communication**

Subjects who indicated that they used "both languages" for certain text types were asked to identify the main factors which motivated the use of English or Chinese in different situations. These findings are summarised in Table 4.2 below.

**Table 4.2: Factors influencing the use of English and Chinese in written communication**

Situations	Reasons for Using English	Reasons for using Chinese
When I am communicating with a foreigner	54%	4%
Because it is a formal situation	32%	8%
When I am communicating with another organization	30%	17%
Because it is the language of business in Hong Kong	25%	13%
Because it is company policy	13%	7%
Because I can communicate my ideas more effectively	11%	48%
When I am communicating with a local superior	11%	22%
When I am communicating within my organization	10%	16%
Because it is an informal situation	2%	20%
When I am communicating with a local junior	2%	38%

The subjects who opted for point 3 on the scale were asked to tick up to three factors (from the list above) which prompted them to use English and Chinese for a particular text type.

As might be expected, the main factor influencing the use of English is when the recipient of the communication is a non-Cantonese-speaking contact, either in Hong Kong or overseas. English is also likely to be used in formal situations, in external communication (with other companies in Hong Kong or with clients and colleagues overseas), and because it is a traditional practice in Hong Kong business. The findings indicate that English is unlikely to be used (in preference to Chinese) in informal situations or when communicating with Chinese juniors. In contrast, written Chinese tends to be used in informal situations where the clear communication of ideas is paramount, particularly when the recipients are junior-level staff whose proficiency in English may be limited (e.g. unskilled or semi-skilled workers in the construction industry). These factors should be borne in mind when examining the patterns of language use in the private sector, which I turn to now.

At first sight, the finding that professionals in the private sector make slightly less use of written English than their counterparts in government might be regarded as somewhat surprising (see Table 4.1). After all, the continuing use of English in the private sector is considered to be vital to the territory's economic prosperity. It would therefore be

reasonable to expect the more internationally-oriented business sector to exhibit the highest levels of English use, more especially as the increasingly mainland China-oriented civil service is currently shifting towards Chinese. The explanation for this apparent paradox appears to lie in the fact that many Hong Kong private sector concerns have dealings with mainland China and the amount of both Putonghua and written Chinese skills demanded of employees is increasing relative to English. Evidence to support this claim may be drawn from the focus group interview; most of the participants reported having dealings with the mainland – even the professional drawn from the area of Construction and Real Estate and working for the government-related Hong Kong Housing Authority – and such dealings often stretch interlocutors' linguistic resources to their limits - as this exchange between the researcher and the informant from Business Services shows (see Appendix III, page 9):

Researcher: Martina, ... do you make wide use of the telephone?

Informant: Yes, but always in Cantonese to mainland er ... because my Putonghua is not, is not good enough. I say in Cantonese and the colleague in PRC they in Putonghua, but in a slow speech ...

Researcher: ... so you're actually talking in Cantonese ... and the other people in the PRC are speaking Putonghua very slowly.

Informant: Yes, or maybe we will communicate by fax or CC mail ... in a Chinese version ... to confirm what the wording or what the things we're talking about.

#### **4.3.2: Written communication in Hong Kong-owned and foreign-owned companies**

The means presented in Table 4.1 were based on the responses of all those subjects who indicated that they worked in the private sector. When the findings derived from these subjects are classified according to company ownership (see Table 4.3 below), it can be seen that those subjects who work for foreign-owned companies make noticeably greater use of written English than their counterparts in Hong Kong-owned companies.



**Table 4.3: Written communication in Hong Kong-owned and foreign-owned companies**

<b>Text Type</b>	<b>Hong Kong-owned Companies</b>	<b>Foreign-owned Companies</b>
E-mails	1.66	1.29
Letters	2.09	1.55
Faxes	2.28	1.71
Memos	2.38	1.66
Legal documents	1.93	1.59
Reports	2.02	1.48
Agendas	2.16	1.56
Minutes	2.20	1.60
Records	2.37	1.70
Notices	2.63	1.85

Scale: 1=Always English, 2=Usually English, 3=Both languages, 4= Usually Chinese, 5=Always Chinese. Chi-square tests were conducted to test the dependency between the categorical variables of text type and company ownership. These tests confirmed that without exception the variables are not independent ( $p < 0.05$ ).

The low means in the foreign-owned column (ranging from 1.29 to 1.85) clearly indicate that English is the predominant medium of written communication in this sector. Although the relatively low means in Hong Kong-owned column (ranging from 1.66 to 2.63) suggest that Chinese professionals in this sector normally use English in written business communication, the fact that these means are generally higher (by around 0.40) than those in the foreign-owned column indicates that a certain percentage of the subjects opted for the mid-point on the scale (i.e. "both languages").

Evidence from the focus groups suggests that the slightly higher use of Chinese in the Hong Kong-owned sector stems from the close business ties which exist between local concerns and companies or branches on the Chinese mainland. The informant from Business Services cited earlier was drawn from the Hong Kong-owned sector and she reported that she would normally use Chinese in faxes and memos to her company's contacts in China. In this respect, it is interesting that the means for faxes (2.28) and memos (2.38) are slightly higher than most of the other text types in the Hong Kong-owned column in Table 4.3, and this may reflect the influence of those subjects who work for local companies who maintain business ties with mainland China. The same informant said that when she writes to contacts overseas (e.g. in America) she would always use English. When

writing to other Chinese professionals in Hong Kong (either colleagues or clients), her use of English or Chinese would depend on factors such as the topic and purpose of the communication, and the nature of her relationship with the recipient (in which case the factors presented in Table 4.2 would come into play).

#### 4.3.3: Written communication in the private sector by company size

When the responses of the subjects working for Hong Kong-owned and foreign-owned companies are analysed in terms of company size (small, medium and large) several interesting patterns appear to emerge (see Table 4.4 below).

**Table 4.4: Written communication in the private sector by company size**

Text Type	Hong Kong-owned companies			Foreign-owned companies		
	Small	Medium	Large	Small	Medium	Large
E-mails	1.58	1.69	1.51	1.51	1.23	1.24
Letters	2.15	2.14	2.01	1.71	1.68	1.49
Faxes	2.47	2.37	2.08	2.00	1.80	1.62
Memos	2.63	2.50	2.14	1.95	1.76	1.57
Legal documents	2.01	2.05	1.82	1.62	1.81	1.54
Reports	2.23	2.08	1.82	1.81	1.60	1.38
Agendas	2.33	2.32	1.97	1.88	1.63	1.48
Minutes	2.30	2.36	2.05	1.91	1.68	1.51
Records	2.46	2.58	2.22	1.94	1.79	1.61
Notices	2.71	2.68	2.54	2.06	1.91	1.79

Scale: 1=Always English, 2=Usually English, 3=Both languages, 4=Usually Chinese, 5=Always Chinese. Chi-square tests were conducted to test the dependency between the categorical variables of text type and company size. In the Hong Kong-owned sector, these tests confirmed that (except for letters and notices) the variables are not independent ( $p < 0.05$ ). In the case of foreign-owned companies, the chi-square tests revealed that only memos, reports and minutes are not independent.

In the case of Hong Kong-owned companies, chi-square tests revealed a significant relationship between the categorical variables of text type and company size (except for letters and notices, the results of which will be excluded from the discussion below). The findings clearly indicate that the subjects who work for large Hong Kong-owned companies make greater use of written English in internal and external communication than their counterparts in small- and medium-size local companies. A clear pattern of differences between small- and medium-size companies is harder to detect, although it would seem that

firms in the latter category tend to make more consistent use of English in faxes, memos and reports.

The prevalence of English in large Hong Kong companies can be attributed to a number of factors. In the first place, large local companies tend to be more internationally-oriented than smaller Hong Kong firms. Data from the focus group and case studies suggest that professionals working for large local companies often have to communicate with customers, suppliers or colleagues overseas (especially in North America and Europe), and the medium of this international business correspondence is invariably English. The relatively high mean for faxes (2.08) - an important means of external communication - would appear to support this conclusion. The focus group informant from the Engineering field and working for a large Hong Kong-owned company (see Appendix III, pages 4-5) reported his use of English for written overseas communication thus:

Researcher: Stanley, do you have to write memos in your workplace?

Informant: Always – fax memos. I have to issue fax to our colleague or overseas suppliers.

Researcher: You ... you deal in ... you use fax a lot.

Informant: Fax or e-mail.

Researcher; ... what percentage of your faxes or e-mails are in English?

Informant: ... a hundred percent.

It is perhaps also true that large local firms are more likely to have closer business dealings with international companies in Hong Kong and with government departments. Written communication with both types of organisation would mainly be in English. Secondly, large Hong Kong-based companies, particularly well-established ones, are perhaps more likely to employ expatriate staff than smaller local concerns. Since most expatriates in Hong Kong are generally not able to read or write Chinese (especially those who come to the territory on short-term contracts), it is inevitable that English will be adopted as the usual medium of internal communication in large companies. Indeed, this would appear to be borne out by the relatively high means for memos, reports, agendas, minutes and records (i.e. internally-oriented documents).

Thirdly, it may also be the case that the organisational patterns and management styles found in large Hong Kong companies correspond more closely to those found in foreign companies, particularly those local concerns which started out under Western ownership. One obvious manifestation of foreign influence would be the pragmatic and relatively informal adoption of a pro-English policy for internal communication. By contrast, smaller Hong Kong-owned companies, especially family-run concerns, might be expected to have a more flexible, ad hoc approach to the language of internal communication. In this respect, it is interesting to note that the mean for memos in small Hong Kong companies (2.63) indicates a tendency towards the mid-point, which suggests that a significant percentage of the subjects who work for such firms make roughly equal use of English and Chinese.

As was noted above, English is the usual medium of written communication in foreign-owned companies in Hong Kong. When the responses of subjects working in this sector were examined on the basis of company size, a distinct pattern appears to emerge: the larger the company, the more likely it is that English will be the exclusive language of internal and external communication. While such a pattern might conform to expectations, it should be pointed out that chi-square tests revealed that only in the case of memos, reports and minutes was a dependency established between the variables of text type and company size. In terms of external communication (e.g. letters, e-mails, faxes), the results of these tests therefore suggest that there is no connection between language use and company size. However, the fact that a relationship was found to exist between company size and the language of memos, minutes and reports indicates that large foreign-owned corporations (especially those with headquarters in Anglophone countries) are perhaps more likely than smaller foreign concerns in Hong Kong to use English as a convenient and appropriate medium of internal communication.

The findings reported in this section indicate that English continues to function as the main medium of written communication in the public and private sectors in post-1997 Hong Kong. Although Chinese is apparently used for some business-related purposes, particularly in small Hong Kong-owned companies and in quasi-governmental organisations, compared to English its role in written workplace communication is presently somewhat limited but is likely to expand as China opens her markets further.

The next section examines the roles of English and Cantonese in spoken workplace communication and, as will be seen, the picture of spoken language use which emerges from the findings is somewhat less clear than that for written communication.

#### **4.4: Language use in spoken workplace communication**

The findings relating to the use of spoken English and Cantonese in the public and private sectors indicate that most of the subjects use either a roughly equal mix of Cantonese and English or mainly Cantonese when speaking and listening for various purposes at work. A close analysis of the mean responses (which range from 3.02 to 4.13) reveals that a significant percentage of the subjects (30%-40%) opted for the mid-point on the scale (i.e. "some situations English, some situations Cantonese") for most of the items listed on the questionnaire. Before discussing the findings in terms of sector, ownership and size (see Tables 4.5 and 4.6 below), it would be helpful to examine these subjects' responses to the two follow-up questions about the factors which motivate them to use either English or Cantonese in the various listening/speaking situations.

##### **4.4.1: Factors influencing the use of English and Cantonese in oral communication**

It will be immediately apparent from Table 4.5 that the main factor motivating the subjects to speak and/or listen in English at work is when they are listening to or interacting with an expatriate (who may not of course be a native English speaker).

**Table 4.5: Factors influencing the use of English and Cantonese in oral communication**

<b>Situations</b>	<b>Reasons for using English</b>	<b>Reasons for using Cantonese</b>
When I am communicating with a foreigner	64%	3%
Because it is a formal situation	27%	8%
When I am communicating with another organization	22%	14%
Because it is the language of business in Hong Kong	16%	16%
Because it is company policy	10%	4%
Because I can communicate my ideas more effectively	11%	53%
When I am communicating with a local superior	10%	24%
When I am communicating within my organization	9%	17%
Because it is an informal situation	3%	16%
When I am communicating with a local junior	3%	38%

The subjects who opted for point 3 on the scale were asked to tick up to three factors (from the list above) which prompted them to use English and Cantonese in a particular situation.

It is worth recalling that the main factor prompting the use of English in written business communication was that the recipient of the text was an expatriate (see Table 4.2 above). Indeed, when the rank order of factors in Tables 4.2 and 4.5 are compared, it will be seen that they are almost the same. Chinese professionals are most likely to read, write, speak and listen in English when they are communicating with foreigners, in formal situations, in external communication, and because it is traditional business practice in Hong Kong.

While the factors motivating the use of written and spoken English are similar in terms of rank order, an analysis of the percentages in Tables 4.2 and 4.5 is revealing. In the case of spoken English (Table 4.5), 64% of the subjects indicated that the main reason for using English is in situations where they are communicating with foreigners, whereas in the case of written English (Table 4.2), the percentage of subjects who identified this as an important factor is lower (54%). Perhaps more significantly, the other main factors - formality, external communication and tradition - appear to be somewhat more important in prompting the use of English in written communication than in spoken communication (where "communicating with a foreigner" stands out as by far the most important factor).

The apparent importance of other factors in determining language choice is perhaps evidence that the practice of using English in written communication is firmly entrenched in the Hong Kong workplace, and thus provides empirical support for Li's (1999:93) contention that "in general the unmarked written language choice in office settings is still English". In contrast, the use of spoken English in the workplace appears to be more dependent on contextual factors, chief among which is the presence of a non-Cantonese speaker.

The ten factors listed in the questionnaire (see Tables 4.2 and 4.5) were devised after extensive discussions with the focus group involved in the piloting process. While these items necessarily constrained the subjects in their identification of factors determining the use of English or Cantonese, subsequent discussions in the post-questionnaire focus group suggested that these items captured the range of influences quite effectively. However, these discussions inevitably introduced perspectives on language choice which a questionnaire, through its very nature, is incapable of eliciting. One of these perspectives concerns the issue of formality. The findings in Table 4.5 appear to confirm the general impression that spoken English tends to be restricted to communication with expatriates in relatively formal situations.

However, the focus group informant from Construction and Real Estate reported that in the past few years they have often been required to use English to communicate with unskilled or semi-skilled contract workers from Nepal, Pakistan and Thailand (see Appendix III, page 10):

Informant: I use English also on site in Hong Kong ... with talking to construction workers.

Researcher: Not on the telephone?

Informant: No ... I mean direct ... talking with those workers from Nepal, maybe Thailand and the Pakistan.

Researcher: Ah. Contract workers ... not local.

Informant: Yes. In a very simple English.

These on-site interactions are generally quite informal in nature, and typically involve giving instructions and reviewing progress. The quotation above makes it clear that

since the English proficiency of these imported workers is very limited, it is apparently necessary for Hong Kong professionals to employ a simple, almost pidginised, form of English to communicate their ideas. In the past, labourers in the local construction industry, and low-level workers in the territory generally (e.g. in the once-dominant manufacturing sector) were mainly ethnic Chinese, and so "downward" communication in the workplace tended to be conducted primarily in Cantonese.

Generally speaking, English is rarely used by Hong Kong Chinese to communicate (either formally or informally) with junior-level staff. Before the onset of the "transitional" period, the use of spoken English by Chinese professionals in both the public and private sectors tended to be restricted to "upward" communication with expatriate superiors. Although local professionals still need to use English to communicate with senior expatriate staff, the creation of an increasingly meritocratic workplace in recent years means that spoken English is also needed for "lateral" and "downward" communication with non-Chinese colleagues. This suggests that Chinese professionals in the modern, multicultural Hong Kong workplace need to possess a much wider repertoire of English speaking styles than their predecessors in the colonial period.

When we turn to the situational factors which influence the use of Cantonese in the workplace (refer to Table 4.5 above), it can be seen that the main factor which motivates local professionals to speak Cantonese is that it helps to ensure the clear communication of ideas (as was the case with written communication). Cantonese also appears to be the usual language of intra-ethnic and intra-company communication. Hong Kong Chinese professionals generally use Cantonese or mixed-code (i.e. Cantonese admixed with English terms) in work-related interactions with local colleagues and clients. Indeed, Cheung (1984:274) maintains that using English in intra-ethnic communication is regarded as being "in very bad taste and an indication of severance from the Chinese community".



The only circumstances which would prompt Cantonese-speaking Chinese professionals to address each other in English in a formal context would be at meetings where foreigners are present, and job interviews. In the former case, the use of English is a matter of courtesy to the non-Cantonese-speaking participants; in the latter case, English is often used as a means of assessing a candidate's professional knowledge and ability.

Although Cantonese is the usual language of intra-ethnic communication in the Hong Kong workplace, it would appear from the data in Table 4.5 that Cantonese is used slightly more in "downward" communication with fellow Cantonese speakers (38%) than in "upward" communication (24%). This seems to bear out the finding that whereas local professionals hardly ever use English to communicate with local juniors (3%), there are occasions when they need to do so with local seniors (10%).

#### **4.4.2: Language use in spoken workplace communication by sector**

The reasons for English being occasionally used by Cantonese speakers in junior-senior interactions form part of the discussion of the sector-based findings in Table 4.6 below. Table 4.6 summarizes the findings relating to spoken language use in government departments, government-related organizations and private companies. Although the picture which emerges is much less clear than was the case for written communication, when the overall means for the various speaking/listening situations are examined it is possible to detect a number of interesting patterns.

**Table 4.6: Language use in spoken workplace communication by sector**

Situation	Government	Government-related Organisations	Private companies	Overall
Seminars	3.32	3.31	3.07	3.15
Presentations	3.33	3.24	3.19	3.21
Conferences	3.50	3.45	3.38	3.41
Meetings	3.65	3.80	3.53	3.60
Job interviews	2.93	3.03	3.02	3.02
Appraisal interviews	3.78	3.72	3.63	3.66
On the telephone	3.97	3.99	3.74	3.82
Discussing work with colleagues	4.18	4.05	4.07	4.07
Socialising with colleagues	4.30	4.18	4.10	4.13

Scale: 1=Always English, 2=Usually English, 3=Both languages, 4=Usually Cantonese, 5=Always Cantonese. Chi-square tests were conducted to test the dependency between the categorical variables of situation and sector. These tests confirmed that (except for job interviews, appraisal interviews, discussing work with colleagues, socialising with colleagues) the variables are not independent ( $p < 0.05$ ).

The situation in which the use of English is most prevalent is job interviews (mean 3.02). Data from the focus groups indicate that interviews in Hong Kong are often divided into English and Cantonese segments, in which each language is assigned a clear role. It would appear that employers often use English to discuss technical issues with interviewees or test their professional knowledge. One reason for this is that English has traditionally served as the main language of post-secondary professional education in Hong Kong. As a result of their English-medium studies, many local professionals claim that they are ignorant of the Chinese equivalents of English technical terms or find the English terms more convenient. The following exchange from the focus group interview illustrates this point (see Appendix III, page 11):

Researcher: Can you give me an example ... of a term which is easier to say in English than Cantonese?

Informant 1: Such as the payment terms ... employment terms ...

Informant 2: ... we always use the terminology from accounting terms. For example Trial Balance ... or a Balance Sheet. We don't say in Chinese.

Researcher: Why not?

Informant 2: It's more easy for us to express.

A second reason for using English is that it is the *de facto* language of most professional bodies in Hong Kong, and many senior executives are actively involved in these bodies. A final reason for using English is that it gives employers the chance to assess a candidate's level of proficiency in the language. In contrast, Cantonese, the language of

solidarity and intimacy, is apparently often used to discuss personal matters such as career ambitions, personal qualities, interests, and contractual issues.

Apart from job interviews, the other situations in Table 4.6 which show a clear overall tendency towards the mid-point are seminars (mean 3.15), presentations (mean 3.21) and conferences (3.41). Unlike the other situations displayed (i.e. meetings, appraisal interviews, telephoning, discussions, socializing), which involve interaction in pairs or small groups, the main purpose of seminars, presentations and conferences in a professional context is the presentation of information (about new products, services, procedures, methods, etc.) to fairly large groups of fellow practitioners.

Although most members of a local professional audience will be Chinese, Hong Kong is an international business centre and for this reason there are always likely to be a number of non-Chinese present. If the presenters are Cantonese speakers, the presence of non-Cantonese-speaking participants in the audience - even one or two - usually ensures the use of English. This point was underlined by a participant in the focus group, who recalled a seminar in which the speaker commenced his presentation to an all-Chinese audience in Cantonese but immediately switched to English when a non-Chinese participant entered the room (see Appendix III, page 17):

In seminar, if foreigner is there, then all is in English ... even only one. If only Chinese, then speakers uses Cantonese – but if foreigner walks in – then ... uh ... switch to English.

Another participant stressed the point that seminars and presentations may be offered in separate Cantonese and English sessions (see Appendix III, page 17):

... it all depends on who is organizing the seminar. If it is, for example, like the Export Credit Insurance Association, then probably I will select it in English – because they got, they got the choice for you. You can select Chinese or the English seminar.

While the initial presentation of material at seminars, presentations and conferences conducted by Chinese speakers is generally in English (if expatriates are present), Cantonese is apparently often used for the purpose of explication or clarification in the question-and-answer session at the end. The situation just described contrasts interestingly with that

which obtains in formal meetings in Malaysia (Asmah, 1987:19). Asmah reports that, irrespective of the ethnic composition of the audience, Bahasa Malaysia is commonly used to start meetings but that once this formal introductory stage is over, participants switch to English (with possibly some code switching and mixing) for the remainder of the meeting. Asmah calls this the 'letterhead form of meetings'.

Seminars, presentations and conferences place demands primarily on participants' receptive language skills. The other communicative situations in Table 4.6 require interaction with colleagues and clients, and thus place demands on professionals' speaking and listening skills. When the overall means for these items are examined, it becomes immediately apparent that there is a tendency towards using Cantonese, particularly in the case of telephoning (mean 3.82), work-related discussions (mean 4.07) and socializing with colleagues (mean 4.13). Evidence from the focus-group discussion suggests that English is used at meetings only when non-Cantonese speakers are present (as confirmed by the results shown in Table 4.5), although, as we shall see, there are exceptions to this pattern. A focus-group participant also reported that the agenda and minutes of meetings conducted in Cantonese are usually written in English. This would seem to be borne out by comparing the overall means for meetings (3.60), agenda (2.12) and minutes (2.15).

The findings shown in Table 4.6 suggest that the subjects from the private sector need to speak and listen in English slightly more than their counterparts in government and government-related organizations, although, unlike the case of written communication (see Table 4.1), it is difficult to detect a clear pattern in the findings. This seems to be confirmed by the results of the chi-square tests which established a dependency relationship between the variables of situation and sector only in the case of seminars, presentations, conferences, meetings and telephoning. It will be recalled that in the area of written communication there was a significant relationship between text type and sector in all cases (see footnote to Table 4.1). The findings of the chi-square tests appear to underline a point made earlier about the

factors which influence the use of English and written Chinese/Cantonese in the Hong Kong workplace: that language choice in written communication tends to be determined by the business culture of particular organizations, whereas language choice in spoken communication seems to be more dependent on contextual factors.

It appears that the subjects from the government sector make much less use of English in spoken communication than in written communication. This finding confirms a point made by an official from Hong Kong's Official Languages Agency, who reported that in internal communication English is restricted to situations where expatriate officers are present (personal communication, 7 June 2000). Since the number of expatriates has greatly diminished in recent years, it would be reasonable to assume that Cantonese is now the predominant language of oral communication at all levels of government. However, a focus group participant from the government-related Housing Authority pointed out that in her department formal meetings are still conducted in English, even though all the participants (including the Chair) are Cantonese native speakers (see Appendix III, page 7). According to this informant, English is used because it is a departmental "tradition", although she also acknowledged that the Chair's high level of proficiency in the language may function as a means for him to impose his authority on the meeting, and thereby ensure the smooth management of business.

#### **4.4.3: Spoken communication in the private sector by company size**

As was noted earlier, the use of English appears to be slightly more prevalent in the private sector than in the government and government-related sectors. When the private-sector findings are analyzed according to ownership and size, it can be seen that the mean responses for the various situations are consistently lower in the foreign-owned sector than in the Hong Kong-owned sector (see Table 4.7 below).

**Table 4.7: Spoken communication in the private sector by company size**

Situation	Hong Kong-owned companies			Foreign-owned companies		
	Small	Medium	Large	Small	Medium	Large
Seminars	3.21	3.11	3.23	2.96	2.93	2.77
Presentations	3.29	3.43	3.24	3.04	3.05	2.88
Conferences	3.65	3.68	3.44	3.02	3.10	2.99
Meetings	3.70	3.77	3.75	3.07	2.91	3.17
Job interviews	3.18	3.41	2.92	2.86	2.92	2.81
Appraisal interviews	3.58	3.61	3.94	3.14	3.51	3.48
On the telephone	3.82	3.80	3.89	3.23	3.53	3.59
Discussing work with colleagues	4.11	4.15	4.26	3.91	3.94	3.80
Socialising with colleagues	4.08	4.01	4.29	3.89	4.02	3.95

Scale: 1=Always English, 2=Usually English, 3=Both languages, 4=Usually Cantonese, 5=Always Cantonese. Chi-square tests were conducted to test the dependency between the categorical variables of situation and company size. In the Hong Kong-owned sector, these tests confirmed that (except for job interviews, conferences, appraisal interviews and socialising with colleagues) the variables are independent ( $p < 0.05$ ). In the case of foreign-owned companies, the chi-square tests revealed that all the variables are independent.

The slightly greater orientation towards the use of English in foreign-owned companies is perhaps not surprising. Although Cantonese speakers are usually in a majority in foreign-owned companies, particularly in large international corporations, as a result of their foreign origins it is generally the case that the upper echelons of such companies are dominated by expatriates. The presence of expatriates inevitably means that Chinese employees are required to speak English for particular purposes in various workplace settings. Generally speaking, Chinese professionals who work at senior levels in foreign companies often need to use English in business-related oral communication. In contrast, junior and middle-ranking employees have fewer opportunities to speak English as their contacts with expatriate staff tend to be limited.

When the findings in Table 4.7 are examined in terms of company size, it is difficult to detect a clear pattern. Although in a number of situations English appears to be more prevalent in large Hong Kong and foreign companies, this is by no means a consistent pattern (cf. the results for written communication in Table 4.4). Indeed, as the footnote to Table 4.7 indicates, chi-square tests found no connection between language use and

company size, with the exception of job interviews, conferences, appraisal interviews and work-related socialising in the Hong Kong-owned sector. The results of these tests therefore underline the point made earlier that - unlike written communication - language choice in spoken business communication in Hong Kong is more dependent on the contextual factors which influence particular communicative situations than factors such as sector, ownership or size.

In this chapter, I presented and discussed the results of the survey in terms of the language chosen to carry out particular workplace communication tasks in both written and spoken modes. The discussion involved explaining how certain factors - employing sector, company size, and company ownership – influence the use of English and Chinese to carry out particular workplace tasks. In the next chapter, I narrow the focus of the study in order to examine the uses of English specifically in the Hong Kong workplace.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Results and discussion part two: the use of English in the professional workplace**

#### **5.1: Introduction**

To this point, the central issue in the discussion of results has been that of choice of language among subjects and the way that choice is influenced by certain key factors. In this chapter, however, the focus of the research narrows to a consideration of the use of English alone. The section begins by examining the use of English *vis a vis* the employing sectors before going on to explore the relationships between the need to operate in English with respect to membership of particular professional areas.

This exploration also involves examining the influence of rank on the need to use English to perform various communication tasks. In this chapter, the discussion makes considerable use of the information given in the language logs kept by five volunteer subjects who were asked to record only those tasks which they were required to carry out in English in a typical working week (see Appendix IV).

#### **5.2: The use of English in the public and private sectors**

This section examines the extent to which professionals working in the public and private sectors in Hong Kong need to write, read and speak/listen in English at work. The data presented here – and indeed throughout the whole chapter – derives from responses to Section Three of the final version of the survey questionnaire (see Appendix II). As was the case in the previous chapter, results are presented as tabulated mean frequencies.

##### **5.2.1: Writing in English by sector**

I begin the presentation of findings with a discussion of the use of English in the public (government and government-related organizations) and private sectors (private



companies). The overall means in Table 5.1 (final column) indicate that written English continues to play an important role in the post-1997 workplace.

**Table 5.1: Writing in English by sector**

<b>Text Type</b>	<b>Government</b>	<b>Government-related Organisations</b>	<b>Private companies</b>	<b>Overall</b>
E-mails	3.78	3.79	4.41	4.24
Faxes	4.02	3.65	4.44	4.23
Memos	4.06	3.64	3.85	3.81
Letters	3.64	3.34	3.92	3.77
Reports	3.79	3.47	3.59	3.58
Instructions	3.18	3.20	3.22	3.21
Minutes	3.28	2.94	2.98	3.00

Scale: 1=Never, 2=Seldom (once/twice a year), 3=Not very often (once/twice every six months), 4=Sometimes (once/twice a month), 5=Often (once/twice a week), 6=Always (almost every day). Chi-square tests were conducted to test the dependency between the categorical variables of text type and sector. These tests confirmed that, with the exception of reports and instructions, the variables are not independent ( $p < 0.05$ ).

As might be expected, the documents which subjects write most frequently in English are e-mails, faxes, memos and letters; in other words, interpersonal texts whose primary purpose is the communication of information and instructions between people and organisations. Although – as will be seen later in this chapter – the demand for written English varies according to sector, profession and rank, taken as a whole the findings cast doubt on Luke & Richards' (1982) and Li's (1999) contention that the need for productive language skills in the Hong Kong workplace is quite restricted. While it may be the case that blue-collar workers in Hong Kong have had little need to write in English at work, this does not necessarily hold true for personnel in the “front-line” (non-management) workforce, whose numbers (in relation to unskilled and semi-skilled workers) have greatly expanded as a consequence of Hong Kong's economic transformation in the past two decades from a manufacturing base to an international financial centre.

When we compare the use of written English in government, quasi-governmental organisations and private companies several interesting patterns emerge. Firstly, it would appear that professionals in the private sector make greater use of English in external written communication (e.g. faxes, e-mails and letters) than their counterparts in

government. Secondly, professionals who work for government departments appear to make greater use of English in internal written communication (e.g. memos and minutes) than practitioners working for private companies. Thirdly, professionals employed by government-affiliated organisations apparently have less need to write in English than their counterparts in the civil service and the private sector.

The importance of English in external communication in the private sector can be explained to a large extent by the fact that professionals working for local and international companies are often required to transact business with clients, partners and colleagues in Hong Kong and overseas, and English, as the principal language of international business, is the natural medium for such communications. An interesting illustration of this point can be drawn from the Language Log 1 in Appendix IV. This log keeper, an accounting officer from the Business Services field working for a large German bank clearly makes very extensive use of English in both spoken and written modes. The communication whether internal (e.g. on day two discussing a cash advance with a German Senior Vice President) or external (e.g. on day three talking to the Stuttgart-based German Chief Accountant on the telephone) is always in English.

If we turn to the public sector, the lower means for letters, faxes and e-mails in this sector (compared with the private sector) perhaps reflect the government's policy (dating from the late 1960s) to use Chinese in dealings with the public. According to an official in the administration's Official Languages Agency, 'all incoming correspondence in Chinese is replied to in Chinese to avoid any possible language barrier and as a matter of courtesy'. Similarly, civil servants use Chinese 'when communication is initiated by the Government and the addressee is known to understand Chinese' (personal communication, 7 June 2000).

While the use of English in external communication may be diminishing somewhat in the public sector, the findings relating to internal communication displayed in Table 5.1 suggest that the administration's policy (Hong Kong Government, 1995) to engineer a shift

from English to Chinese in internal communication is still far from complete. Indeed, language log 5 (kept by a volunteer from the Community and Social Services field and employed by the Hong Kong government as a social work assistant) shows quite clearly the predominance of English for writing memos, completing case study reports, and filling out official forms in her department. If forms are still issued and filled out in English, then clearly the move to Chinese for internal communication is very far from complete.

However, it would appear that the organisations which place the least demands on professionals' English writing skills are those in the government-affiliated sector. Although written communication in English has some degree of importance in these organisations, reflecting perhaps their historical ties to government, it seems that the subjects from this sector generally use rather more Chinese in both internal and external communication than their counterparts in direct government service. Supporting evidence for this point comes from comparing language logs 4 and 5; the former was kept by a Community and Social Services professional employed by the government-related Multi Services Centres for the Elderly and the latter was kept by the government-employed social work assistant. It can be seen almost at a glance that the government-related employee's use of English is limited to writing case study reports for internal reference, while the government employee is required to tackle a greater range of writing tasks.

The relatively high level of Chinese used in the government-related sector partly stems from the administration's public-sector language policy, but perhaps a more important determinant of language use in quasi-governmental organisations – one which was explained briefly in Chapter Four – is the fact that practitioners in this area (e.g. health-care professionals and social workers) need to communicate with the public. Issues of courtesy, clarity and clients' legal rights to access to personal data make Chinese the obvious medium for external communication with the public, particularly with the elderly, who for the most part cannot read English.

### 5.2.2: Reading in English by sector

When we examine the findings relating to reading in English in Table 5.2 below, two general points seem to be worthy of note. Firstly, the means for reading are higher than those for writing, which (as expected) indicates that the professional workplace in Hong Kong places greater demands on practitioners' reading skills than on their writing skills in English. The data in Tables 5.1 and 5.2 thus provide empirical support for Luke & Richards' (1982) and Li's (1999) claim that the need for receptive language skills in the employment domain outweighs that for productive skills. Secondly, and more generally, the findings in Table 5.2, allied to those in Table 5.1, offer empirical evidence to underpin Li's (1999:93) contention that 'the unmarked written language choice in office settings is still English'.

**Table 5.2: Reading in English by sector**

Text Type	Government	Government-related Organisations	Private companies	Overall
Faxes	4.54	3.91	4.69	4.50
Letters	4.48	3.91	4.41	4.30
E-mails	3.93	3.82	4.48	4.30
Memos	4.88	3.91	4.17	4.16
Reports	4.10	3.80	4.00	3.96
Notices	4.35	3.69	3.95	3.92
Instructions	4.19	3.70	3.87	3.85
Circulars	4.42	3.81	3.79	3.84
Minutes	4.08	3.34	3.51	3.51
Legal documents	3.67	3.35	3.39	3.41

Chi-square tests were conducted to test the dependency between the categorical variables of text type and sector. These tests confirmed that, with the exception of legal documents, the variables are not independent ( $p < 0.05$ ).

As might be expected, the findings relating to reading in English reflect patterns of language use already discerned in Table 5.1. In the first place, professionals working in the private sector tend to spend more time reading incoming documents in English such as faxes and letters than more internally oriented texts such as memos and minutes. Professionals in the civil service, however, seem to devote more time to reading documents of inter/intra-departmental communication in English than their counterparts in private

companies. The internal orientation of public servants is particularly evident in the high mean (4.88) for memos (the quintessential document of internal communication), which is significantly higher than that in the private sector (4.17).

The findings relating to reading in the civil service (allied to those for writing in Table 5.1) tend to confirm the picture of public-sector language use provided by the informant in the Official Languages Agency, who reported that ‘English is still the primary working language in most of the Policy Bureaux and front-line Departments’. This official did, however, point out that government departments are ‘charting and reviewing progress in using Chinese in official business’, and (as of June, 2000) ‘results obtained so far indicate a general trend towards greater use of Chinese’. On the evidence of the findings presented in Table 5.2, however, the shift from English to Chinese appears to be in greater evidence in quasi-governmental organisations than in the civil service itself.

### 5.2.3: Speaking and listening in English by sector

While the data in Tables 5.1 and 5.2 indicate that English continues to function as the main language of written communication in the Hong Kong workplace, the findings relating to oral communication in Table 5.3 below suggest that spoken English plays a lesser (though not unimportant) role in the professional lives of most of the subjects.

**Table 5.3: Speaking and listening in English by sector**

Situation	Government	Government-related Organisations	Private companies	Overall
On the telephone	3.40	3.05	3.48	3.37
Seminars	2.85	3.05	3.04	3.03
Meetings	2.80	2.74	3.08	2.98
Job interviews	2.50	3.00	2.81	2.82
Presentations	2.60	2.90	2.76	2.78
Conferences	2.44	2.69	2.63	2.63
Work-related discussions	2.45	2.60	2.60	2.58
Appraisal interviews	2.19	2.52	2.34	2.36
Socialising	2.17	2.33	2.36	2.33

Chi-square tests were conducted to test the dependency between the categorical variables of situation and sector. These tests confirmed that, with the exception of telephoning, meetings and job interviews, the variables are independent ( $p < 0.05$ ).

These findings tend to confirm Luke & Richards' (1982) and Li's (1999) impression that the employment sector in Hong Kong places greater demands on professionals' written communication skills in English than on their spoken communication skills. The relatively low overall means for speaking and listening in English, ranging from 2.33 (socialising) to 3.37 (telephoning), can largely be attributed to the fact that Hong Kong's workforce at all levels is predominantly made up of Cantonese speakers. For the most part, therefore, Chinese professionals have little need to communicate orally in English. There are, of course, exceptions to this pattern of language behaviour as evidenced in language logs 1 and 3; the keeper of the first log recorded the following socialising events on days one and two respectively:

- General conversations with English speakers around the company, including lunch: about 1 hour and 15 minutes.
- Social conversation with Head of Operations, a German, about family matters: about 15 minutes.

The keeper of the third log, drawn from the field of Engineering and employed as an electronic engineer in a large foreign-owned company reported no socialising in English but did report using English on the telephone and in meetings. The entry for listening/speaking for day one is not untypical:

- Made a telephone call to supplier in USA to get information on a new product: about 10 minutes.
- Telephone call to colleague in Paris office to check quality control problem in one of our systems: about 10 minutes.
- Internal meeting with top management; most colleagues at meeting were foreigners: about 35 minutes.

Three log keepers, however, reported either speaking English for only a few minutes over the working week or did not speak the language at all. What emerges fairly clearly from the qualitative data confirms a finding reported in Chapter Four: that the need for Chinese professionals to speak and listen in English for various work-related purposes is highly dependent on contextual factors, the most important of which is the presence of non-Cantonese speakers. As might be expected, Cantonese (generally admixed with English professional terminology) is the usual medium of spoken workplace communication if all

the participants are Cantonese speakers. It is worth noting, however, that meetings and discussions conducted in Cantonese tend to be reported in English, a practice which appears to be confirmed by the survey findings as shown in Tables 5.1 and 5.2, and which receives further support from both the focus group feedback (see Appendix III, page 7), and language log 3 in Appendix IV (day one, reading/writing column).

While Chinese professionals' use of spoken English at work is generally motivated by the presence of non-Cantonese speakers, the focus group discussion revealed a number of situations in which local professionals elect to use English in intra-ethnic communication, a phenomenon which is generally taboo in the Hong Kong context (Cheung, 1984). Perhaps the most common example is in employment interviews, where a Cantonese-speaking panel may conduct part of an interview in English in order to assess a candidate's proficiency in the language (an important requirement in most job advertisements) and their professional or technical knowledge (which is generally acquired through English-medium university courses).

There may also be cases (rather infrequently perhaps) where organisational policy or tradition dictates the use of English among a group of Cantonese speakers. For example, an official from the government-related Housing Authority who participated in the focus group stated that meetings in her department are still conducted in English, even though all the participants are Cantonese speakers. This informant claimed that English was used primarily as a result of departmental tradition stemming from colonial days, and she also acknowledged her Head of Department's high level of proficiency in the language. It may be the case that this particular HoD uses English to increase the formality level of meetings and to impose his authority on meetings. The following exchange is taken from the transcript of the focus group interview (Appendix III, page 7):

Researcher: ... But your boss uses English actually in meetings even if all the participants are native speakers of Cantonese?

Informant: Even no foreigner there ... we still go in English ... it is the habit of my boss.

Researcher: Why is it his habit?

Informant: He got a good standard and ... maybe because he work for many years in ... under British. In the old days, meetings always in English.

Whether this practice is at all common in government-related bodies and civil service departments generally must be extremely doubtful. The evidence in Table 5.3 suggests that professionals in the civil service have little need to use English in spoken communication (in marked contrast to written communication). This finding confirms a point made by the informant from the Official Languages Agency, who reported that spoken English in government tends to be restricted to situations where expatriate officers are present. Since the number of expatriates has greatly diminished in the past decade, it would be reasonable to assume that Cantonese is now the predominant language of oral communication at all levels of government.

In the case of speaking and listening in English it is not possible to compare patterns of language use in the government, government-affiliated and private sectors since the chi-square tests revealed that, with the exception of telephoning, job interviews and meetings, no relationship exists between the categorical variables of situation and sector. In contrast, the chi-square tests on the data relating to writing (Table 5.1) and reading (Table 5.2) indicated that that in most cases a dependent relationship exists between text type and sector. The results of the chi-square tests therefore suggest that whereas language choice in written business communication is largely determined by organizational tradition or policy, language choice in spoken business communication is to a great extent dictated by the particular circumstances which influence each communicative situation.

### **5.3: The use of English by professional area**

It will be recalled that professionals drawn from five broad areas participated in the survey: Business Services, Community and Social Services, Construction and Real Estate, Engineering, and Manufacturing. Tables 5.4-5.6 below display the mean frequencies for each professional area for writing, reading, and speaking/listening in English respectively.



### 5.3.1: Writing in English by professional area

Table 5.4 displays the results for the writing of certain key text types which were selected from the original and much longer inventory of text types on the survey questionnaire. The text types were selected because they are the most frequently produced in all the professional workplaces surveyed and their selection allows for a more focused discussion of results.

**Table 5.4: Writing in English by professional area**

Text type	Business Services	Community & Social Services	Construction & Real Estate	Engineering	Manufacturing
E-mails	4.26	3.68	3.83	5.33	4.84
Faxes	4.24	3.40	4.67	4.82	4.62
Memos	3.54	3.50	4.40	4.14	4.14
Letters	3.64	3.16	4.46	4.07	4.08
Reports	3.30	3.38	3.89	4.34	3.78
Instructions	2.90	3.03	3.56	3.77	3.59
Minutes	2.70	2.84	3.36	3.66	3.20

Chi-square tests were conducted to test the dependency between the categorical variables of text type and profession. These tests confirmed that the variables are not independent ( $p < 0.05$ ).

The highest overall mean for writing in English was registered by Engineering and the lowest by Community and Social Services. With the important exceptions of letters and memos, engineers appear to write all other types of text with greater frequency than professionals in the other four areas. This initially rather surprising finding may be partly explained in terms of text type: engineers are required to write reports frequently – especially progress reports – on the projects they are carrying out at any given time. In fact, nearly 85% of subjects indicated their need to write progress reports in English when responding to item 52 in Section 3A of the final version of the questionnaire and this confirms an important finding in Evans (1999b). Evans found that his Building Services Engineering subjects wrote progress reports in English more frequently than any other sub-genre of report. Whether these reports are prepared for a domestic (Chinese-reading) audience or for scrutiny by non-Chinese-reading representatives of international companies

based overseas or in Hong Kong, they are nearly always written in English. Further evidence of the importance of the progress report in the Engineering field can be drawn from this brief exchange between the researcher and the focus group informant from Engineering (Appendix III, page 13):

Informant: I need to write reports on projects. A kinds of checking reports.

Researcher: Checking what, Stanley? I mean, quality, safety ...

Informant: No. Progress in a project. Not so expensive and on time.

It is, then, not entirely surprising that Engineering returns a mean of around 4.3 for this text type compared, for example, to a mean of around 3.4 for subjects in the Community and Social Services category. Employees in the field of community and social work tend to produce reports for external consumption in Chinese. This is a result of laws which allow clients access to data which refer to them and which stipulate that documents should be produced in the language most comprehensible to clients. Internal records and reports, by contrast, tend to be kept in English as evidenced very clearly in language logs 4 and 5 (see Appendix IV). The following extract is taken from the day 3 reading/writing column of log 5, which was kept by a Social Work Assistant working for government:

- Wrote down client's particulars in her case file: about 25 minutes
- Read case file and drafted complete case recording: about 2 hours
- Interviewed clients and then entered summary of interview into case recording file: about 1 hour
- Writing an investigation report on employee compensation for review by District Court: about 1 hour
- Wrote a memo to refer a case to the Field Unit to process a claim for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance: about 15 minutes
- Filled out a form authorizing payment of expenses to field team: about 15 minutes

If the focus of scrutiny is switched from reports to minutes, it appears that subjects from Engineering are more likely to write these in English (mean of 3.7) than subjects from the professional area of Business Services (mean of 2.7). This may be partly explicable in terms of the specialist nature of much engineering work – clerical or secretarial staff would find it extremely difficult to draft accurate minutes of meetings because of the highly technical nature of much of the discussion and it seems that participants often elect a junior colleague to write the minutes. By contrast, the field of Business Services commonly makes secretaries available for note taking and writing minutes, and so subjects in this

professional area are less likely than engineers to be required to write minutes at all. But engineers are by no means limited to writing in English in only one or two genres as this extract from day one of the language log kept by the participant from the Engineering field makes plain:

- Drafted minutes of internal meeting for checking by seniors before distribution: about 1 hour
- Wrote and faxed a letter to supplier to agree price of equipment: about 15 minutes
- Wrote and faxed a letter to a main contractor to revise the project schedule: about 20 minutes
- Read and answered a letter requesting advice from client in USA: about 30 minutes
- Wrote memo to authorize transfer of equipment from one site to another site: about 10 minutes
- E-mailed colleagues to give technical information on a new product: about 5 minutes

It appears from the data displayed in Table 5.4 that the text types most frequently produced in English by Business Services employees are e-mails and faxes. To find corroborating evidence for this, the language logs submitted by the two study participants working in Business Services were checked. One log keeper - an Accounting Officer with the Hong Kong branch of a large German bank - noted that she had sent 9 faxes in a single afternoon (see Appendix IV, log 1, day five). The faxes were all written in English - as is the practice in international banking. The second log keeper – an Accounts Clerk for the Hong Kong branch of a Japanese trading firm (see log 2, days one and two) – reported writing no faxes or e-mails but did write two letters of confirmation in English during the reporting period of a working week. It is interesting to note that the two letters written by this participant were addressed to external service providers: a bank and an international firm of accountants.

### **5.3.2: Reading in English by professional area**

Results of the data analysis for reading in English in the various professional areas are displayed below in Table 5.5.

**Table 5.5: Reading in English by professional area**

<b>Text type</b>	<b>Business Services</b>	<b>Community &amp; Social Services</b>	<b>Construction &amp; Real Estate</b>	<b>Engineering</b>	<b>Manufacturing</b>
Faxes	4.51	3.75	4.90	4.87	4.93
Letters	4.27	3.75	4.84	4.45	4.53
E-mails	4.34	3.70	3.98	5.19	4.92
Memos	4.04	3.81	4.70	4.36	4.28
Reports	3.77	3.64	4.36	4.54	4.12
Notices	3.78	3.60	4.27	4.32	4.10
Instructions	3.67	3.57	4.27	4.23	4.07
Circulars	3.70	3.70	4.18	4.15	3.84
Minutes	3.19	3.24	4.23	4.03	3.63
Legal documents	3.23	3.27	3.75	3.81	3.45

Chi-square tests were conducted to test the dependency between the categorical variables of text type and profession. These tests confirmed that the variables are not independent ( $p < 0.05$ ).

As was the case for writing, the highest overall mean for reading in English is recorded by Engineering subjects and the lowest by those in the Community and Social Services category. This is not surprising since reading and writing are often inseparable skills and so a high degree of congruence between the data reported in Tables 5.4 and 5.5 is to be expected. The means for reading are higher than those for writing in all the professional areas and this indicates that subjects tend to read in English rather more than they write. This finding tends to confirm the view of Luke & Richards (1982) and Li (1999) that in terms of English language skills the professional workplace in Hong Kong places greater demands on receptive than the productive.

Across the professional areas, faxes, letters, e-mails and memos are the most frequently read text types and circulars, minutes and legal documents are read less frequently. These quantitative findings were confirmed by the qualitative data gathered from both focus group feedback and language logs. While log keepers from all areas mentioned the frequent, almost daily, reading of faxes, letters, e-mails and memos, only single occurrences of reading a report, minutes and a circular were recorded. The circular was read by a subject drawn from the Community and Social Work category (in this instance employed by the Salvation Army in one of their Multi-Services Centres for the

elderly). International non-governmental agencies and charities in Hong Kong, such as the Salvation Army, issue all internal communications in English – a policy which stands in contrast to the issuing of documents in Chinese or in Chinese with an English translation which, as I indicated in Chapter Four, is now common practice in government departments.

### 5.3.3: Speaking and listening in English by professional area

The analysis will now focus on speaking and listening in English. Unlike the analysis of reading and writing, speaking and listening are dealt with together since in all the situations presented to subjects they are inseparable although, of course, the proportion of each skill used varies according to the situation; there is likely to be a greater equivalence of skill use, for example, in work-related discussions than in presentations. By contrast, it is perfectly possible for a job to demand a great deal of reading in English but very little production of writing. My reading of the literature would lead me to expect lower overall means for speaking and listening than those for writing and reading, and indeed this is the case as the results in Table 5.6 below show.

**Table 5.6: Speaking and listening in English by professional area**

<b>Situation</b>	<b>Business Services</b>	<b>Community &amp; Social Services</b>	<b>Construction &amp; Real Estate</b>	<b>Engineering</b>	<b>Manufacturing</b>
On the telephone	3.45	3.11	3.13	3.84	3.54
Seminars	2.85	2.98	3.04	3.70	3.11
Meetings	2.81	2.66	3.13	3.79	3.26
Job interviews	2.68	2.78	2.77	3.34	3.01
Presentations	2.51	2.83	2.87	3.42	2.91
Conferences	2.36	2.61	2.72	3.35	2.82
Work-related discussions	2.45	2.52	2.47	3.23	2.76
Appraisal interviews	2.17	2.43	2.30	2.90	2.49
Socialising	2.21	2.24	2.21	2.93	2.57

Chi-square tests were conducted to test the dependency between the categorical variables of situation and profession. These tests confirmed that the variables are independent ( $p < 0.05$ ).

A pattern noted earlier was partially repeated for speaking in English: that the Engineering category recorded the highest overall means and thus appear to use English for spoken communication more frequently than subjects from the other categories. It will be

recalled that the lowest overall means for both writing and reading in English were recorded by subjects from the Community and Social Services field, but the lowest for speaking and listening were scored by those from the Business Services category. The results here almost certainly reflect the fact that most of the engineering subjects were drawn from large, foreign-owned firms and it is these kinds of organisations which tend to develop a culture of English language use. Subjects in the Business Services field were, by contrast, mostly drawn from Hong Kong-owned companies of small and medium sizes and we have noted that such concerns require their employees to use English less frequently than large, foreign-owned concerns.

Of the speech situations displayed in Table 5.6, speaking and listening on the telephone registered the highest means across the professional areas. Although focus group feedback tended to confirm that Cantonese is the unmarked choice of language for business-to-business communication on the telephone within Hong Kong, there was also evidence from both the focus group feedback and the language logs that international calls in English are made quite frequently by subjects to customers, suppliers, purchasers, transportation agencies and the like.

For example, one of the log keepers, the electronic engineer working for a large international automation control company, recorded making six lengthy overseas calls in English in a single working week (see Appendix IV, log 3). Thanks to the meticulousness of this particular log keeper, we know that he spoke to an American supplier, two French colleagues at the Paris office of the company, two British co-workers in the London office, and an Australian working for the transportation agency employed by the log keeper's company.

Table 5.6 above shows that the lowest overall means among the various speech situations were recorded for socialising in English. This unsurprising finding lends additional weight to the finding discussed earlier in this chapter in relation to speaking and

listening in English by sector (see Table 5.3): that – with a few notable exceptions such as the accounting officer working for an international bank (see Appendix IV, log 1) - the Cantonese-native-speaking homogeneity of many Hong Kong workplaces means that professionals are rarely required to speak or listen in English.

#### **5.4: The use of English by rank**

The final and relatively brief section of this chapter will focus on the use of English by occupational rank (junior, middle or senior). This is done to identify possible connections a professional's level of seniority within an organisation and his/her need to write, read, and speak and listen in English.

##### **5.4.1: Writing in English by rank**

Table 5.7 below displays the results for writing in English. Subjects were asked to classify themselves in terms of their rank within their employing organisations. Fully 70% of subjects (see Chapter Three, Table 3.2) had been in full-time employment for 10 years or less and nearly 40% of the whole body of subjects had less than 5 years of full-time working experience in their professions. This indicates that the results of the self-ranking exercise are probably quite accurate in that the vast majority of subjects classified themselves as either junior or intermediate in status; 42% and 47% respectively with only 11% classifying themselves as senior.

**Table 5.7: Writing in English by rank**

<b>Text Type</b>	<b>Junior</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>Senior</b>
E-mails	3.87	4.47	4.44
Faxes	3.75	4.53	4.84
Memos	3.48	4.03	4.27
Letters	3.35	3.99	4.45
Reports	3.29	3.74	4.04
Instructions	2.99	3.27	3.84
Minutes	3.79	3.07	3.52

Chi-square tests were conducted to test the dependency between the categorical variables of

text type and rank. These tests confirmed that the variables are not independent ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Seniority appears to be of considerable importance in determining the need for an employee to communicate in written English; the highest overall mean is recorded by subjects of senior rank and the lowest by those of junior rank. This finding corroborates that of Forey & Nunan (forthcoming, 2001) who, it will be recalled from Chapter Two, found that the senior accountancy subjects in their study spent on average 15 hours per week writing documents in English.

The data in Table 5.7 relating to instructions, memos and minutes is of interest in terms of both confirming common sense expectations and providing collaborative data to support previous claims made in this study. It is to be expected that instructions and memos are produced with greater frequency by senior rather than junior or middle grades of staff, since these text types are formal documents often used for downward transmission within an organization. Minutes, by contrast, are more frequently produced by junior grades of staff than either middle-ranking or senior staff. This finding corroborates that reported earlier when discussing Engineering subjects: that junior employees are often allocated the task of taking the minutes of meetings where a secretary is not provided by the organization.

While Li (1999) appears to be broadly correct in his claim that English is the unmarked language choice for office-based written communication in Hong Kong, the present study is able to reveal variations within this area of language use in that the patterns of use which begin to emerge from the data in Table 5.7 suggest that the use of English rather than Chinese for written communication is to some extent context-sensitive and tends to be used more frequently in formal communications and at senior levels.

#### **5.4.2: Reading in English by rank**

Frequency of writing in English, then, appears to correlate positively with seniority of rank and, since reading and writing are closely associated skills, a similar correlation is



expected for reading in English. Table 5.8 below shows that there is such a connection, although it is generally a little stronger than that for writing in English.

**Table 5.8: Reading in English by rank**

<b>Text Type</b>	<b>Junior</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>Senior</b>
Faxes	4.09	4.79	4.96
Letters	3.94	4.55	4.71
E-mails	3.88	4.61	4.48
Memos	3.87	4.37	4.49
Reports	3.61	4.20	4.34
Notices	3.68	4.09	4.22
Instructions	3.65	3.96	4.22
Circulars	3.60	4.04	4.07
Minutes	3.22	3.68	3.94
Legal documents	3.25	3.44	3.87

Chi-square tests were conducted to test the dependency between the categorical variables of text type and rank. These tests confirmed that the variables are not independent ( $p < 0.05$ ).

The finding that senior staff are required to read documents – particularly minutes and legal documents - more frequently than more junior staff is an important finding and again goes some way towards lending empirical credibility to Luke & Richard's (1982) assertion that the Hong Kong workplace makes greater demands on an employee's receptive rather than productive skills in English.

#### **5.4.3: Speaking and listening in English by rank**

The data for speaking and listening in English by rank are presented in Table 5.9 below and tend to confirm the pattern established for writing and reading in English: that senior ranks are called upon more frequently to use English than either junior or middle-ranking grades of staff.

**Table 5.9: Speaking and listening in English by rank**

<b>Situation</b>	<b>Junior</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>Senior</b>
On the telephone	3.08	3.52	3.92
Seminars	2.84	3.06	3.59
Meetings	2.72	2.09	3.51
Job interviews	2.83	2.78	2.98
Presentations	2.69	2.75	3.18
Conferences	2.49	2.67	2.99
Work-related discussions	2.46	2.61	2.91
Appraisal interviews	2.42	2.27	2.61
Socialising	2.28	2.31	2.65

Chi-square tests were conducted to test the dependency between the categorical variables of situation and rank. These tests confirmed that, with the exception of socialising, the variables are independent ( $p < 0.05$ ).

In fact, the data indicate a stronger differentiation between ranks for speaking and listening than for either writing or reading but within a far narrower range of mean frequencies. It would appear, then, that the requirement to speak in English increases with seniority and that the factor of seniority influences not only the frequency with which English is used for purely functional or transactional purposes, say, telephoning, but even that for purposes such as socialising – for which Cantonese would normally be the default option. A comparison of the means in Tables 5.3 and 5.9 show that senior staff employed by private sector companies are required to speak and listen in English more frequently than their counterparts in the public sector.

Another interesting comparison is that between the data displayed in Tables 5.9 and 4.7 (for spoken communication in the private sector by company size and ownership). The comparison reveals that local professionals employed by large, foreign-owned private companies are required to speak and listen in English more frequently than those employed in smaller companies and those working for Hong Kong-owned concerns. As we would expect in a language ecology which has Cantonese as the default option for informal and intimate spoken communication, much of senior staff's speaking and listening in English takes place in formal, work-related settings.

In this penultimate chapter of the thesis, I have presented the findings of the study relating to the use of English specifically in the professional workplace in Hong Kong. The findings have largely confirmed the views expressed in the existing literature that English is used rather more for reading and writing than for speaking and listening and that English is the unmarked option for written office-based communication. However, some interesting new data has come to light.

Grouping and analyzing the data around a number of different independent variables has allowed certain subtleties of language use to be detected; for example, within the broad category of reading in English by rank, it was found that faxes – formats purely external in orientation - are the text type read most frequently by all ranks of staff, and while speaking and listening in English was found in all situations to be rather infrequent, using the telephone constitutes the most frequent use of spoken English for all ranks. In this connection, it is interesting to note an item of qualitative corroboration for this empirical finding: that among the five language log keepers (all at junior or middle-ranking levels of seniority) three reported making telephone calls in English, but only two reported participation in formal or informal meetings in English, and indeed two reported no occasions at all when they were required to speak in English.

In the next chapter, I present the conclusions which flow from the findings discussed in Chapters Four and Five. I also offer a critical review of the study and at the same time suggest some possible directions for future research into language use in the professional workplace in Hong Kong.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Conclusion**

#### **6.1: Introduction**

In this final chapter, I will first address directly the five research questions posed in Chapter One. To address the first research question, I review the socio-cultural and historical factors which have shaped Hong Kong's current language ecology in general and language use in the workplace in particular. There then follows a consideration of how certain factors influence the decision to use English or Chinese in office-based communication. The factors in question here are those of employing sector, the ownership of a company or organisation and the size of the company or organisation.

The third part of this section will review the main ways in which certain factors influence the use of English specifically in the professional Hong Kong workplace. The factors under investigation in this case are those of employing sector, membership of one of the five professional fields central to the study, and rank within the employing organisation. The various factors and their influences on workplace language use are combined in this discussion to achieve a single coherent, consolidated response to the second and third research questions.

I then evaluate in relation to research questions four and five how this empirical study confirms or disconfirms the received expert opinion that the professional Hong Kong workplace makes greater demands on local employees' receptive rather than productive English language skills and that where productive skills are demanded, English is the unmarked option for written communication while Cantonese is the unmarked option for spoken communication. For the sake of coherence and as for questions two and three, I deal with questions four and five in combination.

In the final and relatively brief section in this chapter I present a critical review of the study; I do this in order to evaluate if, and to what extent, the aims of the study have been achieved. While critically reviewing the study, I suggest a number of possible directions for future research into language use in the professional Hong Kong workplace.

### **6.1.1: A review of the socio-cultural and historical forces which have shaped Hong Kong's language ecology**

The socio-cultural and historical forces which have shaped Hong Kong's language ecology were the subject of the discussions in Chapters One and Two. In Chapter One, I identified and described certain key socio-cultural factors which have shaped not only the purposes for which a particular language is used but, in the case of English, the actual form that language has taken. It is also worth noting here that Hong Kong-specific socio-cultural factors have not only influenced the local form of English, but have also impacted on the written Chinese language in terms of colloquial additions to standard written Chinese script which appear nowhere else in the Chinese-speaking world.

Perhaps the most important shaping influence in the development of Hong Kong's language ecology - and certainly the most consistent - is that throughout the 150 years of Hong Kong's recorded history about 98% of the population has spoken Cantonese as the mother tongue; a factor which has delimited the possibilities for linguistic diversity since - as I pointed out in Chapter One - the result of the dominance of Cantonese has been that Hong Kong has never needed a lingua franca to unite resident speakers of different mother tongues. Indeed, as we saw in Chapter One when examining census data, the adoption of Cantonese as the language of integration by immigrant and refugee native speakers of other dialects of Chinese initiated a sharp decline in the use of such dialects; for example, Sze Yap, Hoklo and Hakka.

Another important force in shaping the local language ecology has been the role played by English. The imposition of English in the colonial period (1840-early 1960s) created a diglossic situation in which English functioned as the common language in the high domains of government, law, business and education. I argued that the role of English in Hong Kong has been essentially "institutional" and refined this notion further by suggesting that in the colonial period, English played, *vis a vis* the general populace a restricted institutional role. In the transitional period (mid 1960s-1997), I suggested that English played an expanding institutional role as increasing numbers of Hong Kong people came to view themselves as bilingual in Chinese and English - largely as a result of the introduction of universal compulsory secondary education in the late 1970s.

In the post-colonial period (1998-present), I used the term "diminishing institutional" to reflect the growing importance of Chinese in the high domains of government, law and business. I made the point, however, that socio-cultural conditions in Hong Kong and, in particular, the dominance of Cantonese as the medium of virtually all social interaction, ensured that the form of English which spread among the population was non-standard in character and is not recognised as a nativised variety.

A factor which has played a central role in shaping how languages develop in Hong Kong are the outcomes of a local bilingual education. I pointed out in Chapter One that certain socio-cultural conditions - the demands from parents for their children to be educated through the medium of English, and the fact students do not get enough exposure and practice in using the language to cope comfortably with an education delivered through the medium of the L2 - tend to determine that the outcome of a bilingual education in Hong Kong is often of the subtractive kind. Where the result of a bilingual education is subtractive a level of L2 proficiency adequate for study is rarely achieved and often L1 suffers since the L2-led educational processes offer reduced opportunities for the individual to develop linguistic and cognitive skills in the mother tongue. This factor has impacted on

the local language ecology by creating the need for code mixing and switching, particularly in the secondary classroom.

Fishman's (1972) notion of "diglossia without bilingualism" seems to reflect the language situation in Hong Kong quite accurately. Luke and Richards (1982), however, characterised the language situation as one of "societal bilingualism" in which two largely monolingual societies exist in close physical proximity but with little interaction taking place between them. Luke & Richard's judgement, even at the time of writing, while accurate enough from the social interaction perspective, gives too little credit to Hong Kong peoples' language skills - few may be truly bilingual but it is likely that far fewer than this are monolingual. Following Saville-Troike (1989:57), I concluded that Hong Kong is perhaps most accurately defined as a society which is diglossic but not dinomic; by this I mean that Hong Kong is neither truly bilingual nor bicultural.

That said, the past three decades have, of course, witnessed a gradual realignment of the roles of the English and Chinese languages in Hong Kong society. During this period, the diglossic character of Hong Kong has been somewhat eroded as standard written Chinese and Cantonese have increasingly penetrated the high domains which had largely been the preserve of English during the period of British colonial rule. The beginnings of this shift can be traced to the early 1970s when the colonial government accorded co-official status to "Chinese"; a move which resulted in a steady increase in the use of Cantonese and written Chinese in public administration. However, the real momentum for the shift towards Chinese was provided by the signing of the Joint Declaration in 1984, which marked the formal beginning of the decolonisation process which was to culminate in mid-1997, when sovereignty over Hong Kong was returned to China.

As I pointed out in Chapter Two, since 1984, and particularly since the handover, there has been an undramatic but persistent increase in the use of Chinese and Cantonese in the executive, legislative, administrative, legal and educational domains. In some domains,

Chinese and Cantonese have largely replaced English (e.g. the Executive and Legislative Councils, and to some extent education) while in others (e.g. the legal system) Chinese has attained a degree of equality with English. It is very unlikely, however, that Putonghua (the Chinese national dialect) will replace Cantonese in the high domains. Evidence for this may be drawn from the fact that Cantonese has always held sway in the high domains and in education in Cantonese-speaking Guangdong Province - even at times of the greatest revolutionary fervour.

Putonghua is viewed in Hong Kong as a language worth learning for doing business with the mainland and arguments about Hong Kong's possibly triglossic future need to be set within the context I have just outlined. Nevertheless, the growing importance of Chinese in the local language ecology is gradually eroding the role of English and this diminishing presence in important domains leaves the professional workplace as arguably the only domain in post-colonial Hong Kong where English might be deemed to hold sway - an argument which strengthens the rationale for carrying out the present study.

#### **6.1.2: A review of the factors which influence the use of English and Chinese for written workplace communication and for reading**

The factor of employing sector is important in influencing what particular languages are used for, and subjects working in the private sector make the greatest use of English for external written communication, while those employed by government make the greatest use of the language for internal communication. Government-related organisations appear, generally speaking, to make the least use of written English. The private sector's international orientation clearly demands frequent written communication in English with overseas contacts and, among private sector companies, professionals employed by the large, foreign-owned ones make more frequent use of English in both external and internal written communication than either their counterparts in the Hong Kong-owned sector or



those employed by small and medium-sized companies. This argument is supported by the fact that some 19% of respondents working for Hong Kong-owned concerns opted for the mid point on the frequency scale i.e. “both languages”, which indicates that the locally-owned workplace makes greater demands on professionals’ multilingual skills. The trend in Hong Kong-owned companies to use Chinese for written communication will continue to gather momentum as trade with mainland China increases in volume year on year. By contrast, foreign-owned companies tend to be larger than their Hong Kong counterparts and are more likely than the latter to have dealings with other large international companies and with government departments. Large foreign-owned companies operating in Hong Kong tend to employ a relatively high proportion of expatriate employees – thus triggering the use of English for written communication by all parties involved in transactions.

If we now turn our attention to the use of written language in the five professional areas, we find that English holds sway with e-mails, reports and legal documents the most frequently written text types. This finding, I argued, is the result of both the technical ease of sending e-mails in English, and the fact that many ethnic Chinese professionals feel that they are able to write more effectively in English than in Chinese as a result of their English-medium educational and training experience.

An interesting and perhaps initially surprising finding was that, among the five broad professional areas surveyed, engineering professionals score the highest overall means and subjects from the field of Community and Social Services the lowest. This finding is less surprising, however, when the international orientation of engineering companies is borne in mind. The finding is also explicable by the fact that many engineering companies are foreign-owned and large. These factors determine the text types processed by engineers, and their audiences determine the language used. For example, engineers frequently write reports and it seems nearly always write these in English because of their international readership. By contrast, employees in the Community and Social

Services area produce nearly all their reports in Chinese which, as I explain below, is a legal requirement predicated on their readership's better comprehension of Chinese than English.

A further reason for the frequent use of English among engineering professionals relates to the technical nature of much written communication in the field. In addition to reports, engineering professionals frequently write read and write minutes in English and the choice of language here appears to be determined by two factors: the perceived suitability of English for discussing technical matters, and the fact that secretarial or clerical staff rarely have the technical expertise to produce minutes of meetings of engineers - a practical constraint which means that junior-ranking engineers are commonly assigned the task of writing the minutes.

A finding noted earlier in this section was the dominant use of English rather than Chinese in the government sector for internal written communication; this important finding suggests that government initiatives (both before and after the handover) to promote the use of written Chinese in government offices has been largely ineffective. However, Chinese is used more frequently than English for direct communication with the public and this undoubtedly reflects government policy - implemented gradually over the past thirty years - to use Chinese in direct dealings with the public. Nowhere is this important trend illustrated more plainly than in the case of professionals employed in the government-related sector. The results shown in Table 4.1 indicate that these professionals have less need to communicate in written English than either those in the private or government sectors; a finding readily explicable by the fact that the government-related sector includes bodies which interface with the public such as the Housing Authority, the Hospitals Authority and various social welfare organisations. All these bodies are required by law to use the language most easily comprehensible for clients and in nearly all cases this is, of course, Chinese.

The findings for reading cohere well with those for written communication in the sectors, although the means are generally higher for reading. In the private sector, the most frequently read text types are incoming documents such as faxes and letters, while internally-oriented text types such as memos and minutes are more frequently read in the government sector. In terms of rank, seniors in all fields tend to read documents in English more frequently than their junior or middle-ranking colleagues and this is particularly true for formal documents such as memos and instructions. However, the mean frequencies are a little lower for reading than for writing, indicating that all ranks of staff are required more frequently to read rather than write in English. As for writing, the professional area of Engineering registered the highest overall means for reading a range of text types but were closely followed by the Construction and Real Estate, and Manufacturing areas.

The central importance of reports, notices, instructions and legal documents in these areas is responsible, at least in part, for this result. Reading also parallels writing in that the professionals least likely to read documents in English are those employed in the Community and Social Services field. This is not surprising – as I explained earlier this field interfaces with the public and addresses them in Chinese and so attracts responses written in Chinese. In this respect it is interesting to note that the only department of the twenty-five in the Hong Kong Polytechnic University which has an official dispensation to teach through the medium of Chinese rather than English is the department of Applied Social Work.

### **6.1.3: A review of the factors which influence the use of English and Chinese for spoken workplace communication and for listening**

The results of the investigation into speaking and listening in the sectors presents an unsurprising contrast to those for writing and reading: Cantonese is used for most situations across all sectors and means for speaking and listening in English were significantly lower

than those for writing and reading across the five professional areas surveyed. It was noted that subjects drawn from the private sector appear to speak and listen in English slightly more than their counterparts in the government and government-related sectors. Unsurprisingly, the means show that professionals working for Hong Kong-owned companies tend to use Cantonese more frequently than those working in foreign-owned concerns, but again the differences are slight.

Chi-square tests revealed that there is little connection between speaking/listening and the size of an organisation. This underlines the fact that – unlike written communication – language choice in spoken business communication is more dependent on the contextual factors which impinge on communicative situations than on factors such as sector, ownership and size. The analysis of speaking and listening by sector is made problematic, then – but also rather more interesting - by the fact that the chi-square statistic shows no dependency between the situations presented and the sectors. This means that any conclusions must be tentative, although one overwhelming factor is clear enough – and this probably accounts for the chi-square result: the choice of language for speaking and listening in the workplace is quite evenly balanced between a mixture of Cantonese and English, or mainly Cantonese (see Chapter Four, Table 5).

In fact, since 30%-40% of the research population opted for the mid point on the frequency scale, it was important to discover triggers for the choice of language. The choice of language here appears to be, as anticipated, context sensitive. It was found that the use of English is triggered most frequently by the presence of non-Cantonese-speaking participants in particular communicative situations. This finding was confirmed by both focus group feedback and personal communication with officials of the government's Official Languages Agency. Interestingly, however - and this finding was supported by data drawn from the focus group interviews - intra-ethnic spoken communication in English

does occur in job interviews and in certain government departments which have retained the colonial tradition of using English in meetings.

Other factors which appear to trigger the use of English are a relatively high degree of formality and the orientation of communication i.e. whether the communication is intra or inter-company in nature and, more importantly, whether the communication is intra or inter-national, with inter-company and especially international spoken communication more likely to take place in English.

As was the case for writing and reading, professionals drawn from the Engineering area achieved the highest overall means for speaking and listening in English but those from the Business Services field (rather than Community and Social Services) recorded the lowest. The result for the Engineering sector probably reflects the fact that most of the engineering subjects were employed by large international firms which, as we have seen, tend to develop a culture of English language use. Subjects in the Business Services area, by contrast, were mostly drawn from Hong Kong-owned companies which tend to require their employees to use English less frequently than foreign-owned companies.

The speech situation which demands the most frequent use of English across all five professional areas is telephoning, and it must be the case that this communication is international in nature – a contention supported by both focus group and language log data – since results show that Cantonese is used more frequently than English for business-to-business communication on the telephone within Hong Kong (see Chapter Four, Table Six). An interesting finding relates to the analysis of speaking and listening by rank: there is a stronger differentiation among junior, middle and senior ranks than was noted for either writing or reading with senior staff required to speak in English more frequently. It would appear that the requirement to speak English increases with seniority.

#### **6.1.4: A review of expert opinion on language skill use in the Hong Kong workplace**

I want now to address my fourth and fifth research questions directly and in combination, since they are more coherently addressed together; these questions required an investigation of Luke & Richard's (1982) and Li's (1999) views that the local professional workplace makes greater demands on an employee's receptive rather than productive skills in English, and that where productive skills are demanded in English, these will be for written rather than spoken communication. It can be claimed with a high degree of confidence from the empirical evidence presented in this study that English is the unmarked option for written office-based communication in Hong Kong and is more frequently used than the spoken language. This, of course, confirms Li's (1999) view – but the view needs to set within a context of increasing use of written Chinese by Hong Kong-owned private sector organisations of all sizes as Hong Kong's trade with mainland China expands.

Another important hedge is that English is rather more likely to be used for formal written communication produced by staff at senior levels both for upward and lateral internal communication and external communication. The use of English, then, correlates positively with seniority and a high level of contextual formality. In contrast to this, Chinese appears to be the unmarked option for informal written communication and is commonly used for internal downward communication although as I noted in Chapter Four there is an increasing tendency for private sector employees to express downward communication in English. This is probably done to increase the level of formality of the communication. It is important to note here that while the study has confirmed Li's view of the dominant role of English in written workplace communication, it does cast doubt on the soundness of his (and Luke & Richard's, 1982) claims that the Hong Kong workplace makes only a limited demand on employees' productive skills in English. Clearly, this is not so – at any rate for professionals – who need to be able to write effectively in English in a wide range of genres. The writers may have had blue collar staff in mind when they were

formulating their views but do not perhaps make this adequately clear. That said, the writers' broader view of the role of English in the workplace – that receptive skills are more frequently demanded than the productive – is borne out by this study.

That professionals as a body read in English more frequently than they use it to write is evidenced by the fact that the means for reading across the whole range of text types are higher than those for writing. As expected, far greater support for Luke & Richards and Li's views on the primacy of receptive skills can be drawn from the study's investigation of the use of speaking and listening skills in the local workplace. Situations such as meetings, presentations and conferences tend to place greater demands on subjects' listening rather than speaking skills in English since Cantonese tends to be used to deliver and debate issues even in these relatively formal situations – unless non-Cantonese-speaking participants are present. While the use of written English appears to be firmly entrenched in Hong Kong offices, the same certainly cannot be claimed for speaking – for which the unmarked option as Li claims indeed appears to be Cantonese.

As I explained when drawing conclusions from the study's investigations into the uses of speaking and listening in English, Cantonese appears to be the language of choice for telephone communication within Hong Kong and dominates most socialising contexts – a situation common for all grades of staff unless non-Cantonese-speaking participants are present. Senior staff, however, are more likely than other ranks to socialise in English in relatively formal contexts. A further context in which Cantonese plays an important role is job interviews in which both Cantonese and English are likely to be used with the former being employed to elicit the applicant's personal qualities and give detailed information on job requirements. These pieces of evidence lend considerable empirical support to – and confirm as broadly correct and applicable to the local professional workplace – Luke & Richard's and Li's expert views on the primacy of receptive skills in English among

employees and the greater demands placed on them for written rather than spoken English communication skills.

What this study has contributed to the body of knowledge on workplace language use is to reveal certain subtleties and variations – to add perhaps detail and colour to the existing picture of the workplace language ecology. The findings I have just discussed for all aspects of language use are broadly in line with those reported in previous studies (see, for example, Poon 1992, Evans 1999a), and this suggests that the impact of Hong Kong's return to China on language use in business and the professions has (thus far) been slight.

The question that naturally arises is whether the coming decade will see a shift towards the use of Chinese (at the expense of English) and Putonghua (at the expense of Cantonese, and to some extent English) in written and spoken workplace communication. The shifts towards written Chinese/Cantonese in other domains in recent years have generally been the result of carefully formulated government policies (in the case of government, the law and education), or have been the natural outcome of political change during the transition (in case the of the Executive and Legislative Councils).

Unlike the domains of government, law and education, language use in business and the professions is less susceptible to the influence of centrally issued directives. As I indicated earlier, however, the use of Putonghua will increase not in the higher domains of Hong Kong society – it is unlikely ever to displace Cantonese (an assertion supported by the linguistic history of Guangdong province) – but rather in the commercial field as Hong Kong develops further its trade links with the mainland – links which are multiplying fast with China's imminent accession to full membership of the World Trade Organisation. The position of English is that it is now chiefly used as the medium of instruction in a small number of selective secondary schools and all eight of Hong Kong's tertiary educational institutions, and in business – especially for written business communication.



Both English and Putonghua, then, play primarily business-related roles in post-colonial Hong Kong, but English is, of course, the more deeply entrenched of the two languages. In Chapter One, I termed the post-colonial role of English “diminishing institutional” and the evidence appears to support the use of the term, but English will continue to play an important role in business and the professions in Hong Kong, and indeed its role is set to expand among “front-line” employees with the introduction of the government’s new English in the Workplace campaign (discussed briefly in Chapter Two) – an initiative aimed in the main at upgrading the occupational English skills of employees below management levels.

Although changes in policies and practices in the administrative, legal and educational domains are likely to exert an indirect influence on the language of business communication, the future roles of the English and Chinese languages in the private sector are more likely to be shaped by the economic and cultural roles which Hong Kong adopts in the post-colonial era. If Hong Kong continues to function as a centre of economic and cultural interchange between China and the West, as it has done since the mid-nineteenth century, it is likely that English will continue to play an instrumental role in Hong Kong's economic development. However, if Hong Kong turns inward, and hastens its political, economic and cultural integration with mainland China, it is likely that Cantonese, Putonghua and written Chinese will become increasingly important in the business and professional spheres.

Hong Kong’s future role and direction will to a great extent be determined by which of the two competing forces eventually holds sway. If it is the former, Hong Kong may become (as the present government expressly wishes) a “world class” metropolis on par with New York or London; if it is the latter, Hong Kong's historical role as a meeting place of East and West may gradually diminish, and the territory will become (as some members of the business and professional elite sometimes fear) just another big city in China.

## **6.2: A critical review of the study**

In this final and relatively brief section, I want to point out what I perceive to be the central strengths and limitations of the study, and suggest possible directions for future research into language use in the professional workplace in Hong Kong. I have chosen to combine the review and suggestions for future research for the sake of coherence since directions for future research are, in part at least, suggested by the study's limitations.

It is important, first, to point out the deliberate, but I hope not unjustified, bias in the study towards the analysis of English. In parts of the study, the use Chinese in the Hong Kong workplace is analyzed, in the main, as a contrast to the choice to use English. This is a function of the approach taken to addressing the study's aims and research questions and which, in turn, reflects the interests and occupation of the researcher and which, of course, in no way implies that the use of English in the professional workplace in Hong Kong is more worthy of study than the uses of Chinese.

Similarly, Cantonese-English code mixing and switching, while recognized as an important communicational phenomenon in Hong Kong's language ecology, is discussed only briefly and tangentially. The role of Putonghua also receives summary treatment in the study. However, the code mixing and switching processes and the role of Putonghua in the local language ecology constitute major areas of study in their own right and cannot be addressed adequately within the limited scope of this study and will doubtless provide the bases for future studies into multilingualism in Hong Kong.

One of the main aims of this study was to bridge the gap in the existing body of knowledge of workplace language use in Hong Kong by carrying out a piece of "broad-spectrum" research – existing studies being either small-scale in scope or focused on single professions. This aim has been achieved, but in fact, the study's broad, large-scale nature may also be seen as a weakness. This is because the results of the study, while probably of

reasonably high internal validity, may lack external validity; that is, they do not permit the level of confidence necessary to generalize to wider populations, and this is particularly so with regard to the results relating to the five professional areas.

As I explained in the first section of Chapter Four when describing the procedures adopted for the analysis of data, steps were taken to ensure the validity of inter-area comparisons of mean frequencies but that since each area consists of sub-categories of professions, it is not possible to generalize the results of these comparisons to wider populations. Thus, for example, I can claim with some confidence that engineers use both written and spoken English more frequently in the workplace than their counterparts drawn from the area of Community and Social Services, but I cannot claim that this holds good for all sub-categories of engineering professionals – even those represented in the study, namely, electrical, electronic and manufacturing engineers.

Lack of generalisability, however, has to be traded off against the value of producing a broad picture of language use in the professional workplace and in this respect the study has succeeded through empirical quantitative enquiry in identifying and explaining patterns of language use at the levels of employing sector, company/organization size and ownership, membership of professional area, and rank within a company or organization. These patterns have been further corroborated and elaborated by reference to insights gained through the qualitative procedures of focus group interviews, language logs and personal communication with the government's Official Languages Agency.

These factors inspired enough confidence for me to issue (as I mentioned in the final section of Chapter Three) reports on language use in the broad professional areas to the twelve departments of the Polytechnic University whose students participated in the study. An obvious direction for future research has been opened up by the present study: the need to investigate language use in and between the various recognized sub-categories of professional area. The results of such focused research could then be compared with the

results obtained for particular areas as a whole. Similarities and differences could then be noted, investigated and the finding used to inform, at a higher level of confidence than is permitted by the results reported here, the design of special purpose language syllabuses and associated instructional materials.

An additional arguable strength of the study relates to the process of piloting the questionnaire. The crucial importance of sampling respondent opinion in questionnaire piloting and being prepared to act on the feedback cannot be overstated and the piloting process undertaken here was a very thorough one. The feedback I received from participants on the prototype questionnaire allowed me to make a number of modifications to it – some of which were radical. The final version of the instrument is relatively long and complex, but it is a far more comprehensible and efficient means of gathering information than it was in prototype form and before I acted on the feedback received from the subjects who participated in the piloting.

The relative strength of the processes for gathering quantitative data may be perceived to have been achieved at the cost of backgrounding qualitative data gathering methods - focus group interviews and case study log-keeping activities. In fact, both qualitative mechanisms have important roles to play - as the discussions in Chapters Four and Five make clear - in allowing the voices of participants to be heard in the enquiry process. Without these voices, it would be extremely difficult to interpret or elaborate the more contentious quantitative data. That said, reference to focus groups and case studies is selective since they are seen as support for what is primarily a piece of quantitative research. But certainly the keeping of “rich” language logs could be treated as a single research method and be placed at the heart of a future study into workplace language use.

In fact, when the problems associated with researchers accessing the workplace are recalled, case studies appear to offer one of the best and most cost-effective methods for investigating workplace language ecologies. Case studies – provided subjects are as closely

and prototypically representative of their professions as possible – are capable of supporting generalisations from the particular subjects to classes of similar subjects. Subjects of such case studies would need, then, to be drawn from highly specified sub-categories of major professional areas. Thus, for example, a very useful future study could be a case study of a junior, graduate electronic engineer working for a Hong Kong-owned, medium-sized company. The extreme difficulty of recruiting volunteer log keepers, however, was explained in Chapter Three and it would almost certainly be necessary in future studies based on log-keeping case studies to pay subjects for their record keeping activities.

The final point I want to make is an extremely important one and relates to the need to adopt adequate ethical safeguards in research. I can claim with considerable confidence that every effort was made to put such safeguards in place in my study; not only those which are demanded by my employing institution – the signing of release forms and so forth – but also those which showed respect to the busy lives of my participants and which aimed to increase their status in the study to that of active stakeholders rather than passive subjects.

## References

- Adelman, C., Jenkins, D. & Kemmis, S. 1980. Rethinking case study: notes from the Second Cambridge Conference. In Simons, H. (ed.), *Towards a Science of the Singular*. University of East Anglia, Centre for Applied Research in Education.
- Asmah, Omar, H. 1987. Patterns of language communication in Malaysia. In Omar H. Asmah (ed.), *National Language and Communication in Multilingual Settings*, 13-25. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (Language and Literature Bureau).
- Au, Alexander. 1997. *Communication and language skills: an employer's view*. Speech delivered at the International Conference on Language, Education and Culture, Lignan College, Hong Kong, June 25<sup>th</sup>.
- Bacon-Shone, John & Bolton, Kingsley. 1998. Charting multilingualism: Language censuses and language surveys in Hong Kong. In Martha Pennington (ed.), *Language in Hong Kong at Century's End*, 43-90. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Bhatia, V.K. 1993. *Analysing Genre: Language Use in Professional Settings*. London: Longman.
- Biggs, John. 1998. Approaches to teaching and learning in two cultures. In Verner Bickley (ed.), *Language learning and teaching styles within and across cultures*, 171-198. Hong Kong: Institute of Language in Education.
- Bilbow, Grahame. 1997. Cross-cultural impression management in the multicultural workplace: The special case of Hong Kong. *Journal of Pragmatics* 28: 461-487.
- Board of Education. 1973. *Report of the Board of Education on the Proposed Expansion of Secondary Education over the Next Decade*. Hong Kong: Government Printer.
- Bolton, Kingsley and Lim, Shirley (2000). Hong Kong English: Autonomy and creativity. *World Englishes Special Issue Number 3*, 22-44.
- Brassey, Anne. 1879. *The Voyage of the "Sunbeam"*. London: Longmans, Green & Co.
- Brewin, A.W., Ho, K. & Irving, E.A. 1902. Report of the Committee on Education. *Hong Kong Government Gazette*, Hong Kong.
- Brown, James Dean. 1995. *Understanding Research in Second Language Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bunton, David. 1991. A comparison of English errors made by Hong Kong students and those made by non-native learners of English internationally. In David Bunton & Christopher Green (eds.), *English Usage in Hong Kong. Institute of Language in Education Journal Special Issue Number 2*, 9-22.
- Burney, Edmund. 1935. *Report on Education in Hong Kong*. London: Crown Agents.

Chan, Della. 1990. Language use in the Hong Kong Inland Revenue Department - Features and trends. In Verner Bickley (ed.), *Language Use, Language Teaching and the Curriculum*, 107-113. Hong Kong: Institute of Language in Education.

Chen, Albert. 1985. 1997: The language of the law in Hong Kong. *Hong Kong Law Journal* 15: 19-47.

Chen, Albert. 1989. Law in a foreign language: The case of Hong Kong. In Kathleen Cheek-Milby & Miron Mushkat (eds.), *Hong Kong: The Challenge of Transformation*, 212-238. Hong Kong: Centre for Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong.

Cheng, T.C. 1969. Chinese unofficial members of the Legislative and Executive Councils in Hong Kong up to 1941. *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 9: 7-30.

Cheung, Anne. 1997. Language rights and the Hong Kong courts. *Hong Kong Journal of Applied Linguistics* 2: 49-75.

Cheung, Yat-sing. 1984. The uses of English and Chinese languages in Hong Kong. *Language Learning and Communication* 3: 273-283.

Cheung, Yat-sing. 1985. Power, solidarity, and luxury in Hong Kong: a sociolinguistic study. *Anthropological Linguistics* 27: 190-203.

*China Mail*. 30 January, 1880. The Central School, XXXVI, No. 5167.

*China Mail*. 9 February, 1893. Victoria College Prize Distribution, XLVIX, No. 9866.

Cohen, Louis & Manion, Lawrence. 1994. *Research Methods in Education* (4<sup>th</sup> Edition). London: Routledge.

Consultative Committee for the Basic Law. 1990. *The Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China*. Hong Kong: C & C Offset Co. Ltd.

Crystal, David. 1997. *English as a Global Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cummins, Jim. 1981. Age on arrival and immigrant second language learning in Canada: a reassessment. *Applied Linguistics* 2: 132-149.

Cummins, Jim & Swain, Merrill. 1986. *Bilingualism in Education: Aspects of Theory, Research, and Practice*. New York: Longman.

Davidson, John. 1970. *Outdoor recreation surveys: the design and use of questionnaires for site surveys*. London: Countryside Commission.

Du-Babcock, Bertha. 1998. An analysis of code-switching or mixing in Cantonese business meetings. In Lita Lundquist, Heribert Picht & Jacques Qvistgaard (eds.), *Proceedings of the 11<sup>th</sup> European Symposium on Language for Special Purposes: LSP Identity and Interface Research, Knowledge and Society, Copenhagen, August 1997*,

Volume 2, 555-561. Copenhagen: Business School, Faculty of Modern Languages, Centre for Terminology, LSP Centre.

Duncanson, Dennis. 1988. Hong Kong as a Crown Colony. In Jurgen Domes & Shaw Yu-Ming (eds.), *Hong Kong: A Chinese and International Concern*. Boulder/London: Westview Press, 9-25.

Education Commission. 1882. *Report of the Education Commission*. Hong Kong: Noronha and Co.

Education Commission. 1963. *Report of the Commission on Education*. Hong Kong: Government Printer.

Education Commission. 1984. *Education Commission Report No. 1*. Hong Kong: Government Printer.

Education Commission. 1990. *Education Commission Report No. 4*. Hong Kong: Government Printer.

Education Department. 1955-97. *Annual Summary / Enrolment Survey*. Hong Kong: Government Printer.

Education Department. 1989. *Report of the Working Group Set Up to Review Language Improvement Measures*. Hong Kong: Government Printer.

Education Department. 1997. *Medium of Instruction: Guidance for Secondary Schools*. Hong Kong SAR Government: Printing Department.

Eitel, E.J. 1895. *Europe in China*. Hong Kong: Kelly and Walsh, and Luzac and Company (reprinted by Oxford University Press, 1983).

Endacott, G.B. 1964. *Government and People in Hong Kong 1841-1962: A Constitutional History*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Endacott, G.B. 1973. *A History of Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.

Evans, Stephen. 1999a. Workplace communication in a time of transition: The case of Hong Kong's construction industry. *Hong Kong Journal of Applied Linguistics* 4: 57-78.

Evans, Stephen. 1999b. The English language needs of building services practitioners in Hong Kong. *Asian Journal of English Language Teaching* 9: 41-57.

Evans, Stephen. 2000. Hong Kong's new English language policy in education. *World Englishes* 19: 185-204.

Ferguson, Charles. 1959. Diglossia. *Word* 15: 325-340.

Fishman, Joshua. 1972. *The Sociology of Language*. Rowley: Newbury House.

Flowerdew, John, Li, David & Miller, Lindsay. 1998. Attitudes towards English and Cantonese among Hong Kong Chinese university lecturers. *TESOL Quarterly* 32: 201-231.



Forey, Gail & Nunan, David. Forthcoming, 2001. The role of language and culture within an accountant's workplace. In Colin Barron, Nigel Bruce & David Nunan (eds.), *Knowledge and Discourse: Language Ecology in Theory and Practice*. London: Longman.

Gibbons, John. 1987. *Code mixing and code choice: a Hong Kong case study*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Green, Christopher. 1996. The origins and effects of topic-prominence in Chinese-English interlanguage. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching* XXXIV/2: 119-134.

Hatch, Evelyn & Farhady, Hossein. 1982. *Research Design and Statistics for Applied Linguistics*. Rowley: Newbury House.

Hirvela, Alan. 1991. Footing the English bill in Hong Kong: Language politics and linguistic Schizophrenia. *Journal of Asia Pacific Communication* 2: 117-137.

Hong Kong Government. 1965. *Education Policy*. Hong Kong: Government Printer.

Hong Kong Government. 1974. *Secondary Education in Hong Kong in the Next Decade*. Hong Kong: Government Printer.

Hong Kong Government. 1995. *Report of the Working Group on the Use of Chinese in the Civil Service*. Hong Kong: Civil Service Branch.

Hughes, Richard. 1968. *Hong Kong: Borrowed Place, Borrowed Time*. London: Andre Deutsch.

Hyland, Ken. 1997. Language attitudes at the handover: Communication and identity in 1997 Hong Kong. *English World-wide* 18/2: 191-210.

Johnson, Robert K. 1991. Teaching and learning in the English stream in secondary schools: Implications of ECR4. *Hong Kong Institute of Language in Education Journal* 8: 10-24.

Johnson, Robert K. 1994. Language policy and planning in Hong Kong. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 14: 177-199.

Johnson, Robert K. 1998. Language and education in Hong Kong. In Martha Pennington (ed.) *Language in Hong Kong at Century's End*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 265-276.

Johnson, Robert, K. and Cheung, Yat Shing. 1992. Reading literacy in Hong Kong. In Bird, Norman and Paul Morris (eds.), *Achieving and maintaining quality in language teaching and learning*, 408-419. Hong Kong: Institute of language in Education.

Johnson, Robert K. & Lee, Paul. 1987. Modes of instruction: Teaching strategies and student responses. In Robert Lord & Helen Cheng (eds.), 99-121. *Language Education in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press.

*Joint Declaration of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the People's Republic of China on the Question of Hong Kong*. 1984. Hong Kong: Joint Publishing (HK) Co., Ltd.

Joseph, John. 1999. Ex-colonial language, post colonial identity: the future of English in Hong Kong. In Fritz-Wilhelm Neumann and Sabine Schulting (eds.), *Proceedings of the Conference of the German Association of University Teachers of English*, 1998.

Joseph, John. 2000. The tao of identity in heteroglossic Hong Kong. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 143: 15-31.

Kachru, Braj. 1986. *The Alchemy of English: the spread, functions, and models of non-native Englishes*. Oxford: Pergamon.

Kachru, Braj. 1997. World Englishes and English-using communities. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 17: 66-87.

Kennedy, Chris. 1989. *Language Planning and English Language Teaching*. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall.

Lai, E. 1988. A needs analysis of adult English learners in Hong Kong. *New Horizons in Education* 29: 66-79.

Lai, E. 1996. Language attitudes in the transitional period of Hong Kong. *New Horizons in Education* 37: 37-43.

Lee, Ngok & Lam, Agnes. 1994. *Professional and Continuing Education in Hong Kong: Issues and Perspectives*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Legge, James. 1971. The colony of Hong Kong. *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 11: 172-193. (Reprinted from *The China Review* 3: 1874, 163-76).

Lethbridge, H.J. 1976. *Hong Kong: Stability and Change*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.

Li, David. 1999. The functions and status of English in Hong Kong: A post-1997 update. *English World-wide* 20: 67-110.

Li, So-mui and Mead, Kate. 2000. An analysis of English in the workplace: The communication needs of textile and clothing merchandisers. *English for Specific Purposes* 19: 353-370.

Lin, Angel M.Y. 1990. *Teaching in Two Tongues: Language Alternation in Foreign Language Classrooms*. Research Report No. 3, Department of English, City University of Hong Kong.

Lin, Angel M.Y. 1996. Bilingualism or linguistic segregation? Symbolic domination, resistance and code switching in Hong Kong schools. *Linguistics and Education* 8: 49-84.

Littlewood, William & Liu, Ngar-Fun. 1996. *Hong Kong Students and their English*. Hong Kong: Macmillan.

- Liu, Shuying. 1997. Hong Kong: A survey of its political and development over the past 150 Years. *China Quarterly* 151: 583-592.
- Llewellyn, John. 1982. *A Perspective on Education in Hong Kong: Report by a visiting Panel*. Hong Kong: Government Printer.
- Luke, Kang-kwong. & Richards, Jack. 1982. English in Hong Kong: Functions and status. *English World-wide* 3: 47-64.
- McArthur, Tom. 1998. *The English Languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Miners, Norman. 1991. *Government and Politics in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.
- Newbrook, Mark. 1991. Errors in guides to English usage for Hong Kong students. In David Bunton & Christopher Green (eds.), *English Usage in Hong Kong*. *Institute of Language in Education Journal Special Issue Number 2*, 23-34.
- Pennington, Martha. 1998a. Colonialism's aftermath in Asia: A snapshot view of bilingualism in Hong Kong. *Hong Kong Journal of Applied Linguistics* 3: 1-16.
- Pennington, Martha. 1998b. Perspectives on language in Hong Kong at century's end. In Martha Pennington (ed.), *Language in Hong Kong at century's end*, 3-40. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Pennycook, Alastair. 1994. *The Cultural Politics of English as an International Language*. Harlow: Longman.
- Platt, John. 1982. English in Singapore, Malaysia, and Hong Kong. In Richard Bailey & Manfred Gollach (eds.), *English as a World Language*, 384-414. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Poon, Wanda. 1992. *An Analysis of the Language Needs of Accountants and Company Administrators in Hong Kong*. Research Report No.21, Department of English, City University of Hong Kong.
- Quirk, Randolph & G. Stein. 1990. *English in Use*. Harlow: Longman.
- Regan, Mark. 29 February, 2000. Language essential to future of SAR. *South China Morning Post*.
- Richards, S. 1993. Motivation in second language learning: a Hong Kong perspective. *Department of English Research Report 32*. Hong Kong: City University of Hong Kong.
- Rogerson-Revell, Pamela. 1999. *Meeting talk: a stylistic analysis of intercultural business meetings*. In M. Hewings & C. Nickerson (eds.), *Business English: Research into Practice*. London: Prentice Hall.
- Saville-Troike, Muriel. 1989. *The Ethnography of Communication* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

- Scott, Ian. 1989. *Political Change and the Crisis of Legitimacy in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.
- Shek, C.K.W., Johnson, Robert K. & Law, E.H.F. 1991. Survey of the language policy and practice in 193 Hong Kong secondary schools. *New Horizons* 32: 1-10.
- Smith, Carl. 1970. The Chinese settlement of British Hong Kong. *Chung Chi Bulletin* 48: 26-32.
- Smith, Carl. 1985. *Chinese Christians: Elites, Middlemen, and the Church in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.
- So, Daniel. 1984. The Social Selection of an English-Dominant Bilingual Education System in Hong Kong: An Ecolinguistic Analysis. Unpublished Ed.D. dissertation, University of Hawaii.
- So, Daniel. 1989. Implementing mother-tongue education amidst societal transition from diglossia to triglossia in Hong Kong. *Language and Education* 3: 29-44.
- So, Daniel. 1992. Language-based bifurcation of secondary schools in Hong Kong. In Luke, Kang-kwong (ed.), 69-95. *Into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Issues of Language in Education in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Linguistic Society of Hong Kong.
- So, Daniel. 1998. One country, two cultures and three languages: Sociolinguistic conditions and language education in Hong Kong. In Barry Asker (ed.), *Teaching Language and Culture: Building Hong Kong on Education*, 152-175. Hong Kong: Longman.
- Swain, Merrill. 1990. Manipulating and complementing content teaching to maximize second language learning. In R. Phillipson, E. Kellerman, L. Selinker, M. Sharwood Smith, and M. Swain, M. (eds.), *Foreign language pedagogy research*, 234-250. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Swain, Merrill and Johnson, Robert, K. 1997. Immersion education: a category within bilingual education. In R.K Johnson & M. Swain (eds.), *Immersion education: international perspectives*, 1-16. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Sweeting, Anthony. 1990. *Education in Hong Kong Pre-1842 to 1941: Fact and Opinion*. Hong Kong University Press.
- Topley, Kenneth. 1999. British rule in Hong Kong: From 1840 to the Sino-British Declaration of 1984. In Albert Yee (ed.), *Whither Hong Kong: China's Shadow or Visionary Gleam?*, 109-151. Lanham/Oxford: University Press of America.
- Tsai, Jung-fung. 1993. *Hong Kong in Chinese History: Community and Social Unrest in the British Colony, 1842-1913*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Tsang, Steve (ed.). 1995. *A Documentary History of Hong Kong: Government and politics*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Tsou, Benjamin, 1996. Aspects of the two language system and three language problem in the changing society of Hong Kong. *Current Issues in Language and Society* 3/2: 128-139.

Tsui, Amy. 1992. Using English as the medium of instruction and English language acquisition. In Kang Kwong Luke (ed.), *Into the Twenty-First Century: issues of Language in Education in Hong Kong*, 138-145. Hong Kong: Linguistic Society of Hong Kong.

Watts, Michael & Ebbutt, David. 1987. More than the sum of the parts: research methods in group interviewing. *British Educational Research Journal* 13/1: 25-34.

Walters, Steve & Balla, John. 1998. Medium of instruction: Policy and reality at one Hong Kong tertiary institution. In Martha Pennington (ed.), 365-389. *Language in Hong Kong at Century's End*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Welsh, Frank. 1993. *A History of Hong Kong*. London: HarperCollins.

Wesley-Smith, Peter. 1994. Anti-Chinese legislation in Hong Kong. In Ming K. Chan, ed. *Precarious Balance: Hong Kong between China and Britain, 1842-1992*, 91-105. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Westcott, John. 1979. A survey of English use in Hong Kong. Unpublished manuscript, British Council, Hong Kong.

Woods, Anthony, Fletcher, Paul & Hughes, Arthur. 1986. *Statistics in Language Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wright, George B. 10 March, 1894. Annual Report of Victoria College for 1893. *Hong Kong Government Gazette*.

Wright, Sue, 1996. One country, two systems, three languages. *Current Issues in Language and Society* 3/2: 107-113.

Yau, Frances. 1997. Code switching and language choice in the Hong Kong Legislative Council. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 18: 40-53.

Zhao, Yuhong. 1997. Hong Kong: The journey to a bilingual legal system. *Loyola of Los Angeles International and Comparative Law Journal* 19: 293-313.

## **Appendix I: the prototype questionnaire**

### **Information and release form for potential participants in the questionnaire piloting exercise**

Thank you for considering my request to participate in piloting my questionnaire on language use in the professional workplace in Hong Kong. As employed Hong Kong professionals, the feedback you may be able to give me would be valuable to me and would be used to help me redesign the questionnaire, which is one of the instruments I will be using to gather data for my doctoral thesis.

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University requires me to ask you to sign a form stating that you agree to participate in the piloting exercise. The University also requires me to tell you that your feedback will be treated confidentially and anonymously unless you request otherwise and that you may stop your participation at any point. Please take time to think about your involvement in the piloting over the next week and if you agree to participate, please sign the release form below and send it to me at Room QT424 in the English Language Centre by October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1999.

*I agree to take part in the project **Communication in the Professional Workplace in post-colonial Hong Kong: the roles and statuses of Chinese and English**. My participation will involve me participating in a single questionnaire piloting session. The session is likely to be about one and a half hours in length and will take place at a mutually agreed time out of class.*

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## **Personal information**

Please mark the appropriate letter on the computer sheet.

1.     Male A           Female B
2.     Age:   < 25   A                   36-40 D                   > 51   G  
              25-30 B                   41-45 E  
              31-35 C                   46-50 F
3.     Academic level:   Form 5           A                   Diploma           E  
                          Form 7           B                   Higher Diploma   F  
                          Certificate       C                   Bachelor's Degree G  
                          Higher Certificate D                   Master's Degree   H
4.     Years of working experience in your profession  
              <5       A                   16-20 D                   > 31   G  
              6-10    B                   21-25 E  
              11-15   C                   26-30 F

5. Current position:

.....

6. Company / Organization:

.....

## **Language use in the workplace**

### **A. Written communication**

- (i) Look at the types of written texts in the list below. Indicate which language you use when reading or writing each text type at work by filling in the appropriate letter (A-F) on the computer sheet. Please use the scale below.

- A - Always English
- B - Usually English
- C - Some situations English, some situations Chinese
- D - Usually Chinese
- E - Always Chinese
- F - Not required to read / write this type of document at work

- |             |                           |                     |
|-------------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| 5. Reports  | 11. E-mail messages       | 17. Journals        |
| 6. Memos    | 12. Notices               | 18. Newsletters     |
| 7. Letters  | 13. Instructions          | 19. Legal documents |
| 8. Faxes    | 14. Manuals               | 20. Magazines       |
| 9. Minutes  | 15. Circulars             | 21. Advertisements  |
| 10. Agendas | 16. Promotional materials |                     |

- (ii) Please think about the documents above that fall into category 'C' on the scale (i.e. Some situations English, some situations Chinese). What are the factors that influence you to read or write these documents in English (rather than Chinese)? Please fill in **no more than 3** options (A-J) from the list on the computer form from the list below.

22. I generally use English because ...

- A. I am communicating with a superior
- B. I am communicating with a junior
- C. it is the main language of communication in my profession
- D. my English is better than my Chinese
- E. I can communicate my ideas more effectively
- F. it is a formal situation
- G. it is an informal situation
- H. it is company policy
- I. it is convenient
- J. it is the language of business



- (iii) What are the factors that influence you to read or write these documents in Chinese rather than English)? Please fill in **no more than 3** options (A-J) from the list on the computer form from the list below.

23. I generally use Chinese because ....

- A I am communicating with a superior
- B I am communicating with a junior
- C it is the main language of communication in my profession
- D my Chinese is better than my English
- E I can communicate my ideas more effectively
- F it is a formal situation
- G it is an informal situation
- H it is company policy
- I it is convenient
- J it is the language of business

**B. Spoken communication**

- (i) Look at the speaking/listening situations in the list below. Indicate which language you when speaking or listening in each situation at work by filling in the appropriate letter (A-F) on the computer sheet. Please use the scale below.

- A - Always English
- B - Usually English
- C - Some situations English some situations Cantonese
- D - Usually Cantonese
- E - Always Cantonese
- F - Not required to speak listen in this situation at work

- |                       |                            |                  |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|------------------|
| 24. Meetings          | 27. Job interviews         | 30. Conferences  |
| 25. One the telephone | 28. Chatting to colleagues | 31. Socializing  |
| 26. Seminars          | 29. Presentations          | 32. Negotiations |

- (ii) Please think about the situations above that fall into category 'C' on the scale (i.e. Some situations English, some situations Cantonese). What are the factors that influence you to use English (rather than Cantonese) in these situations? Please fill in **no more than 3** options (A-J) from the list on the computer form from the list below.

33. I generally use Cantonese because ...

- A I am communicating with a superior
- B I am communicating with a junior
- C it is the main language of communication in my profession
- D my English is better than my Cantonese
- E I can communicate my ideas more effectively
- F it is a formal situation
- G it is an informal situation
- H it is company policy
- I it is convenient
- J it is the language of business

## **Use of English in the workplace**

### **C. Writing in English**

- (i) Look at the types of written texts in the list below. Indicate how often you write each text type in English at work by filling in the appropriate letter (A-F) on the computer sheet. Please use the scale below.

A - Never	
B - Seldom	(once / twice a year)
C - Not very often	(once / twice every 6 months)
D - Sometimes	(once / twice per month)
E - Often	(once / twice per week)
F - Always	(almost every day)

### **Letters**

- |                                   |                          |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 34. Complaint letters             | 38. Order letters        |
| 35. Replies to complaints         | 39. Confirmation letters |
| 36. Enquiry letters               | 40. Request letters      |
| 37. Replies to requests/enquiries | 41. Arrangement letters  |

### **Reports**

- |                         |                            |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| 42. Feasibility reports | 46. Situation reports      |
| 43. Progress reports    | 47. Laboratory reports     |
| 44. Site reports        | 48. Proposals              |
| 45. Appraisal reports   | 49. Recommendation reports |

### **Other writing in English**

- |                     |                           |                    |
|---------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
| 50. Faxes           | 54. Notices               | 58. Minutes        |
| 51. Memos           | 55. Newsletters           | 59. Circulars      |
| 52. Agendas         | 56. instructions          | 60. Advertisements |
| 53. E-mail messages | 57. Promotional materials |                    |

## **D. Reading in English**

Look at the types of written texts in the list below. Indicate how often you read each text type in English at work by filling in the appropriate letter (A-F) on the computer sheet. Please use the scale below.

- A - Never  
B - Seldom (once / twice a year)  
C - Not very often (once / twice every 6 months)  
D - Sometimes (once / twice per month)  
E - Often (once / twice per week)  
F - Always (almost every day)

- |                 |                           |                         |
|-----------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| 61. Letters     | 67. Notices               | 73. Catalogues          |
| 62. Reports     | 68. Memos                 | 74. Profession journals |
| 63. Faxes       | 69. Instructions          | 75. Legal documents     |
| 64. newsletters | 70. Circulars             | 76. magazines           |
| 65. Agendas     | 71. E-mail messages       | 77. Advertisements      |
| 66. Minutes     | 72. Promotional materials |                         |

## **E. Speaking and listening in English**

Look at the speaking / listening situation in the list below. Indicate how often you speak / listen in English in each situation at work by filling in the appropriate letter (A-F) on the computer sheet. Please use the scale below.

- A - Never  
B - Seldom (once / twice a year)  
C - Not very often (once / twice every 6 months)  
D - Sometimes (once / twice per month)  
E - Often (once / twice per week)  
F - Always (almost every day)

- |                      |                            |                 |
|----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|
| 78. Meetings         | 81. Job interviews         | 84. Conferences |
| 79. On the telephone | 82. Chatting to colleagues | 85. Socializing |
| 80. Seminars         | 83. Presentations          |                 |

## **Self-assessment of communication skills in the workplace**

### **F. Written communication skills in English**

Look at the types of written texts in the list below. How would you rate your ability to write and read each text type in English in the workplace? Indicate your ability by filling in the appropriate letter (A-F) on the computer sheet. Please use the scale below.

- A - Poor
- B - Not very good
- C - Barely adequate
- D - Satisfactory
- E - Good
- F - Excellent

How good are you at writing ...

- |             |                     |                  |
|-------------|---------------------|------------------|
| 86. Reports | 89. E-mail messages | 92. Faxes        |
| 87. Letters | 90. Minutes         | 93. Instructions |
| 88. Memos   | 91. Agendas         |                  |

How good are you at reading ...

- |                    |                     |                            |
|--------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|
| 94. Reports        | 99. E-mail messages | 104. Legal documents       |
| 95. Letters        | 100. Minutes        | 105. Professional journals |
| 96. Memos          | 101. Manuals        | 106. Promotional materials |
| 97. Faxes          | 102. Instructions   |                            |
| 98. Advertisements | 103. Newsletters    |                            |

### **G. Oral communication skills in English**

Look at the speaking/listening situations in the list below. How would you rate your ability to speak and listen in English in each situation in the workplace? Indicate your ability by filling in the appropriate letter (A-F) on the computer sheet. Please use the scale below.

- A - Poor
- B - Not very good
- C - Barely adequate
- D - Satisfactory
- E - Good
- F - Excellent

How good are you at speaking ...

- |      |                   |      |   |
|------|-------------------|------|---|
| 107. | at meetings       | 111. | To English-speaking colleagues at work      |
| 108. | at job interviews | 112. | To English-speaking colleagues outside work |
| 109. | on the telephone  | 113. | On business trips                           |
| 110. | at presentations  |      |   |

How good are you at listening ...

- |      |                   |      |   |
|------|-------------------|------|---|
| 114. | at meetings       | 118. | To English-speaking colleagues at work      |
| 115. | at job interviews | 119. | To English-speaking colleagues outside work |
| 116. | on the telephone  | 120. | On business trips                           |
| 117. | at presentations  |      |   |

**Thank you very much for completing this questionnaire.**

## **Appendix II: the final version of the questionnaire**

### **Information and release form for potential participants in the questionnaire survey**

Thank you for considering my request to participate in my questionnaire survey on language use in the professional workplace in Hong Kong. As employed Hong Kong professionals, the information you may be able to give me would be valuable to me and would be used to help me write my doctoral thesis. The information may also be used to help myself and others to prepare suitable teaching materials for future English in the Workplace courses offered by the English Language Centre of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. The main findings of the project will be sent in report form to the departments you are affiliated to for your programme of studies. This will allow the departments to understand more clearly the occupational English language demands placed on you, their part-time students.

The University requires me to ask you to sign a form stating that you agree to participate in this survey. The University also requires me to tell you that your contribution will be treated confidentially and anonymously unless you request otherwise and that you may stop your participation at any point in the survey. Please take time to think about your involvement in the survey over the next week and if you agree to participate, please sign the release form below and send it to me at Room QT424 in the English Language Centre by October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1999.

*I agree to take part in the project **Communication in the Professional Workplace in post-colonial Hong Kong: the roles and statuses of Chinese and English**. My participation will involve me completing a questionnaire on my use of Chinese and English in my work. The questionnaire will be administered and completed in class time and this is likely to take about 30 minutes.*

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

# 1. Personal Information

Please mark the appropriate letter on the red answer sheet.

1. Gender:                      A        Male    B        Female
  
2. Age:                                      A        < 25    E        41  
     – 45    B        25 – 30    F        46 – 50  
     C        31 – 35    G        > 50  
     D        36 – 40
  
3. Highest academic level achieved:
 

A Form 5	E Diploma
B Form 7	F Higher Diploma
C Certificate	G Bachelor's Degree
D Higher Certificate	H Master's Degree
  
4. Professional experience (years):                      A        < 5    E        21  
     – 25    B        6 – 10    F        26 – 30  
     C        11 – 15    G        > 30  
     D        16 – 20
  
5. Rank in current job:                      A        Junior rank  
     B Middle rank  
     C Senior rank
  
6. Type of company / organisation:
 

A Government (e.g. civil service) .....	Go to Section 2 on page 2
B Government-related (e.g. Housing Authority)...	Go to Section 2 on page 2
C Private company .....	Please answer questions 7 & 8
  
7. Is the company you are working for...                      A        a HK-owned company  
     B        a China-owned company  
     C        a foreign-owned company
  
8. Is it ...    A        a small company (<50 employees)  
     B        a medium-sized company (51-100 employees)  
     C        a large company (>100 employees)

*Go to Section 2 on page 1*



## 2. Language use in the workplace

### 2A. Written communication

Look at the types of written texts in the list below (questions 9-25). Indicate which language(s) you use when reading or writing each text type at work by filling in the appropriate letter (A-F) on the answer sheet. Please use the scale below.

- A - Always English
- B - Usually English
- C - Some situations English, some situations Chinese
- D - Usually Chinese
- E - Always Chinese
- F - Not required to read / write this type of document at work

- |                     |                           |
|---------------------|---------------------------|
| 9. Reports          | 18. Manuals               |
| 10. Memos           | 19. Circulars             |
| 11. Letters         | 20. Promotional materials |
| 12. Faxes           | 21. Journals / Magazines  |
| 13. Minutes         | 22. Newsletters           |
| 14. Agendas         | 23. Legal documents       |
| 15. E-mail messages | 24. Forms                 |
| 16. Notices         | 25. Advertisements        |
| 17. Records         |                           |

*If you have answered C for any of the questions above, please answer questions 26 and 27 on page 3. Otherwise go to section 2B on page 3.*

Please think about the documents listed in questions 9-25 (previous page) that fall into the category **Some situations English, some situations Chinese** (i.e. category C). What are the factors that influence you to read or write these documents in English (rather than Chinese)? Please fill in **no more than 3** options (A-J) on the answer sheet from the list below.

26. I generally use English ...

- A when I am communicating with a local superior
- B when I am communicating with a local junior
- C when I am communicating with another company / organisation

- D because I can communicate my ideas more effectively in English
- E because it is the language of business in HK
- F because it is a formal situation
- G because it is an informal situation
- H when I am communicating within my company / organisation
- I when I am communicating with a foreigner
- J because it is company policy

What are the factors that influence you to read or write these documents in Chinese (rather than English)? Please fill in **no more than 3** options (A-J) on the answer sheet from the list below.

27. I generally use **Chinese** ...

- A when I am communicating with a local superior
- B when I am communicating with a local junior
- C when I am communicating with another company / organisation
- D because I can communicate my ideas more effectively in Chinese
- E because it is the language of business in HK
- F because it is a formal situation
- G because it is an informal situation
- H when I am communicating within my company / organisation
- I when I am communicating with a foreigner
- J because it is company policy

## 2B. Spoken communication

Look at the speaking / listening situations in the list below (questions 28-36). Indicate which language(s) you use when speaking or listening in each situation at work by filling in the appropriate letter (A-F) on the answer sheet. Please use the scale below.

- A - Always English
- B - Usually English
- C - Some situations English, some situations Cantonese
- D - Usually Cantonese

E - Always Cantonese

F - Not required to speak / listen in this situation at work

- 28. Meetings
- 29. On the telephone
- 30. Seminars
- 31. Job interviews
- 32. Discussing work with colleagues
- 33. Presentations
- 34. Conferences
- 35. Socialising with colleagues outside work
- 36. Appraisal interviews

*If you have answered C for any of the questions above, please answer questions 37 and 38 on page 5. Otherwise go to section 3 on page 5.*

Please think about the situations listed in questions 28-36 (previous page) that fall into the category **Some situations English, some situations Cantonese** (i.e. category C). What are the factors that influence you to use English (rather than Cantonese) in these situations? Please fill in **no more than 3** options (A-J) on the answer sheet from the list below.

37. I generally use **English**...

- A when I am communicating with a local superior
- B when I am communicating with a local junior
- C when I am communicating with another company / organisation
- D because I can communicate my ideas more effectively in English
- E because it is the language of business in HK

- F because it is a formal situation
- G because it is an informal situation
- H when I am communicating within my company / organisation
- I when I am communicating with a foreigner
- J because it is company policy

What are the factors that influence you to use Cantonese (rather than English) in these situations? Please fill in **no more than 3** options (A-J) on the answer sheet from the list below.

38. I generally use **Cantonese** ...

- A when I am communicating with a local superior
- B when I am communicating with a local junior
- C when I am communicating with another company / organisation
- D because I can communicate my ideas more effectively in Cantonese
- E because it is the language of business in HK
- F because it is a formal situation
- G because it is an informal situation
- H when I am communicating within my company / organisation
- I when I am communicating with a foreigner
- J because it is company policy

### 3. **Use of English in the workplace**

#### 3A. **Writing in English**

Look at the types of written texts in the list below (questions 39-50). Indicate how often you write each text type **in English** at work by filling in the appropriate letter (A-F) on the answer sheet. Please use the scale below.

A - Never

- B - Seldom (once / twice a year)
- C - Not very often (once / twice every 6 months)
- D - Sometimes (once / twice per month)
- E - Often (once / twice per week)

F - Always (almost every day)

- |                     |                           |
|---------------------|---------------------------|
| 39. Letters         | 45. Minutes               |
| 40. Memos           | 46. Promotional materials |
| 41. Faxes           | 47. Forms                 |
| 42. E-mail messages | 48. Circulars             |
| 43. Reports         | 49. Advertisements        |
| 44. Instructions    | 50. Notices               |

What are the main reasons for writing **letters, memos, faxes** and **E-mail messages** when you are at work? Please fill in **no more than 3** options (A-J) on the answer sheet from the list below. (If you do not need to write letters, memos, faxes or E-mail messages in English at work, go to question 52 on page 6.)

51. When I write **letters, memos, faxes** and **E-mail messages** it is mainly to

- |                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| A complain      | F apply for a job                      |
| B arrange       | G confirm (e.g. an order, instruction) |
| C inform        | H ask for information                  |
| D make an order | I instruct                             |
| E request       | J reply to an enquiry / request        |

Please think about the different types of **reports** that you write **in English** at work. Which types of reports do you write most? Please fill in **no more than 3** options (A-J) on the answer sheet from the list below. (If you do not need to write reports in English, go to section 3B.)

52. The types of **reports** I write most often at work are:

- |                          |                      |
|--------------------------|----------------------|
| A Feasibility reports    | F Appraisal reports  |
| B Progress reports       | G Situation reports  |
| C Site reports           | H Laboratory reports |
| D Recommendation reports | I Proposals          |
| E Case studies           | J Accident reports   |

### 3B. Reading in English

Look at the types of written texts in the list below (questions 53-71). Indicate how often you read each text type **in English** at work by filling in the appropriate letter (A-F) on the answer sheet. Please use the scale below.

A - Never

B - Seldom (once / twice a year)

C - Not very often (once / twice every 6 months)

D - Sometimes (once / twice per month)

E - Often (once / twice per week)

F - Always (almost every day)

53. Letters

63. E-mail messages

54. Reports

64. Promotional materials

55. Faxes

65. Catalogues

56. Newsletters

66. Journals / Magazines

57. Agendas

67. Legal documents

58. Minutes

68. Records

59. Notices

69. Advertisements

60. Memos

70. Forms

61. Instructions

71. Manuals

62. Circulars

### 3C. Speaking and listening in English

Look at the speaking / listening situations in the list below (questions 72-80). Indicate how often you speak / listen **in English** in each situation at work by filling in the appropriate letter (A-F) on the answer sheet. Please use the scale below.

A - Never

B - Seldom (once / twice a year)

C - Not very often      (once / twice every 6 months)

D - Sometimes          (once / twice per month)

E - Often                (once / twice per week)

F - Always                (almost every day)

72. Meetings

73. On the telephone

74. Seminars

75. Job interviews

76. Discussing work with colleagues

77. Presentations

78. Conferences

79. Socialising with colleagues outside work

80. Appraisal interviews

**Thank you very much for completing this questionnaire**

### **Appendix III: transcription of focus group interview (02.11.99)**

#### **Information and release form for potential participants in the focus group interview**

Thank you for considering my request to participate in a focus group interview to help me understand your use of Chinese and English at work. The interview follows the administration of a questionnaire survey and is designed to obtain more detailed information on language use than is possible using a questionnaire. As employed Hong Kong professionals, the information you may be able to give me would be valuable to me and would be used to help me write my doctoral thesis. The information may also be used to help myself and others to prepare suitable teaching materials for future English in the Workplace courses offered by the English Language Centre of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. The main findings of the project will be sent in report form to the departments you are affiliated to for your programme of studies. This will allow the departments to understand more clearly the occupational English language demands placed on you, their part-time students.

The University requires me to ask you to sign a form stating that you agree to participate in this focus group interview. The University also requires me to tell you that your contribution will be treated confidentially and anonymously unless you request otherwise and that you may stop your participation at any point in the interview exercise. Please take time to think about your involvement in the project over the next week and if you agree to participate, please sign the release form below and send it to me at Room QT424 in the English Language Centre by 25<sup>th</sup> October, 1999.

***I agree to take part in the project *Communication in the Professional Workplace in post-colonial Hong Kong: the roles and statuses of Chinese and English*. My participation will involve me participating in a focus group interview for a single session of about 1 hour.***

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_



## Speakers and codes

C – Chris (facilitator)

B - Betty (Community & Social Services: junior status in the HKSAR government's social welfare department)

Ca – Cathy (Construction & Real Estate: middle-ranking status in the government-related Housing Authority)

D – Dick (Manufacturing: middle-ranking status in a medium-sized, foreign-owned international company)

M – Martina (Business Services: senior status in a large, international, Hong Kong-owned company)

S – Stanley (Engineering: junior status in a large, international, Hong Kong-owned company)

### Side A of tape:

C: OK everybody, well, thanks for attending this focus group meeting on my English in the workplace research project. We are looking now at the questionnaire, we are looking at Section 2: Language Use in the Workplace, written communication. Can you just have a look at those items 9 to 25, reports, memos, letters etc. And can I just get some idea from you who.... Er.... Which of those documents are *always* in English? Can we deal with that first? I mean, for example, Stanley, what.... do you have to write reports?

S: Yes, many ... to check the progress ... ah ...

C: Progress of ..?

S: The projects – so the boss can know we are keeping to schedule and the the err budget

C: So, these reports – are they always in English ... in writing?

S: Sometimes I give a report on the telephone and sometimes make a presentation.

C: You mean an oral presentation on progress - in a meeting?

S: Yes... maybe just to the boss and sometimes to different people in a project... the err lawyer ... ah, the supplier ... transportation agent...

C: OK, thanks, Stanley. So, Stanley writes reports in English ... does anybody else have to write reports here?

D: Yup.

C: All right, Dick. So, what.... Er.... Which language, always English?

D: Always English.

C: Always? Always.

D: English. My boss will check my grammar and correct my mistakes before issue to other department.

C: And, what's your company?

D: My company?

C: Yes, what kind of company?

D: In manufacturing company. The head office ... in United States. So you have to give many report to headquarter.

C: So, it's an international company you work for.

D: Yup.

C: OK, so, but are any of your colleagues in Hong Kong – I mean are any of those people, er, native speakers of English?

D: Most of our employee now in our company in Hong Kong all are Chinese.

C: Chinese?

D: Yup.

C: OK

D: But we still issue the report memorandum and to all of – the employee use English...

C: All right, OK.

D: Send by e-mail.

C: And you said those reports had to submitted to the head office in America, is that right?

D: Yup.

C: All right, interesting. What about Business Services. Martina? Do you write reports?

M: Er... most of the reports are being done... I need to prepare report but ...er... I don't have to write it in long essays. I just have to verbally present it to my boss.

C: All right. When you present a report verbally, do you... do you do it in Chinese or English?

M: Em... consider about the topic we are talking. If it is an internal topic about the management, then we go in Chinese...

C: Right.

M: But if it is topic about the facilities or the vendors overseas, then we go in English.

C: And... and that's presumably your... your boss is a Hong Kong Chinese person?

M: Yeah.

C: OK. So, it's really depends on whether you are talking about internal matters or external.

M: Yes.

C: So external means you switch channels ... so to speak ... to English ..?

M: Yes.

C: Interesting...

M: Because we get an American... er... vendors that we make sometimes joint venture for projects.

C: OK. But... but... but in that meeting with your bosses, are other non-Chinese speakers present?

M: Em... I think there are Americans - maybe we have the joint-venture meeting that I had to go into English language.

C: Oh you're talking.... Right.... Particularly in a joint-venture...

M: Yup.

C: .....meeting.....

M: Especially in that one.

C: OK. And those joint-venture meetings, who are the non-speakers of Chinese? Are they only Americans? Or British? Or.....

M: Er.... actually they are mostly Arabians but they got the American residency cards already. I think they are residents of America already.

C: All right. Ethnic Arabians if you like...

M: Umhmm

C: But... but probably American passport holders...

M: Yeah, I think they live there for long and got their passport already.

C: All right, fair enough. Anybody else write reports? No? OK. Well, I mean, let's just pick another type of document and probably the most common of all – memos. Em... Stanley, do you have to write memos in your workplace?

S: Always – fax memos. I have to issue fax to our colleagues or overseas suppliers.

C: You... you deal in... you use fax a lot.

S: Fax or e-mail.

C: O...OK. Fax or e-mail. So...so...so...er... what percentages of your faxes or e-mails are in English?

S: Er... a hundred percent.

C: A hundred percent. Er... is that true even if you're writing to a Hong Kong Chinese person?

S: Even I write to a Hong Kong Chinese I also issue in English.

C: So these faxes...er... the ones targeted inside Hong Kong and the ones targeted outside Hong Kong, they're always English?

S: Because my company is also.... is a worldwide company.

C: OK

S: So and there's also like we call that is like an intra or inter company.

C: OK

S: So we have to send all our information to different countries.

C: Right... Right.... OK, that makes sense. Do you mind telling me the nature of the business?

S: Electronics – automation control systems

C: Control system products?

S: Yes,

C: Right, interesting. Cathy, you're in the Housing Authority, right? What about you? Do you have to write memos?

Ca: No.

C: Ah, what kind of documents do you write? Do you have to write any documents at work?

Ca: I think... maybe... fax.

C: Rather like Stanley, you're writing faxes. Em... what proportion of your faxes are in English or percentage, rather?

Ca: Em... fifty-fifty. Em... fifty percent to our building advice projects in China will be in Chinese.

C: Right.

Ca: Em... others ones is to our supplier ... they are German. So we use English...

C: What about you, Betty? You work for the government, so you must write memos surely.

B: Yes, but this um... the language, maybe English and er... in Chinese... it depends. In Hong Kong, we write the memo internal or em... we will use English, but em... we have our clients for social welfare and for them we write letters and case study in Chinese ...

C: That is the policy of your department?

B: Yes it's ... er ... whole government. People ... clients must read what the officer writes. It's a data protection.

B: Right.

C: Right. Right, so it seems, it seems perhaps a pattern in emerging here. Er... I think, outside Hong Kong er... these e-mail and faxes tends to be in English if they're aimed at company outside of Hong Kong. Er... for PRC obviously in Chinese, standard written Chinese. Em... but I still haven't really got an answer about faxes that you send to other companies inside Hong Kong.

Ca: We use the CC mail or e-mail, the internet...

C: And that's English, or...?

Ca: Er... half-and-half.

C: Oh really?

Ca: Yes.

C: CC mail, internet e-mail and, but not always in English if your...

Ca: Half and half, and we're trained, er... used to use Chinese in type... in a fast accuracy speed.

C: OK, OK, so... so can you, Cathy, can you give me an example of em...of when you might use Chinese for communicating by e-mail inside Hong Kong? For what kind of companies do you use Chinese?

Ca: Maybe for some local supplier.

C: OK, and... possibly supplier, suppliers yeah? Em... what's the motivation for... for using... for using Chinese. Well, does... does the supplier not know how to speak English, or...?

Ca: No, em... our boss want me use more much Chinese, less English.

C: Ah...

Ca: Yes, because em... maybe sometime we em... we need to travel to China...

C: Mmm...

Ca: ... to communicate with the government staff in the PRC...

C: Right...

Ca: They used to speak in Putonghua or Chinese, not English.

C: So, your boss has a policy of... of promoting er... well written Chinese and Putonghua presumably.

Ca: Yes. But for meetings of our company ... in here ... Hong Kong ... we use English speaking ... and for minutes ...

C: Right, and for minutes. Bu ... But your boss uses English actually in meetings even if all the participants are native speakers of Cantonese?

Ca: Even no foreigner there ... we still go in English ... it is the habit of my boss.

C: Why is it his habit?

Ca: He got a good standard and ... maybe because he work for many years in ... under British. In the old days, meetings always in English.

C: Ah... interesting... interest... But to go back to Chinese. I mean does anyone else's boss has a positive policy of promoting Putonghua? No? OK, now, time is limited... So can we quickly move on... er... to er... a different er... a different section, I think altogether. Em... maybe we can look at the em... Section 2B on page 4, spoken communication, which is particularly interesting... I, I mean if you look at items 28 to 36. Those are the possible er... situations when you might speak: Always in English; Usually in English; Usually Cantonese; Always Cantonese... Whatever. All those answers A through F. Em... so can I start by asking anybody. Meetings. Does anybody go to meetings at work which are conducted in English – like Martina, for example?

M: I think that what I have tell you. I've talked about the meetings with joint ventures, parties and that they are conducted in English.

C: Right, er... Martina, er... that's joint venture. Er... what if the, what if the joint venture people, the overseas representatives, er... the Americans, are not there? Er... if the meeting is purely between Hong Kong Chinese people.

M: I think they'll use duo-dialog then. Most probably, of course they will use Chinese as the basic communication, but sometimes the wordings and the things we're doing they have to communicate back to our joint ventures or even if they are not present. That's why we keep it as English wordings.

C: OK now. I think now I understand what you mean. If the joint venture representatives are not present at the meeting, only Hong Kong people, there is a tendency for the meeting to be in Chinese. Is that right?

M: Yes, yup.

C: But you'll have to keep the wordings in mind...

M: Yes.

C: ... for reporting back...

M: Yes, but of course it depends on who is there.

C: Ok, Ok, that figures, yes. And, and I am going to go back to Dick.  
Dick, what about you? You presumably have meetings in your workplace.

D: Yup, em... Our company er... there are several meeting. But, em... depends on er... who did the meeting.

C: Hm...

D: For example, em... my head office send some staff to our company, em... then at meeting we still use English. Em... we have another joint venture in China. Some er... staff come from Chinese then we will use Putounghua. Em... all depends. But with er... for internal meeting for example, QCC or CIT meeting em... we will use Chinese, that means Cantonese.

C: OK.

D: But the meeting...

C: Sorry to interrupt Dick, but there are something the, that I didn't understand. CI, did you say CIT meeting?

D: Oh CIT. C. I. T. that means Continuing Improvement Team. Er... and QCC is er... Quality Control Committee. That is the project of our company.

C: O, OK. Er... now that's inter... that's very interesting information actually.

C: And Stanley, lets go the telephone. Now I know you're e-mailing and faxing a lot, but are you talking to the customers on the telephone, er... to call them on the telephone?

S: Sometimes...

C: Yes?

S: Sometimes I had to talk with er... talk with er... person in other country, such as er... I will talk er... I will talk to British, British person.

C: OK.

S: Because when Hong Kong time is er... 4 o'clock pm, the British person er... people will call to Hong Kong. We will talk about er... the topics in English.

C: OK, and what if you make business phone calls inside Hong Kong? Are... are they to other Chinese people always in Cantonese?

S: Always in Cantonese. But I want to mention the meetings and seminars. It is my company ... in my company ... we hold meetings and seminars in Cantonese but if a foreigner joins the meeting ... err... we change channels ...

C: Change channels?

S: Yes. That means we change to speaking in English.

C: OK, thank you. Now, Martina. Martina, let's go back to using the telephone. Do you make wide use of the telephone?

M: Yes, but always in Cantonese to mainland er... because my Putonghua is not, is not good enough. I say in Cantonese and the colleague in PRC they in Putonghua, but in a slow speech. Slow...

C: How interesting... how interesting, so you're, you're actually talking in Cantonese...

M: Yes.

C: And the other people in the PRC are speaking in Putonghua very slowly.

M: Yes, or maybe we will communicate by fax or CC mail ... in a Chinese version ... to confirm what the wording or what the things we're talking about.

C: Which province is it? Is it in Guangdong province?

M: [No audible response]

C: Guangdong province, because the person who is listening to you can obviously understand Cantonese.

M: Donghuan area...

C: So, it's close, it's close to Hong Kong ...

M: Yes.

C: OK, well, right.



M: The middle management staff in the PRC is the always, is the university graduate, so their qualification is very high.

C: OK, OK... Have you ever attempted to communicate in English with the PRC management?

M: Er... sometime, with the communicating with the middle management level or the high management level.

C: It depends on level...

M: Yes, it depends on level. I too ...

C: OK, now, right. You're talking middle and high management level you can use English. But the people you use Cantonese or Putonghua with, they are maybe... what... clerical officer...

M: Yes, or the em... worker, er... some team leader...

C: Supervisors maybe, something like that.

M: Yes.

C: Yeah, very interesting actually. And is only by little talks like this, that you get this interesting information. You, you cannot record it on a, on a questionnaire of course. Umm, Cathy. And you?

Ca: I use English also on site in Hong Kong ... with talking to construction workers.

C: Not on the telephone?

Ca: No ... I mean direct ... talking with those workers from Nepal, maybe Thailand and the Pakistan.

C: Ah. Contract workers ... not local

Ca: Yes. In a very simple English.

C: Right, right. Well, I don't want to keep you... too, too long. And it takes a long time if I go round the table like this. Does anybody want to say anything at all about this spoken communication section? Em... I mean, item number 35. Does anybody got anything to say about socialising with colleagues from work but outside the office?

S: It depends on whether the, the colleague, is a foreigner or not.

C: It depends.

S: Depends. If our colleague is a British, American, maybe Australia then we talk with him in English... and always.

C: It would have to be. I mean if the colleague is a Cantonese speaker then presumably it's er... always...

S: Always Cantonese.

C: Always Cantonese, yeah. Em... what if, what if the person er... well not just, not just presumably ... not just native speaker of English, but you have, you have Japanese colleagues or something... or whatever. No? Nobody does, hm... I see...

B: No need for me to speak in English in my office or outside ...

C: OK, Betty. Is that because you work for government?

B: Maybe, yes ...

C: Cathy, you work for government, don't you? And you speak English at work ...

Ca: Not quite – it's Housing Authority ...

C: Ah, yes. OK. So, government-related then ...

Ca: Yes, I speak some English in work, but no need to speak outside in the leisure.

C: OK. So you don't have to socialize in English. Anyone else socialize in English. No? OK. Well, OK, socializing with colleagues is fairly obvious really. Em... what, what about things like em... item number 32. Discussing work with colleagues. You know when you er... very informally. When you just go into someone's office and you talk informally or you meet them in the corridor and you talk to them informally, er... about, about work.

B: I think for me always in Cantonese.

C: Yeah, always in Cantonese. What we're talking about, do you, do you mix your Cantonese with some English word and phases?

B: Yes.

C: Yes.

B: Sometimes some words will be in English but er... but all the... all the communication will be, will be in Cantonese.

C: OK, can you give me an example, from the workplace, of a term which is easier to say in English than Cantonese.

B: Such as the payment terms er... employment terms and...

C: Special terms like payment terms, yeah....OK. Can anybody think of anything else?

S: For example, we want to record something for our, our accounting purpose, we always use the, the terminology from the accounting terms. For example, Trial Balance. We always say it is a trial balance or a balance sheet. We don't say all in Chinese.

C: Why not?

S: It is more easy for us to express.

C: So what could we say then, professional terms tend to be in English. And, and perhaps we need, I don't know what you feel about it, but in 2B, maybe we needed another category, er... category A, B, C, D, E, F, "G" maybe. "Mixture of Cantonese and English". That might have been a sensible er... option do you think?

All: Yes.

C: I mean er... how common, Martina, do you find it using English when, when you're talking about business to other Hong Kong people? Do you use a lot of English in with your Cantonese?

M: I think it's probably if I'm talking to em... local people, even anything about my work, I think they always goes in Cantonese with the support of English maybe for the terms of ... for document name.

C: As Stanley, as Stanley was saying, that's what's I am getting at here. Yeah, er... so it's really is professional or special terms only.

M: Yes, even with the local bankers, when we are negotiating about facilities, we go with Chinese. Only the final terms that will be stated in the paper that would have use English.

C: Right, what about figures? You, you know, er... 1 million...er... 300 thousand or something. Do you use Cantonese for figures or English?

M: Cantonese for speaking, English for writing down.

Ca: Yes, I am agree. Legal agreement and contracts are in English. But for talk about, we use Cantonese.

C: So, legal documents are written in English but are discussed in Cantonese ...

Ca: Yes. And also the technical specifications and instructions for building also in English.

C: OK. So, Cathy, all documents in the construction industry – or your place, the er... Housing Authority – all are in English?

Ca: No. For the worker, there are some notices and instructions in bilingual.

C: Ah, I see. Chinese with an English translation.

Ca: Yes. Before only in English. The workmen cannot understand.

C: Right. Well, thank you for having a look at that section. Can, can I just keep you a few more minutes if you don't mind, and just have a look at Section 3 on page 6. Yeah,

have we all got that? It, it's again 3A, Section 3A on page 6, writing in English. Er... could we have a look at... actually page 7. I'm sorry, page 7. Could we have a look at item 52, the types of report I wrote most often at work are: feasibility; progress; site... Now some of you don't write reports do you? But, Martina you do.

M: I do it verbally.

C: Verbally rather, who did the written report? Dick, that's right... Dick, how would you classify your, your report?

D: Er...

C: You know, feasibility...is it...

D: I think er... each year my company have er... compulsory to each management staff to get their proposal to improve our company er... co-operation... Item number I, proposal. Each er... each year I will, I will write this proposal to our boss to improve my job.

C: Alright. Right, propose ways of improving the job, yeah. Yup, that's, that's quite an interesting one.

D: For example, improve the account payable and that's the system and improve the inventory control and... and improve the payroll system etc...

C: OK, Dick. And the audience or the readership of your proposal is always your boss?

D: Yup, my boss and GM.

C: And general manager?

D: Yes.

C: Yup, and those people who are the readership of your proposal are they all Hong Kong people?

D: Yup, all Hong Kong.

C: Native speakers of Cantonese?

D: Yup, Chinese.

C: So what is your, do you write your report in Chinese?

D: No, because the, the proposal may be submit to head office in US.

C: ... again... OK. So, even though your first readers are Hong Kong people, native speakers of Cantonese, still the reports are in English. OK, all right, that, that figures.

S: I need to write reports on projects. A kinds of checking reports.

C: Checking what, Stanley? I mean, quality, safety ...

S: No. Progress in a project. Not so expensive and on time.

C: Right. So, progress reports.

C: Now, what about reading on page 7? Go on quickly to, to reading which is in a way is, is similar I suppose, to er... to writing. Em... have a look at items 53 to 71. It goes all the way from letters to instruction manuals. Cathy, in English now. Well, which would you say is the most common document for you to read in English?

Ca: In English...

C: Out of all those things, yeah...

Ca: I think the letters, the manual, and then some... all the documents, the document in our company is in English in Hong Kong.

C: All are...

Ca: Except communicate, the document communicate with the PRC staff.

C: OK. In fact all in English, yup.

Ca: Except for PRC projects ...

C: OK, all right. Martina, is that true for you?

M: Yeah, I think em... most of the papers come up to me in English.

C: Again?

M: Yes.

C: Does everybody agree with that or are there...

All: Agree.

C: Yes, most of that reading would be in English. Would that for you, Betty, as well?

B: Um... some reading in English ... like the policy documents. But the case study reports are in Chinese so that clients can understand and they write letters to us – all in Chinese...

C: A mixture, then?

B: Yes. Legal documents, records, minutes ... we use English...

C: For internal communication?

B: Yes, but the other is in Chinese, includes advertisements, reports, letters maybe faxes.

C: OK, all right. OK, and then, finally... Perhaps the most interesting section in a way, 3C, speaking and listening in English here on page 8. And we are particularly interested in, in the situations er... 72 to 80, meetings to appraisal interviews and the frequencies, you know which you do these things. Em... Stanley, could I, could I ask you please, em... Which one of those things do you do most in English, or most frequently?

S: I seldom speak English in my office except for just kidding with our er... er... colleagues.

C: OK, but it isn't just speaking informally in the office, it's also negotiating on the telephone, seminars...

S: Maybe sometimes on the telephone I have to speak with a foreigner in English.

C: How, how frequently would you... say er... once or twice every 6 months, or once or twice per week?

S: Once or twice a year.

C: To... to speak to foreigner...

S: Yes.

C: OK, what can we say, seldom?

S: Seldom.

C: Seldom then, OK, that's all... And Dick.

D: So am I.

C: What's the frequency?

D: In our company, always Chinese, er... few thing will use English, er... so I think... once per half year.

C: And again, once per half a year, maybe 'not very often' classification...

S: Er... I am sorry Mr. Green, I have a correction...

C: Sure, Stanley.

S: For my speaking in English, I seldom speak in my office but for listening in English er... I always listen er... in English all the time, because my boss always speak to er... others in English and some of our colleagues are also foreigners. So, I also listening English er... the most er... often.

C: OK, you mean some of your colleague in your office...

S: Yes.

- C: Are, are...
- S: Are British.
- C: Are British ... actually based here... in Hong Kong?
- S: Yes.
- C: Here in your office, OK. So in a sense you are getting exposed to English but you don't have to use it very much, right?
- S: Not very much because I seldom talk to them.
- C: Right.
- S: Except lunch time or...
- C: Well, do, do you do some socialising with native speakers of English?
- S: Er... I always speak with them outside, outside work.
- C: So, there seems to be some socialising with colleagues outside...
- S: Yes.
- C: ... of work. How many, how many are there, Stanley, in your office, expatriates?
- S: What's that?
- C: Well, how many foreign colleagues in your...
- S: Oh, three.

**Side B of tape:**

- C: That's an interesting er... seems rather unusual er... feature of your life having these expatriates in your office. Em... Dick, what about you? Anything on that list that you do frequently?
- D: Um...
- C: In English. It's in English, listening and speaking in English.
- D: ... interview for job ...
- C: So, job interviews are always in English?
- D: No ... Cantonese session and English session ..
- M: Yes, Cantonese for discussing about the conditions and salary. English for talking about qualification ...

D: And test the English standard.

M: Yes, maybe test the standard.

C: OK. Anything else on that list, Dick? I mean to do in English?

D: Seminar, seminar maybe... maybe... more often use English.

C: You attend seminars...

D: Yes.

C: Yeah...

D: ... but er... I think only once per every 6 months.

C: OK, who organise these seminars?

D: Er... my boss will send me to the, to the outside seminar...

C: OK, but outside the company, but still inside Hong Kong or...

D: Inside Hong Kong.

C: Inside Hong Kong, OK. And in those seminars, er... are the people mostly Hong Kong Chinese people?

D: Yup, Chinese.

C: The seminars are in Chinese or English?

D: Er... most of is Chinese but er... the speaker use er... English to present their topic.

C: Even though the audience is all Chinese?

D: Most of Chinese.

C: Yeah...

D: ... a few are foreigners.

C: Oh, but just a few...

D: Right.

Ca: In seminar, if a foreigner is there, then all is English ... even only one. If only Chinese, then speaker uses Cantonese – but if a foreigner walk in – then uh switch to English.

C: I see, Cathy. Right, I see, Dick, yeah, yeah, yeah... What I wanted to try to find out was if the seminar was all Chinese people, would they use Cantonese then in that case... or



the seminar was considered to be formal enough to use English. But then there are all these foreigners present, right, in the seminar, yeah. And how frequent are these seminars, Dick?

D: I think er... once half...

C: For half a year?

D: For half a year.

C: So again, category 'not very often'.

D: Yes.

C: OK, thanks a lot for that. What, what about on the telephone, Betty?

B: I think er... on the telephone ... is ... not very often I speak in English.

C: And you classify that as ...?

B: But I just say 'Please hold on'... or 'Wait a minute'...

C: OK, so, so you are doing receptionist duties, almost you, you are not holding a long conversation.

B: Yes. Most times I use Cantonese on the telephone for clients and my co-worker.

C: OK, thanks. Cathy?

Ca: On the telephone, about half and half in Cantonese and English when I, when I pick up the phone and calls ... of course, Cantonese to local people and English for foreigner staff ...

C: Ah... right, right... And well, finally, what about Martina?

M: Em... I think in meetings or on the phone I did have chance to go in English because I need to talk to our clients and suppliers and transportation arrangers – UK people and Australian, the US and even French and Italy. But of course if it is em... pure Hong Kong Chinese then definitely the call would be in Cantonese.

C: Sure, and, and you talked about on the telephone, but, but could you rate your frequency?

M: I think sometimes that... it is not with a fixed frequency. It depends on what is the job that we are doing.

C: Right...

M: Yeah, but for seminar, if I did have time to attend seminar, it all depends on who is organising the seminar. If it is, for example, like the Export Credit Insurance Association, then most probably I will select it in English – because they got, they got the choice for you. You can select Chinese or the English seminar.

C: Um...

M: Yup ... you can choice.

C: Right, and one of the advantages of being bilingual is you can make that choice, can't you?

M: Yup.

C: That you can decide to go for the Chinese channel if you like or switch, switch to the English er... channel. So do you find in Hong Kong there are seminars, maybe conferences em... are often these, there is a chance to have an English session and a Chinese session. Is that quite common?

M: Yes, I think em...em... for these few years ...

C: Um... and... and for seminars, what's the frequency for you? Frequency of attending seminars. Is it often? Sometimes? Not very often...?

M: I think it's sometimes. It all depends if I am busy or not.

C: Sure, OK. So maybe once or twice per month?

M: Yup.

C: And... and you tend to choose the English section...

M: It depend on the topic... really...

C: So what ..?

M: If they talk about the Chinese trade, of course I go with the Chinese versions.

C: OK, so what influences you choice of... to go for English?

M: Now... em... what I have quote before. If it is about the export credit insurance, it talks about foreign trade that you're doing, how to make your risk lower or whatever ... then of course I am going for the international part, so I go in English.

C: OK.

M: Yeah, if it's talking something about er... what is happening in Hong Kong or in the PRC, I think Chinese or Cantonese will be the better terms that they could express.

C: To express the... what... the concepts I suppose, yeah. So, so would it be for... to say that, use Cantonese er... for internal and ... what... including PRC, right, to some extent, PRC business but English is the... is used for external, externally-focused things, yup?

M: I do agree.

C: And after a meeting or a seminar, do you socialize with ...

M: Yes, I socialize with the visitor ... not Chinese ...small talking and also business topics. And sometimes I must present in the seminar...

C: You mean give an oral presentation on your own...

M: Sometimes by myself ... sometimes in a group.

C: Yup... Thank you very much everybody and ... er ... on that interesting reflection let's stop the tape because we've run out of time.

#### **Appendix IV: Language logs**

Thank you for considering my request to keep a language log to help me in my current research project. As employed Hong Kong professionals, the information you may be able to give me would be valuable to me and would be used to help me write my doctoral thesis. The information may also be used to help myself and others to prepare suitable teaching materials for future English in the Workplace courses offered by the English Language Centre of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. The main findings of the project will be sent in report form to the departments you are affiliated to for your programme of studies. This will allow the departments to understand more clearly the occupational English language demands placed on you, their part-time students.

The University requires me to ask you to sign a form stating that you agree to participate in this project. The University also requires me to tell you that your contribution will be treated confidentially and anonymously unless you request otherwise and that you may stop your participation at any point in the log keeping exercise. Please take time to think about your involvement in the project over the next week and if you agree to participate, please sign the release form below and send it to me at Room QT424 in the English Language Centre by March 19th, 2000.

***I agree to take part in the project Communication in the Professional Workplace in post-colonial Hong Kong: the roles and statuses of Chinese and English. My participation will involve me keeping a language log to record my use of English for speaking/listening and reading/writing at work over the period of a single typical 5-day working week.***

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**If you agree to participate in the project, please complete the personal details form overleaf**

## Personal details

1. Your mother tongue: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Highest level of education achieved e.g. Form 5, Higher Diploma, first degree, postgraduate degree etc: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Nature of your company/organization's business/activity: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Size of your company (circle one item): small (<50 employees), medium (51-100), Large (>100)
5. Your employing sector (circle one item): government (e.g. Civil Service), government-related (e.g. Housing Authority), private (e.g. private company)
6. Ownership of your company (circle one item): Hong Kong-owned or foreign-owned (including China-owned)
7. Your job title: \_\_\_\_\_
8. Your main duties: \_\_\_\_\_
10. Position in your company/institution (circle one item): junior/middle/senior  
Number of years spent working for present company/institution: \_\_\_\_\_
11. Total number of years working full-time in your profession: \_\_\_\_\_

***Now, please keep your record of English language use on the pages provided. Record the activity e.g. writing a letter of confirmation, and then give a brief description of it e.g. letter written to supplier, an Australian company, about 200 words long, or telephone call to client in Canada, call made to promote a new product range to existing client, about 12 minutes. After completing the five-day log, please return to this page and answer the question below:***

***Do the log entries you have made reflect a typical week of English use in your workplace? Yes/No (circle one). If you circled no, please explain briefly in the space below why the week was not typical.***

## **Language Log 1: Business Services (period 25.04.00-02.05.00)**

### **Personal details**

1. Your mother tongue: Cantonese
2. Highest level of education achieved e.g. Form 5, Higher Diploma, first degree, postgraduate degree etc: BA (Hons) in Commerce
3. Nature of your company/organization's business/activity: Banking
4. Size of your company (circle one item): small (<50 employees), medium (51-100), Large (>100)
5. Your employing sector (circle one item): government (e.g. Civil Service), government-related (e.g. Housing Authority), private (e.g. private company)
6. Ownership of your company (circle one item): Hong Kong-owned or foreign-owned (including China-owned)
7. Your job title: Accounting Officer
8. Your main duties: Accounting, reporting and office administration
9. Position in your company/institution (circle one item): junior/middle/senior
10. Number of years spent working for present company/institution: 2 months
11. Total number of years working full-time in your profession: 4 years

***Now, please keep your record of English language use on the pages provided. Record the activity e.g. writing a letter of confirmation, and then give a brief description of it e.g. letter written to supplier, an Australian company, about 200 words long, or telephone call to client in Canada, call made to promote a new product range to existing client, about 12 minutes. After completing the five-day log, please return to this page and answer the question below:***

***Do the log entries you have made reflect a typical week of English use in your workplace? Yes/No (circle one). If you circled no, please explain briefly in the space below why the week was not typical.***

Log keeper note: this is a typical week. English is absolutely essential within our bank since we have 6 expatriates from Germany and Austria. All communication to Head Office in Stuttgart and to the Hong Kong government Census and Statistics Bureau and Monetary Authority is in English.

Listening/Speaking	Reading/Writing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussing with a colleague from Germany his working visa extension application. Obtained details needed to complete the visa application form: about 15 minutes</li> <li>• Requesting senior manager, a German, to sign the visa application form and supply supporting documentation: about 10 minutes</li> <li>• General conversations with English speakers around the company, including lunch: about 1 hour and 15 minutes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading and filling out visa application form for colleague: about 20 minutes</li> <li>• Drafting a letter to Immigration Department support visa extension application: about 20 minutes</li> <li>• Drafting a second letter to Immigration authorizing my Office Assistant to submit the application form on behalf of the applicant: about 15 minutes</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conversation with German Senior Vice President re cash advance for his trip to Tokyo and the outstanding expenses reports for all business trips made since Feb: about 20 minutes</li> <li>• Spoke to German expatriate colleague re his working visa extension application. Reminded him to bring in his passport and to arrange visa pick-up: about 15 minutes</li> <li>• Social conversation with Head of Operations, a German, about family matters: about 15 minutes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepared a memo for the Senior Vice President regarding his cash advance request – did this myself since his secretary is on leave: about 15 minutes</li> <li>• Completed weekly Assets and Liabilities Return to the Hong Kong Monetary Authority. This is a form with a short memo report attached explaining main aspects of the answers given: about 30 minutes</li> <li>• Filled out form (through Real Time Gross Settlement) to authorize payment for an expatriate employee's apartment: about 15 minutes</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Answered phone call from Chief Accountant in Germany: about 5 minutes</li> <li>• Received call from company in Singapore which organizes conferences. Answered caller's questions about my company: about 5 minutes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drew 24 cheques and prepared payment vouchers to pay creditors: about 40 minutes</li> <li>• E-mailed a staff member in the Financial Control Department at Head Office in Stuttgart re sending the balance sheet for the Hong Kong branch by fax. Received response within 30 minutes and e-mailed confirmation of agreement: about 25 minutes</li> <li>• Input payment vouchers for creditors into database: about 30 minutes</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussed with expatriate Head of Operations extension of his apartment lease: about 15 minutes</li> <li>• Phoned landlord (in Cantonese) and he faxed in English a draft extension agreement. Read fax and explained it to Head of Ops: about 30 minutes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drafted a memo to seek approval for transfer of housing allowance money to a Senior Vice President: about 10 minutes</li> <li>• Filled out form requesting transfer of housing allowance funds to attach to memo: about 15 minutes</li> <li>• Completed a survey form for the government Census and Statistics</li> </ul>

	Bureau about our business e.g. assets and liabilities, foreign exchange reserves held etc. Forms and instructions in English. Had to read three booklets in order to complete forms correctly: about 5 hours
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Spoke to a Senior Vice President about a report he wants me to write for Head Office to review our risk management strategy: about 40 minutes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Drafted and sent faxes to 9 external parties requesting end-of-month prices of the assets and securities we have in hand: about 30 minutes</li> <li>Began to fill out Returns for April for the Hong Kong Monetary Authority. This is done electronically in English: about 4 hours</li> </ul>

## **Language Log 2: Business Services (period 25.04.00-02.05.00)**

### **Personal details**

1. Your mother tongue: Cantonese
2. Highest level of education achieved e.g. Form 5, Higher Diploma, first degree, postgraduate degree etc: Postgraduate (MA)
3. Nature of your company/organization's business/activity: General trading in Japanese mass consumables
4. Size of your company (circle one item): small (<50 employees), medium (51-100), Large (>100)
5. Your employing sector (circle one item): government (e.g. Civil Service), government-related (e.g. Housing Authority), private (e.g. private company)
6. Ownership of your company (circle one item): Hong Kong-owned or foreign-owned (including China-owned)
7. Your job title: Accounts Clerk
8. Your main duties: Prepare accounts and financial reports
9. Position in your company/institution (circle one item): junior/middle/senior
- 10. Number of years spent working for present company/institution: 6 months**
11. Total number of years working full-time in your profession: 6 months



***Now, please keep your record of English language use on the pages provided. Record the activity e.g. writing a letter of confirmation, and then give a brief description of it e.g. letter written to supplier, an Australian company, about 200 words long, or telephone call to client in Canada, call made to promote a new product range to existing client, about 12 minutes. After completing the five-day log, please return to this page and answer the question below:***

***Do the log entries you have made reflect a typical week of English use in your workplace? Yes/No (circle one). If you circled no, please explain briefly in the space below why the week was not typical.***

Log keeper note: my firm is owned by Japanese and there's not much chance for me to speak or write in English. The languages we use most are Chinese and Japanese, but usually English on the telephone.

<b>Listening/Speaking</b>	<b>Reading/Writing</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Answered 5 telephone calls from Head Office in Japan. Routine checks on stock levels: about 15 minutes in total</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read and replied to confirmation letter from company accountants, Deloitte: about 15 minutes</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Answered 3 telephone enquiries from Head Office in Japan regarding sales trends: about 15 minutes in total</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wrote a letter of confirmation to company's regional bank in Taipei: about 15 minutes</li> </ul>

### **Language Log 3: Engineering (period 12.04.00-18.04.00)**

#### **Personal details**

1. Your mother tongue: Cantonese
2. Highest level of education achieved e.g. Form 5, Higher Diploma, first degree, postgraduate degree etc: Higher Diploma in Electronic Engineering
3. Nature of your company/organization's business/activity: Electronic Automation Control
4. Size of your company (circle one item): small (<50 employees), medium (51-100), Large (>100)
5. Your employing sector (circle one item): government (e.g. Civil Service), government-related (e.g. Housing Authority), private (e.g. private company)
6. Ownership of your company (circle one item): Hong Kong-owned or foreign-owned (including China-owned)
7. Your job title: servicing electronic engineer
8. Your main duties: design and maintain automation control systems for clients
9. Position in your company/institution (circle one item): junior/middle/senior
10. Number of years spent working for present company/institution: 5 years
11. Total number of years working full-time in your profession: 5 years

***Now, please keep your record of English language use on the pages provided. Record the activity e.g. writing a letter of confirmation, and then give a brief description of it e.g. letter written to supplier, an Australian company, about 200 words long, or telephone call to client in Canada, call made to promote a new product range to existing client, about 12 minutes. After completing the five-day log, please return to this page and answer the question below:***

***Do the log entries you have made reflect a typical week of English use in your workplace? Yes/No (circle one). If you circled no, please explain briefly in the space below why the week was not typical.***

<b>Listening/Speaking</b>	<b>Reading/Writing</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Made a telephone call to supplier in USA to get information on a new product: about 10 minutes</li> <li>• Telephone call to colleague in Paris office to check quality control problem in one of our systems: about 10 minutes</li> <li>• Internal meeting with top management; most colleagues at meeting were foreigners: about 35 minutes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drafted minutes of internal meeting for checking by seniors before distribution: about 1 hour</li> <li>• Wrote and faxed a letter to supplier to agree price of equipment: about 15 minutes</li> <li>• Wrote and faxed a letter to a main contractor to revise the project schedule: about 20 minutes</li> <li>• Read and answered a letter requesting advice from client in USA: about 30 minutes</li> <li>• Wrote memo to authorize transfer of equipment from one site to another site: about 10 minutes</li> <li>• E-mailed colleagues to give technical information on a new product: about 5 minutes</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Telephoned British office to get advice from colleague about the usage of equipment: about 10 minutes</li> <li>• Telephone negotiation with another British colleague about the huge amount of their order for equipment from Hong Kong: about 15 minutes</li> <li>• Spoke on the telephone to our company's shipping agent in Australia to arrange the transshipment of equipment: about 20 minutes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wrote a letter to complain about late delivery: about 15 minutes</li> <li>• Wrote covering letter to attach to technical information requested by contractor</li> <li>• Read minutes of last project meeting ready for meeting tomorrow</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Made telephone to another French colleague to check project completion date: about 10 minutes</li> <li>• Meeting of new project team. Discussed project. Two Australians from Regional Office present: about 1 hour</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wrote a letter in answer to request for components: about 5 minutes</li> <li>• Wrote letter of enquiry about new product</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Had short conversation with Australian Finance Manager about the maximum cost of a project: about 10 minutes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wrote thank you letter to the new business partner in Britain: about 15 minutes</li> <li>• Wrote letter requesting meeting with colleague next month in France: about 10 minutes</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Made internal telephone calls to confirm a meeting: about 20 minutes</li> <li>• Gave an internal presentation to senior management on work in progress in the region: about 40 minutes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wrote letter and faxed it to request delivery of components: about 10 minutes</li> <li>• Wrote letter for mailing to confirm an order: about 10 minutes</li> <li>• Wrote internal memo to enquire about</li> </ul>

	<p>my company's new medical policy: about 10 minutes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Read an internal memo about changes in payroll accounts</li><li>• Began to write up oral progress report to senior management</li></ul>
--	--

**Language Log 4: Community and Social Services (period 25.04.00-02.05.00)**

**Personal details**

1. Your mother tongue: Cantonese
2. Highest level of education achieved e.g. Form 5, Higher Diploma, first degree, postgraduate degree etc: Diploma in Social Work
3. Nature of your company/organization's business/activity: Multi Services Centre for the Elderly
4. Size of your company (circle one item): small (<50 employees), medium (51-100), Large (>100)
5. Your employing sector (circle one item): government (e.g. Civil Service), government-related (e.g. Housing Authority), private (e.g. private company)
6. Ownership of your company (circle one item): Hong Kong-owned or foreign-owned (including China-owned)
7. Your job title: Team Leader (Home Help Services)
8. Your main duties: managing daily operations of home help team
9. Position in your company/institution (circle one item): junior/middle/senior
10. Number of years spent working for present company/institution: 12 years
11. Total number of years working full-time in your profession: 12 years

***Now, please keep your record of English language use on the pages provided. Record the activity e.g. writing a letter of confirmation, and then give a brief description of it e.g. letter written to supplier, an Australian company, about 200 words long, or telephone call to client in Canada, call made to promote a new product range to existing client, about 12 minutes. After completing the five-day log, please return to this page and answer the question below:***

***Do the log entries you have made reflect a typical week of English use in your workplace? Yes/No (circle one). If you circled no, please explain briefly in the space below why the week was not typical.***

Listening/Speaking	Reading/Writing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing initial case report on new intake: about 1 hour</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read a circular from HQ on new rules for clients' data protection: about 10 minutes</li> <li>• Wrote a case report on team deployment: about 1 hour</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading case report and adding new information to it on service recipient: about 40 minutes</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed case report on existing service recipient: about 1 hour</li> </ul>

## **Language Log 5: Community and Social Services (period 25.04.00-02.05.00)**

### **Personal details**

1. Your mother tongue: Cantonese
2. Highest level of education achieved e.g. Form 5, Higher Diploma, first degree, postgraduate degree etc: Diploma in Social Work
3. Nature of your company/organization's business/activity: Counselling and casework services
4. Size of your company (circle one item): small (<50 employees), medium (51-100), Large (>100)
5. Your employing sector (circle one item): government (e.g. Civil Service), government-related (e.g. Housing Authority), private (e.g. private company)
6. Ownership of your company (circle one item): Hong Kong-owned or foreign-owned (including China-owned)
7. Your job title: Social Work Assistant
8. Your main duties: To provide counselling services to individuals and families
9. Position in your company/institution (circle one item): junior/middle/senior
10. Number of years spent working for present company/institution: 7
11. Total number of years working full-time in your profession: 20

***Now, please keep your record of English language use on the pages provided. Record the activity e.g. writing a letter of confirmation, and then give a brief description of it e.g. letter written to supplier, an Australian company, about 200 words long, or telephone call to client in Canada, call made to promote a new product range to existing client, about 12 minutes. After completing the five-day log, please return to this page and answer the question below:***

***Do the log entries you have made reflect a typical week of English use in your workplace? Yes/No (circle one). If you circled no, please explain briefly in the space below why the week was not typical.***



Listening/Speaking	Reading/Writing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wrote down client's particulars in his case file: about 30 minutes</li> <li>• Wrote a case recording on a family visit: about 15 minutes</li> <li>• Filled out an application form for the placement of an elderly person into residential care: about 20 minutes</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wrote down client's particulars in her case file: about 25 minutes</li> <li>• Read case file and drafted complete case recording: about 2 hours</li> <li>• Interviewed clients and then entered summary of interview into case recording file: about 1 hour</li> <li>• Writing an investigation report on employee compensation for review by District Court: about 1 hour</li> <li>• Wrote a memo to refer a case to the Field Unit to process a claim for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance: about 15 minutes</li> <li>• Filled out a form authorizing payment of expenses to field team: about 15 minutes</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wrote up an Employee's Compensation Report on special format: about 30 minutes</li> <li>• Filled out a form for HQ to register a client to begin receiving residential care services: about 20 minutes</li> <li>• Opened file and wrote down case notes after making a visit to new family counselling services recipients</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Updated three case files: about 50 minutes</li> <li>• Filled out form to request home help services for a client: about 20 minutes</li> </ul>