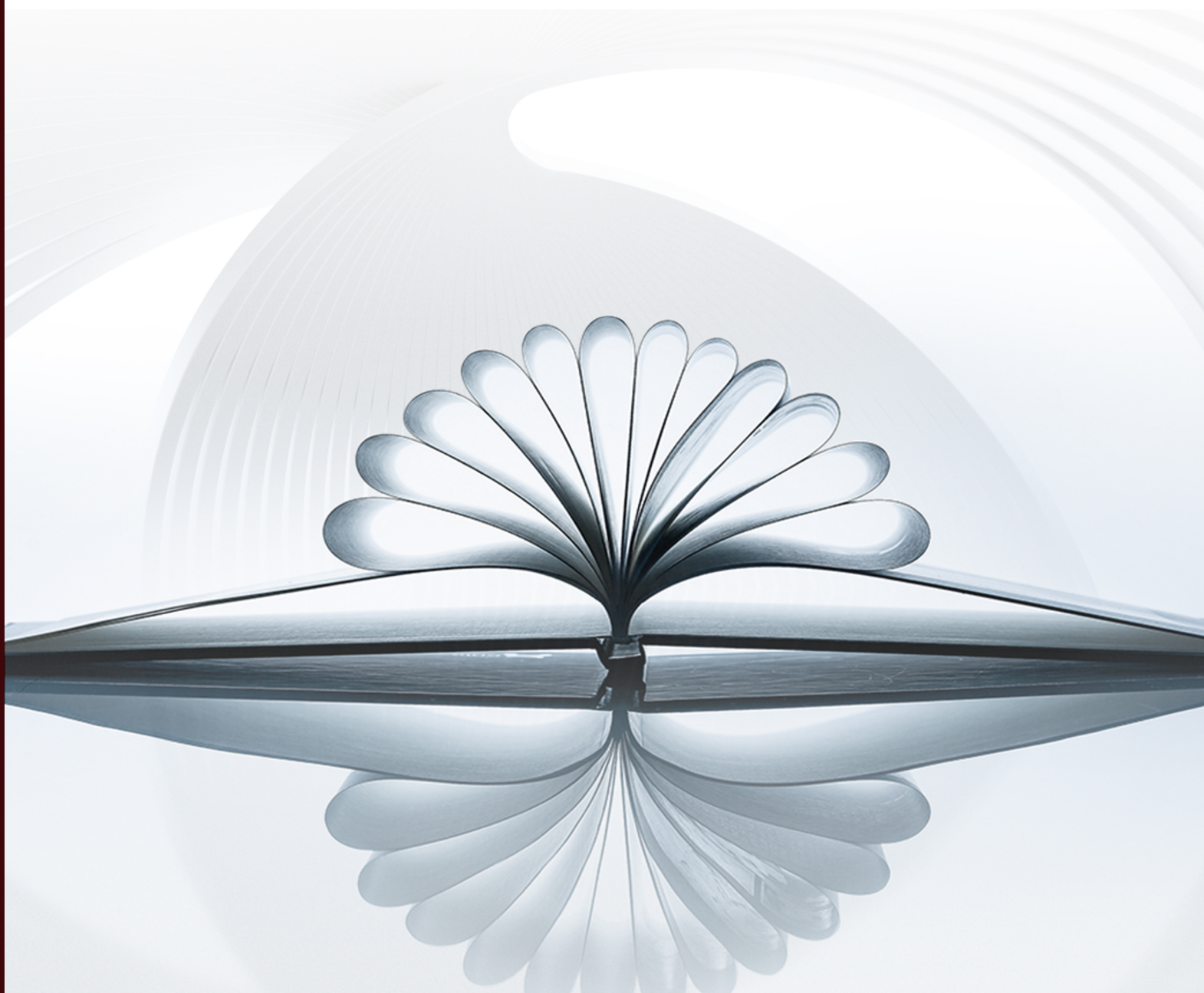


# **Journal of Linguistics and Education Research**

◀ ISSN: 2630-5097(Online)

Volume 2 Annual Issue December 2019 ▶





**BILINGUAL  
PUBLISHING CO.**  
Pioneer of Global Academics Since 1984

## Editor-in-Chief

Dr. Ana Cristina Lahuerta University of Oviedo Spain

## Editorial Board Members

Tania Rahman, Bangladesh

Luca Remaggi, UK

Haopeng LIU, USA

Mohamed Ridha Ben Maad, Tunisia

Busi Makoni, USA

Kamil Stachowski, Poland

Dhirendra Pratap Singh, India

Mantoo Motinyane, South Africa

Jean-Paul Kouega, Cameroon

Philasande Mfaba, South Africa

Ruby Chi Cheung YANG, Hong Kong

Salvador Montaner-Villalba, Spain

Rasool Moradi Joz, Iran

Ciaran Dawson, Ireland

Naimeh Borjalilu, Iran

Phephani Gumbi, South Africa

Matthew Williams, UK

Burcu Aydin, Turkey

SvenOlof Dahlgren, Sweden

Kamal Heidari, Iran

Rivi Carmel, Israel

Li Xin, China

Emad Ali Abdul-Latif, Qatar

Višeslav Raos, Croatia

Ernest Jakaza, Zimbabwe

Claribel Koliswa Moropa, South Africa

Susana Maria Pinto, Portugal

Ching-Yi TIEN, Taiwan

Bernie Chun Nam MAK, Hong Kong

Kazue Okamoto, Australia

Laszlo Maracz, Netherlands

Marta Andersson, Sweden

Elena Even-Simkin, Israel

Thomaï Alexiou, Greece

Ana Cristina Lahuerta, Spain

Hassan Banaruee, Iran

Julie Delkamiller, USA

Danielle Brimo, USA

Arman Kabiri, Canada

Hassan Moradi, Iran

Carla Amoros-Negre, Spain

Ayat Mohammed Naguib Ahmed Mohammed, USA

Eleni Griva, Greece

Ebrahim Isavi, Iran

Daniela Maria Coelho, United Arab Emirates

Christian Ludwig, Germany

Hajar Ghafarpour, Iran

Gerda HaBler, Germany

Sara Albaladejo Albaladejo, Spain

Syed Abdul Manan, Pakistan

Karolina Zofia Grzech, Sweden

Mohammed Sabri Al-Batineh, Jordan

Kourosh Meshgi, Japan

Valentin Uwizeyimana, Rwanda

Antonio Jimenez-Munoz, Spain

Meral Seker, Turkey

Laura Pinnavaia, Italy

Mi-Hui Cho, Korea

Almasa Mulalic, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Ramona Kunene Nicolas, South Africa

Monica Lourenco, Portugal

Gerard Paul Sharpling, UK

Loretta S. Gray, USA

Safa Elnaili, USA

Francisco Manzo-Robledo, USA

Ying Wang, UK

Salwa Ahmed Sadek Mohamed, UK

Maria Carmen Frias Gouveia, Portugal

William K. Lawrence, USA

Monique Gabrielle Marie Bournot-Trites, Canada

Jaffer Sheyholislami, Canada

Volume 2 · Annual Issue · December 2019 · ISSN 2630-5097(Online)

# **Journal of Linguistics and Education Research**

**Editor-in-Chief**

Dr. Ana Cristina Lahuerta



## Contents

### Articles

- 1      On the Relationship between Iranian EFL Students' Writing Strategies and Writing Ability**  
Behrooz Ghoorchaei   Maryam Khosravi
- 8      Teaching Hong Kong English before Teaching Academic English: The Gateway to Effective Learning of College Writing**  
Bernie Chun Nam MAK
- 19     The Bilingual Competence of Local Council Staffers in the Centre and Littoral Regions of Cameroon**  
Jean-Paul Kouega   Sama Alexandre Sihna
- 28     Attitudes Towards the Official recognition of Hong Kong Sign Language by Hong Kong Citizens**  
Linghui Gan   Federico Gobbo

### Copyright

*Journal of Linguistics and Education Research* is licensed under a Creative Commons-Non-Commercial 4.0 International Copyright (CC BY- NC4.0). Readers shall have the right to copy and distribute articles in this journal in any form in any medium, and may also modify, convert or create on the basis of articles. In sharing and using articles in this journal, the user must indicate the author and source, and mark the changes made in articles. Copyright © BILINGUAL PUBLISHING CO. All Rights Reserved.

ARTICLE

# On the Relationship between Iranian EFL Students' Writing Strategies and Writing Ability

Behrooz Ghoorchaie<sup>\*1</sup> Maryam Khosravi<sup>2</sup>

1. Department of English, Farhangian University, Tehran, Iran

2. Islamic Azad University of Gorgan, Iran

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history

Received: 28 November 2018

Accepted: 8 January 2019

Published: 27 March 2019

### Keywords:

Writing strategy

Writing ability

EFL students

## ABSTRACT

This study aimed at investigating the relationship between writing strategies, and writing ability of Iranian EFL students. The participants were 120 students learning English in the Iranian EFL context. Data were gathered by means of a writing strategies questionnaire and an IELTS writing task. The results of Pearson correlation test revealed that there was a statistically significant relationship between writing strategies, and writing abilities of the participants. The results have some implications for teaching writing in the EFL context.

## 1. Introduction

Writing is one of the most important skills in learning English as a foreign language. In some researchers' opinion, there is a relationship between learners' success and their writing abilities (Lerstorn, 1990).<sup>[8]</sup> In writing a passage in English, learners utilize writing strategies to write a text better. These strategies are different in different students. For example, proficient students have more awareness of writing process than novice ones. Lipstein and Renninger (2007)<sup>[9]</sup> mentioned that successful learners develop a better understanding of writing skill, set writing goals, and use diverse writing strategies.

Writing Strategies are cognitive and meta-cognitive procedures that writers use to control the production

of writing (Richards & Schmidt, 2002).<sup>[13]</sup> It can be defined as a sequence of engaging a writer in planning, composing, and revising activities in a writing task (Torrance, Thomas & Robinson, 2000).<sup>[14]</sup>

Today one can find some university EFL students who cannot write even a simple coherent English sentence after four years of study at the university level and the grades they get in the norm-referenced assessment culture of Iran do not have accountability. This problem might be due to their unfamiliarity with strategies involved in writing process. Therefore, this study intends to investigate the relationship between Iranian EFL students' use of writing strategies and their writing ability. Therefore, the following research question was formulated:

Is there any statistically significant relationship

*\*Corresponding Author:*

Behrooz Ghoorchaie,

Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics, Farhangian University, Tehran, Iran;

Email: [behroozghoorchaie@gmail.com](mailto:behroozghoorchaie@gmail.com).



between Iranian EFL students' writing strategies and their writing ability?

Accordingly, the following null hypothesis could be presented:

There is no statistically significant relationship between Iranian EFL students' writing strategies and their writing ability.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Writing

Richards and Schmidt (2002)<sup>[13]</sup> defined writing as strategies, procedures, and decision making processes which are utilized when the authors write about a topic. They mentioned that writing included planning, drafting, reviewing and revising processes.

Heaton (1975)<sup>[6]</sup> explains that a writer needs four fundamental skills to write about a topic. The first skill is grammatical skill which helps the writer to write grammatically correct sentences. The second skill is stylistic skill which is about the ability to manipulate the sentences and use the language efficiently. Mechanical skill is the third necessary skill in writing process. Writers should use conventions peculiar to written language. Judgment skill is the last skill which is related to appropriate manner of writing according to the purpose of writing.

Writing is a complex process which is considered as one of the most essential skills in language learning. Shopping lists, letters and academic texts are some forms of writing. Each of these forms have a variety of features regarding their levels of grammar or structure. Nunan (1999)<sup>[11]</sup> stated that writing is productive skill and shares some functional characteristics with spoken discourse. Halliday (as cited in Nunan, 1999)<sup>[11]</sup> described three purposes for writing. Action, information, and entertainment are the main purposes of writing a text. Action includes public signs, product labels, and so on. Information is related to the newspapers and magazines, and entertainment includes comic strips, novels, and newspaper features. Emig (1977)<sup>[4]</sup> defines writing as a unique mode of learning and in this process both sides of brain should be used. Emig believed that writing a text increases thinking skills, it also helps the author to analyze and synthesize ideas better.

Students in EFL classes have lots of problems with writing. Lack of skills to write is the first problem that students may face. Students do not write in their L1, and this issue impacts their confidence and experience, so learners avoid writing which compounds the problem. Another factor which affects writing is previous learning experience. It impacts the learners' views about their

capabilities, and this prevents them from experimenting writing skills. Nunan (1999)<sup>[11]</sup> said that written discourse is not an important problem, and, linguistically, written language tends to consist of clauses that are complex internally. Students also need to master new vocabulary, format and register conventions.

### 2.2 Writing Strategies

Writing Strategies include cognitive and metacognitive procedures that writers use to control the production of writing. There are eight categories of writing strategies. "Planning" is the first category in which the writer chooses what to write about. "Global planning" is about organizing the whole text. In "Rehearsing" the writer tries out ideas and in "Repeating" phase, they provide impetus to continue writing. Writers review what had already been written down in "Re-reading", and in "Questioning", ideas are classified and evaluated. "Revising" and "Editing" are the last categories which are related to making some changes to clarify meaning and correct syntax and spelling (Arndt, 1987).<sup>[1]</sup> She proposed the following table for describing her own categories of writing strategies.

**Table 1.** Arndt's Categories of ESL Writing Strategies

Category of strategies	Definition
Planning	Finding a focus, deciding what to write about
Global planning	Deciding how to organize the text as a whole
Rehearsing	Trying out ideas and the language in which to express them
Repeating	Of key words and phrases- an activity which often seemed to provide impetus to continue composing
Re-reading	Of what had already been written down
Questioning	As a means of classifying ideas, or evaluating what had been written
Revising	Making changes to the written text in order to clarify meaning
Editing	Making changes to the written text in order to correct the syntax or spelling

Wenden (1991)<sup>[16]</sup> asked eight students to write a text at the computer and investigated how metacognitive strategies impacted students' writing. She classified writing strategies in two sections. The first section includes metacognitive strategies such as planning, evaluation, and monitoring. Cognitive strategies are in the second part which include clarification, retrieval, resourcing, deferral, avoidance, and verification. Metacognitive strategies are mental operations that students use to regulate their learning process. They are used for execution of a writing task. Cognitive strategies are used for learning new information and using it in a particular task or situation. They are used to solve the problems during writing and help the implementation of the metacognitive strategies.

Victori (1995)<sup>[15]</sup> classified writing strategies into seven types. They included planning strategies, monitoring strategies, evaluating strategies, resourcing strategies, repeating strategies, reduction strategies, and the use of L1 strategies. In planning strategies, the writers decide about their ideas and state their aims for writing. The strategies which writers use for checking and identifying

the problems are called monitoring strategies. Evaluating strategies include strategies that are used for changing the text and used after reconsidering the text and learners' objectives. Resourcing strategies means using external referencing sources of information. When writers are reviewing the text, they can apply repeating chunks of language. Reduction strategies involve removing some phrases in a text, trying to solve the problem, and paraphrasing. A writer can use L1 to generate new ideas and evaluate L2 or foreign language written text.

Riazi (1997)<sup>[12]</sup> asserted that some categories can be added to previous categories of writing strategies. He believed that the students can use these strategies for mental representations of writing task and social activities. He said that cognitive strategies include note taking, inferencing, elaboration, L1 use, and revising and editing multiple drafts of writing. He stated that students use their previous knowledge and called this a dynamic and interactive process. Metacognitive strategies lead to the control of writing tasks and the decrease of the levels of stress and anxiety. Social strategies included interaction with teachers and students for clarifying the task, problem solving, and discussing about comments in writing process. The last category of strategies i.e. search strategies deal with searching and using supporting sources. The composing strategies are displayed in table 2 below.

**Table 2.** Composing strategies (adapted from Riazi, 1997)

Composing strategies	Constituents	Phases of composing process
<i>Cognitive strategies</i>  Interacting with the materials to be used in writing by manipulating them mentally or physically	Note-taking	Reading & Writing
	Elaboration	Reading & Writing
	Use of mother tongue	Reading & Writing
	Knowledge and skill transfer from L1	
	Inferencing	Reading
<i>Metacognitive strategies</i>  Executive processes used to plan, monitor, and evaluate a writing task.	Drafting	Writing
	Assigning goals	Task representation and reading
	Planning	Writing
	Rationalizing appropriate Formats	Reading & Writing
	Monitoring and evaluation	Reading/Writing/ task representation
<i>Social strategies</i>  Interacting with other persons to assist in performing the task or to gain affective control	Appealing for clarifications	Task representation
	Getting feedback from Professors & peers	Writing
<i>Search strategies</i>  Searching and using supporting sources	Searching and using libraries	Reading and writing
	Using others' writing as a model	

## 2.3 Empirical Studies

Gahungu (2007)<sup>[5]</sup> conducted a study to find the

interrelationship among strategy use, self-efficacy, and language ability in foreign language learners in Northern Arizona University. Participants of this research were 37 students studying French. One of the researchers asked the students to fill out a forty-item questionnaire which was strategy inventory for language learning (SILL). They were also asked to complete a forty-item questionnaire about their levels of self-efficacy. Learners' levels and their abilities in French language were measured by a cloze test. Open-ended questions, interviews, and class observation were used in this research, too. He found that there was a positive and significant relationship between these three variables.

Yilmaz (2010)<sup>[18]</sup> aimed at investigating the relationship between language learning strategies, gender, proficiency and self-efficacy beliefs. The results showed that there was a statistically significant difference for the strategies in favor of good learners. Also, it was shown that the highest and lowest ranks were for compensation strategies and affective strategies respectively.

Assadi Aidinlou and Massomi Far (2014)<sup>[2]</sup> investigated the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs, writing strategies, and correct use of conjunctions by Iranian EFL learners. The participants of this study were 67 EFL learners who studied English in a language school in Iran. They asked participants to fill out two questionnaires including self-efficacy beliefs questionnaire and a writing strategy questionnaire. They also used a writing task in which they asked students to complete it by using appropriate conjunctions. The findings showed that there was a statistically significant relationship between students' self-efficacy beliefs and writing strategies but there was not any statistically significant relationship between writing strategies and appropriate use of conjunctions.

Bai, Hu, and Gu (2014)<sup>[3]</sup> found that there was a relationship between language proficiency and the choice of strategies in Singapore primary schools. As they said, a wide range of writing strategies is available to young writers. However, their reliance on and use of certain writing strategies might be different in different stages of proficiency development.

Kao and Reynolds (2017)<sup>[7]</sup> investigated the relationship between strategy use and perceived writing ability of Taiwanese university students. They found a statistically significant positive relationship between the use of cognitive/preparation strategies and students' self-rated writing ability.

It could be said that there have been contradictory findings in the literature with regard to the relationship between strategy use and language learning skills and sub-

skills. Due to the paucity of research in the Iranian EFL context, the present study delved in to the issue of writing strategies to find out if there exists a positive relationship between Iranian EFL students' writing strategies and writing abilities.

### 3. Methodology

The study is of a correlational nature. The aim of the study was to investigate the relationship between Iranian EFL students' writing strategies and writing abilities. Data were obtained through the Persian version of writing strategies questionnaire (Assadi Aidinlou & Masoomi Far, 2014)<sup>[2]</sup> and an IELTS writing task.

#### 3.1 Participants

The participants were 120 randomly selected intermediate EFL students at Iran Language Institute. The students had learned English formally at school for more than five years and they participated in English language classes in this institute.

#### 3.2 Instrumentation

The following instruments were used to obtain valid and reliable data: Writing strategies questionnaire and an IELTS writing task. They are explained below:

##### 3.2.1 Writing Strategies Questionnaire

The writing strategies questionnaire was taken from Language Strategy Use Inventory by Cohen, Oxford and Chi (2002).<sup>[21]</sup> Yoong (2010)<sup>[19]</sup> mentioned that this questionnaire has a high level of reliability as the Cronbach's alpha coefficient is 0.91. The original questionnaire included ninety questions. It was divided into six parts based on six language skills of listening strategy, vocabulary strategy, speaking strategy, reading strategy, writing strategy, and translation strategy.

The second version of Language Strategy Use Questionnaire included 40 statements concerning four main English language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The adapted version used in this study includes ten statements for writing skill. This questionnaire is in the form of 5-point likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. It was validated by Assadi and Massoumi Far (2014)<sup>[2]</sup> in Iran (See appendices A & B).

##### 3.2.2 IELTS Writing Task

Task 1 of an IELTS writing test was used to assess the learners' writing ability. The writing task was chosen from the book entitled Academic Writing Practice for IELTS (McCarter, 2002).<sup>[10]</sup> The students were supposed to write 150 words in 20 minutes to describe a graph. The writing samples were rated by two raters and the inter-rater reliability was found to be .95.

#### 3.3 Data collection procedures

The students were asked to fill out the writing strategies questionnaires. They were informed that the items were about their personal views and there were no right or wrong answers. Also, they were given an IELTS writing test to elicit their writing samples.

#### 3.4 Design

The design of the study was ex-post facto design. The variables of the study were writing strategies and writing abilities. Students' writing strategies and writing abilities were measured by giving them a writing strategies questionnaire and an IELTS writing task respectively. The minimum and maximum scores students could get on the writing strategies test were 10 and 50 respectively. To rate students' writing samples, public band descriptors of Cambridge University were used. Four main criteria including "Task achievement", "Coherence and cohesion", "Lexical Resource" and "Grammatical Range and accuracy" were used to assess writing samples. The minimum and maximum scores they could get on the test were 0 and 36 respectively.

#### 3.5 Data analysis

As for data analysis, descriptive and inferential statistics were used. The purpose of descriptive statistics was checking the underlying assumptions of the statistical procedures used in the study. As for the inferential statistics Pearson correlation test was used to check the hypothesis.

### 4. Results

As to this study, the writing strategies questionnaire was administered to indicate students' levels of using writing strategies. Table 3 below provides information about descriptive statistics for writing strategies used by Iranian EFL learners. In this table, the ranks and means of these items are summarized.

**Table 3.** Writing Strategies Used by Iranian EFL Learners

Item no	rank	Writing strategies	mean
1	10	Exercising the alphabet and/or new words in the second language	2.81
2	1	Designing in advance essay writing by preparing an outline for the essay	4.34
3	5	Writing different types of texts in the target language	3.86
4	6	Benefiting from notes taken in the classroom in the target language	3.65
5	3	Finding a different way for expressing the idea when not knowing the correct expression	4.12
6	4	Reviewing the written text before continuing	3.93
7	2	Using of reference issues such as a glossary, a dictionary, a thesaurus for finding words in the second or foreign language	4.23
8	7	Waiting to edit the writing until the ideas are down on paper	3.45
9	9	Modifying writing several times to change the language and content into a better format	2.97
10	8	Getting feedback from others, especially native speakers of language	3.24
		mean	3.66
SD		0.82	



#### 4.1 Test of Normality of distribution of data

The normality of distribution for writing strategies and writing scores are summarized in the following table.

**Table 4.** Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Writing strategies	.157	120	.200
IELTS Writing task1	.114	120	.200

##### a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

As seen in the table above, the sig level for both writing strategies and IELTS writing scores were .20. Therefore, it could be said that the data were normally distributed.

#### 4.2 Analysis of the Research Question

As stated in previous parts, students completed a writing strategies questionnaire to find out about their writing strategies use in foreign language. IELTS writing task 1 was used to elicit students' writing samples. Students wrote about a diagram to show their ability in foreign language writing. The results of writing strategies questionnaire and the students' IELTS writing task 1 would provide data and an answer to the research question i.e. whether there is any relationship between the students' writing strategies use and their writing ability. To find the relationship between writing strategies and writing ability, a Pearson correlation test was done. As shown in table 5 below, the correlation coefficient is .888 which suggests that there was a statistically significant positive relationship between Iranian EFL students' writing strategies and their writing ability.

**Table 5.** Pearson Correlation Test for Writing Strategies Use and Writing ability

		IELTS Writing task1	Writing strategies
Writing ability	Pearson Correlation	1	.888**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	3502.3	449.73
	Covariance	29.43	3.77
	N	120	120
Writing strategies	Pearson Correlation	.888**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	449.73	94.96
	Covariance	3.77	.67
	N	120	120

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

#### 5. Discussion and Conclusion

The results showed that there was a significant positive relationship between Iranian EFL students' writing strategies and their writing abilities. The findings echo earlier findings in the literature. For example, the findings are in line with Yilmaz (2010)<sup>[18]</sup> and Bai, Hu, and Gu (2014)<sup>[3]</sup> that there is a relationship between language learning strategies and students' proficiency. Also, findings

are in line with Kao and Reynolds (2017)<sup>[7]</sup> who found a statistically significant positive relationship between Taiwanese EFL students' use of cognitive/preparation strategies and their self-rated writing ability. However, the results are to some extent in contrast with Assadi Aidinlou and Massomi Far (2014)<sup>[2]</sup> who found that there was no statistically significant relationship between writing strategies and correct use of conjunctions. This might necessitate further research to find out more about the nature of the relationship between writing strategies and different components of writing including conjunctions.

Winne (1995)<sup>[17]</sup> recommended that students will obtain better results and scores in their learning process if they check how well they progress and control the impact and efficacy of their learning methods and strategies.

Moreover, Zimmerman and Bandura (1994)<sup>[20]</sup> mentioned that students should be aware of their abilities and the teachers should teach them to foster their writing strategies and self-efficacy. They believed that students should be aware of the effect of their own writing strategies and their relationship with self-efficacy beliefs.

The findings of this study will be insightful for teachers in that they will help them to find new ways to solve their problems in EFL writing. Most of the students are aware of writing strategies but they do not know how to use them. Teachers should teach them how to use these strategies in a proper context. Teaching these strategies and practicing them in writing classes can help the students to write in a more efficient way.

The study had some limitations. The first one concerned the data collection procedure. The students filled out the questionnaire but it is hard to know if the learners use these strategies in their own writing. The second limitation concerned the selection of participants. The participants were 120 EFL students in one language school. Due to the limitations of the present study, caution needs to be exercised in generalizing the findings to the population of Iranian EFL learners.

Further studies could opt to choose more participants from different institutes across the country. Also, they could use other instruments such as interviews to gauge students' writing strategies. The participants of this study were both males and females. It is suggested that further research deal with males and females separately or take into account the variable of gender which might have affected the results.

#### References

- [1] Arndt, V. (1987). Six writers in search of texts: A protocol-based study of L1 and L2 writing. *ELT journal*, 41(4), 257-267.
- [2] Assadi Aidinlou, N. & Masoomi Far, L. (2014). The

- relationship between self-efficacy beliefs, writing strategies, and correct use of conjunctions in Iranian EFL learners. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 3(2), 221-226.
- [3] Bai, R., Hu, G., & Gu, P. Y. (2014). The Relationship Between Use of Writing Strategies and English Proficiency in Singapore Primary Schools. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 23(3), 355-365.
- [4] Emig, J. (1977). Writing as a mode of learning. *College Composition and Communication*, 28 (2), 122-128.
- [5] Gahungu, O.N. (2007). The relationship among strategy use, self-efficacy, and language ability in foreign language learners. Doctoral Dissertation. Northern Arizona University. Retrieved June 20, 2011, from [http:// ci-doc.coe.nau.edu/13-Dissertation/supporting-files/Dissertation-Olive.pdf](http://ci-doc.coe.nau.edu/13-Dissertation/supporting-files/Dissertation-Olive.pdf).
- [6] Heaton, J.B. (1975). *Writing English Language Test*. London: Longman Group.
- [7] Kao, C.W. & Reynolds, B.L. (2017). A Study on the Relationship among Taiwanese College Students' EFL Writing Strategy Use, Writing Ability and Writing Difficulty. *English Teaching and Learning*, 41(4), 31-67 DOI: 10.6330/ETL.2017.41.4.02
- [8] Lerstorm, A. (1990). Speaking across the curriculum; Moving toward shared responsibility? Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Chicago, IL.
- [9] Lipstein, R.L. & Renninger, K.A. (2007). Interest for writing: How teachers can make a difference. *English Journal*, 96(4), 79-85.
- [10] McCarter, S. (2002). Academic writing practice for IELTS. Retrieved June 15, 2011, from [http:// www.scribd.com/doc/70186089/Academic-Writing-Practicefor-Ielts-2002-Sam-Mccarter](http://www.scribd.com/doc/70186089/Academic-Writing-Practicefor-Ielts-2002-Sam-Mccarter).
- [11] Nunan, D. (1999). *Second Language Teaching and Learning*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.
- [12] Riazi, A. (1997). Acquiring disciplinary literacy: A social-cognitive analysis of text production and learning among Iranian graduate students of education. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 6(2), 105-137.
- [13] Richards, J. C., & Schmidt, R. (2002). *Longman dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics*. Pearson press.
- [14] Torrance, M., G., Thomas, V., & Robinson, E. J. (2000). Individual differences in undergraduate essay-writing strategies: A longitudinal study. *Higher Education*, 39, 181-200. doi: 10.1023/A:1003990432398
- [15] Victori, M. (1995). EFL writing knowledge and strategies: An interactive study. Unpublished PhD dissertation, University Autònoma de Barcelona (Spain), Barcelona.
- [16] Wenden, A. L. (1991). Metacognitive strategies in L2 Writing: A case for task knowledge. In J. E. Alatis (Ed.), *Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics* (pp. 302-322). Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.
- [17] Winne, P.H. (1995). Self-regulation is ubiquitous but its forms vary with knowledge. *Educational Psychologist*, 30 (4), 223-228.
- [18] Yilmaz, C. (2010). The relationship between language learning strategies, gender, proficiency, and self-efficacy beliefs: a study of ELT learners in Turkey. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2, 682-687.
- [19] Yoong L.K. (2010). English Language Learning Strategies used by Form Six Students in Secondary Schools. UKM Master's Thesis.
- [20] Zimmerman, B. J., & Bandura, A. (1994). Impact of self-regulatory influences on writing course attainment. *American Educational Research Journal*, 31(4), 845-862.
- [21] Cohen, A.D, Oxford, R.L. & Chi, J.C. (2002). *Language Strategy Use Survey*. MN: Cenetr for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition. University of Minnesota.

## Appendices

### Appendix A- Writing Strategies Questionnaire

- 1.I practice writing the alphabet and/or new words in target language.
- |                      |                        |
|----------------------|------------------------|
| Never true of me     | Usually not true of me |
| Sometimes true of me | Usually true of me     |
| Always true of me.   |                        |
- 2.I define an outline of the essay to design the way for writing.
- |                      |                        |
|----------------------|------------------------|
| Never true of me     | Usually not true of me |
| Sometimes true of me | Usually true of me     |
| Always true of me.   |                        |
- 3.I try to write different kinds of texts in the target language.
- |                      |                        |
|----------------------|------------------------|
| Never true of me     | Usually not true of me |
| Sometimes true of me | Usually true of me     |
| Always true of me.   |                        |
- 4.I take notes in the class in the target language as much as I'm able.
- |                      |                        |
|----------------------|------------------------|
| Never true of me     | Usually not true of me |
| Sometimes true of me | Usually true of me     |
| Always true of me.   |                        |
- 5.I try to find different way of expressing the idea when not knowing the correct expression.
- |                  |                        |
|------------------|------------------------|
| Never true of me | Usually not true of me |
|------------------|------------------------|

Sometimes true of me	Usually true of me	on the paper.	
Always true of me.		Never true of me	Usually not true of me
6.I review what has already been written before continuing to write more.		Sometimes true of me	Usually true of me
Never true of me	Usually not true of me	Always true of me.	
Sometimes true of me	Usually true of me	9.I revise my writing once or twice for improving the language and content.	
Always true of me.		Never true of me	Usually not true of me
7.I use reference materials such as glossary, a dictionary, or a thesaurus for finding or verifying words in the target language.		Sometimes true of me	Usually true of me
Never true of me	Usually not true of me	Always true of me.	
Sometimes true of me	Usually true of me	10.I try to get feedback from others, especially native speakers of the language.	
Always true of me.		Never true of me	Usually not true of me
8.I wait to edit my writing until all the ideas are down		Sometimes true of me	Usually true of me
		Always true of me.	

### Appendix B- Persian Version of Writing Strategies Questionnaire

- 1- من نوشتن الفبا و/یا کلمات جدید را به زبان انگلیسی تمرین می کنم.  
اصلاً درباره من درست نیست معمولاً درباره من درست نیست کاملاً درباره ام درست است
- 2- من برای طراحی نوشته ام ابتدا طرح و چارچوب کلی تعریف می کنم.  
اصلاً درباره من درست نیست معمولاً درباره من درست نیست کاملاً درباره ام درست است
- 3- من سعی می کنم تا متون مختلفی را به انگلیسی بنویسم.  
اصلاً درباره من درست نیست معمولاً درباره من درست نیست کاملاً درباره ام درست است
- 4- من در کلاس زبان انگلیسی تا جایی که بتوانم یادداشت برداری می کنم.  
اصلاً درباره من درست نیست معمولاً درباره من درست نیست کاملاً درباره ام درست است
- 5- وقتی من اصطلاح صحیح را نمی دانم، سعی می کنم تا راه متفاوتی برای بیان ایده ام بیابم.  
اصلاً درباره من درست نیست معمولاً درباره من درست نیست کاملاً درباره ام درست است
- 6- من متنی را که نوشته ام مرور می کنم و سپس به نوشتن ادامه می دهم.  
اصلاً درباره من درست نیست معمولاً درباره من درست نیست کاملاً درباره ام درست است
- 7- من از منابع مرجع مانند واژه نامه، فرهنگ لغت و فرهنگ جامع لغات برای یافتن کلمات متنوع در زبان انگلیسی استفاده می کنم.  
اصلاً درباره من درست نیست معمولاً درباره من درست نیست کاملاً درباره ام درست است
- 8- من تا زمانی که همه ایده ها و نظراتم را به روی کاغذ بیاورم صبر می کنم و نوشته ام را ویرایش می کنم.  
اصلاً درباره من درست نیست معمولاً درباره من درست نیست کاملاً درباره ام درست است
- 9- من برای بهتر شدن زبان و محتوای نوشته ام یک یا دوباره بازبینی می کنم.  
اصلاً درباره من درست نیست معمولاً درباره من درست نیست کاملاً درباره ام درست است
- 10- من سعی می کنم از بقیه بخصوص سخنوران و گویندگان زبان انگلیسی استفاده کنم.  
اصلاً درباره من درست نیست معمولاً درباره من درست نیست کاملاً درباره ام درست است

ARTICLE

# Teaching Hong Kong English before Teaching Academic English: The Gateway to Effective Learning of College Writing

**Bernie Chun Nam MAK\***

Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong, China

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history

Received: 15 November 2018

Accepted: 13 March 2019

Published: 26 March 2019

### Keywords:

Hong Kong English

World Englishes

Academic writing

Second language learning

Bilingualism

## ABSTRACT

Owing to the negative view of Hong Kong English (HKE) in popular discourse, few English lecturers in Hong Kong universities directly acknowledge or discuss the variety in a non-linguistic course. This paper illustrates an action research study of how HKE may play a role in an academic writing course of a sub-degree program in Hong Kong. Focusing on 8 representatives from an academic writing course with 100 students, it employed the qualitative experiment method to examine whether students who had possessed basic linguistic knowledge of HKE from an additional tutorial would perceive HKE and academic writing differently from those who had not. Student representatives from each group were invited to a focus group to explore ideas about the two subjects discussed in class. Their conversations suggested that prior knowledge of the syntactic features of HKE might raise students' awareness of the grammatical differences between the variety and the standard. The analysis also suggested that introducing the linguistic view of HKE to students might render them optimistic about their variety, helping them identify the situations where the variety would be tolerant of and settings where Standard English would be expected. The study suggested that such an intervention might facilitate students' learning of Standard English for academic purposes and practices of English in actual professional communication. Upon the improvement or advancement, they will position themselves more powerfully in the dichotomy between the standard and non-standard. More formal research on a similar or relevant topic is required to validate the impact of understanding HKE on learning academic writing.

## 1. Introduction

I began to teach academic writing in Hong Kong five years ago. One of the common topics of such a university course is "how to proofread an essay" or the like. In my first lecture of this topic, I mentioned Hong Kong English (HKE) in passing. Although it was not a

sociolinguistics course, I had thought that Hong Kong students' common mistakes in academic writing might originate from their own English variety, which was why I spent half an hour on it. After class, the students said that knowledge of HKE had facilitated their learning of writing. Nonetheless, when the course coordinator knew

*\*Corresponding Author:*

Bernie Chun Nam MAK,

Lecturer (English Language and Linguistics), 1401, 14/F,

Hong Kong Baptist University Shek Mun Campus, Shatin, N.T., Hong Kong, China;

Email: [bcnmak@hkbu.edu.hk](mailto:bcnmak@hkbu.edu.hk).



it in a casual conversation afterwards, she asked me not to discuss HKE in a non-linguistic course again.

It was actually after this lesson that I first became interested in HKE and academic writing. I wondered why she discouraged me from teaching something that should be beneficial to students and their learning. As a linguistics researcher, more importantly, I recognized that HKE should be a natural product of language in contact. I started reading scholarly works on HKE and academic writing respectively. Recently, I even conduct action research to examine any invisible links between them.

Just like other international cities, Hong Kong is a metropolis where English functions like a second language in many workplace settings. It is so widely used that Hong Kong people have developed their own variety of English, often called Hong Kong English (HKE). While the term often refers to the dialect (i.e. phonetic characteristics) of the English language spoken in Hong Kong, it also denotes the grammatical and vocabulary features of the English language used in different channels in the city. However, since English is not used as a *lingua franca* by the majority of Hong Kong people<sup>[1]</sup>, the variety remains not officially codified<sup>[2]</sup>. The mass media, local commentators, and Netizens in Hong Kong usually criticize the phenomenon of HKE<sup>[3]</sup>. Its grammatical characteristics, together with the pronunciation “mistakes”, are often considered “errors” from an English teaching perspective<sup>[4]</sup>.

In the past, higher education in Hong Kong was for the elite, who could be somewhat “grammatically correct” or “near-native” when writing in English<sup>[5]</sup>. Nowadays, owing to mass tertiary education in Hong Kong, many secondary school graduates who do not have sufficient English proficiency are still able to have a place in a degree or an associate degree program<sup>[6]</sup>. Their use of English may contain HKE, and they are likely to find academic writing, which is often a compulsory course for all year one students, exceedingly challenging. They can be discouraged in the learning process because they find it so hard to get rid of the HKE label. Sometimes even graduating students may not be satisfied with their academic writing skills<sup>[7]</sup>.

However, interdisciplinary studies on HKE and academic writing are scarcely found. The problem is that academic writing, compared to speaking, is not soft skills that can be acquired in an informal setting. There is clearly a need for more discussion on these two supposedly unrelated topics. This article illustrates an action research study of how basic knowledge of and linguistic discussions about HKE may help students learn English academic writing. It proposes that knowledge

of the grammatical features of HKE would indirectly assist students, especially those who are weak in written English, in learning the standard norms of using tenses and sentences in academic writing. The paper also suggests that a linguistic, descriptive discussion about HKE could be conducive to the development of a holistic, critical view of using English in different contexts in the digital, globalization era.

## **2. The Role of English in Hong Kong**

Although Cantonese is the mother tongue of most Hong Kong locals, English has become essential in higher education and career development across all disciplines in the city. Hong Kong was under British rule for about 150 years. Before the transfer of sovereignty to the People's Republic of China (PRC) on July 1, 1997, English was the official language of most formal settings, especially legal and governmental settings. This legitimated Standard British English to be a symbolic power that constructed a reality where different people in Hong Kong, regardless of their nationalities, had to agree on its superiority beyond question<sup>[8]</sup>. The historical reality, which was best suited to the particular interests of British in the colony, has engendered the perception that English is critical for going up in the social hierarchy. In the 1980s, international trade in Hong Kong started growing rapidly, and since then English has also played a practical, commercial role in the society<sup>[9]</sup>. People normally consider it an important (if not the most important) indicator of social mobility, career prospects, and economic opportunities<sup>[10]</sup>. Even with the increasing importance of Putonghua after the turnover, Hong Kong people still believe that English will determine whether or not a person will succeed in life, which mostly means being wealthy and enjoying high social status. Since English is seen as a tool for making a living, few people in Hong Kong are emotionally or affectionately attached to English<sup>[11]</sup>. As English is considered a tool for career development and social development as well, when it comes to education, the policy of English education in Hong Kong is rarely driven by educationists or applied linguists, but mainly by the business community, parents, and the upper or ruling class<sup>[12][13]</sup>. Despite the differences among their vested interests, their forces jointly consolidate the pragmatic and ideological importance of English in Hong Kong. The aforementioned three stakeholders, who are not authorities, mostly support Standard English, and they tend to claim that, albeit without sound or strong evidence, the English used by Hong Kong people (i.e. HKE) is inferior and destructive to competitiveness and international trade<sup>[14]</sup>.

### **2.1 Negative Transfer and Hong Kong English**



As the second language of Hong Kong people, it is not exaggerated to say that HKE is a product of transfer. The concept “transfer” denotes how new learning proceeds based on previous learning<sup>[15]</sup>. In linguistics, “transfer” refers to the process in which a learner applies items or structures from his or her first language to speak or write a second language<sup>[16]</sup>. When the L1 is greatly different from the L2, the transfer outcome will be “negative”, which makes the output deviant from the standard norms<sup>[17]</sup>. Although negative transfer does not entail communication failure from a linguistic perspective, it often equals “errors” or “mistakes” in popular discourse. This is likely the case in Hong Kong, where citizens normally learn English as a second language based on their previous acquisition of Cantonese as the first language. The significant differences between the two languages make a negative transfer in general, followed by a criticism from the abovementioned three dominant groups.

Because of the British rule before July 1, 1997, Standard British English was seen the Standard English variety in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, the long period of being a British colony and the increasing use of English in the workplace have also provided the city with an opportunity for the development of its own variety of English<sup>[18]</sup>. It could be further classified as the educated HKE (native-like but locally distinctive with fewer negative transfers) and broad HKE (indicative of low language proficiency with more negative transfers)<sup>[19][20]</sup>. Nevertheless, since HKE has never been codified in the official circle, nor has it been consistently defined in scholarly studies, its meaning sometimes overlaps with Chinese English, code-mixing of Chinese and English, and transliteration of Chinese in English texts. Some lexical elements of HKE come from interactions between Hong Kong indigenous people with other countries, such as India and Malaysia<sup>[21]</sup>. In this article, Hong Kong English specifically refers to the non-standard English language carrying lexical and grammatical characteristics originating from Cantonese or Chinese, namely due to negative transfer. This understanding enables a discussion focused on the recurring structural patterns of HKE that permeate among the low-educated in informal conversation, especially in digital communication.

Applied linguists in Hong Kong have well discussed the pronunciation<sup>[22]</sup>, grammar<sup>[23]</sup>, and vocabulary<sup>[24]</sup> features of HKE (also see the next section). However, HKE is frequently considered a plague outside the linguistics circle, and its features are often considered to be indicators of incompetence or the failure of English education<sup>[25]</sup>. This phenomenon, which echoes the understanding of negative transfer, comes as no surprise:

- Parents know too well about Standard English as a form of economic capital that determines their children’s social mobility in Hong Kong<sup>[26]</sup>;

- The mass media keep imposing and amplifying the effect of HKE on youngsters’ “declining” English standards<sup>[27]</sup>; and

- Business enterprises always stress the supposed importance of Standard English to maintain international competitiveness<sup>[28]</sup>.

The popular discourses about HKE are hardly neutral or positive, and the prescriptive criticisms of HKE permeate and are magnified on the Internet. The majority of Hong Kong people simply want to align or identify with the standard, without understanding the nature of language and the science of second language learning. Indeed, “[t]he local people have always also wanted to keep standards very high, refusing to admit the existence of features like a local accent or to treat local usages as normal or grammatical”<sup>[29]</sup>. In particular in the writing domain, grammatical correctness is given top priority over meaning<sup>[30]</sup>. Due to the prevalent negative view of HKE, few courses and few English teachers in Hong Kong universities directly acknowledge or discuss the variety. HKE seems to be a politically incorrect topic, except in a course on world Englishes or sociolinguistics.

## 2.2 English Learning in Hong Kong Universities

English is the official language in all Hong Kong tertiary institutions. It is used as the medium of instruction in most university courses (including sub-degree courses), and most students have to finish their written assignments (e.g., essays, projects), except for Chinese courses, in English<sup>[31]</sup>. Underlying this situation is the traditional belief that college graduates are supposed to be elites in Hong Kong, whose English abilities and literacy levels should be distinctive from other lower-educated people. To empower them and their shared interests, they should face English on campus every day. Even students not majoring in English or language studies have to take English courses, often known as general education (GE) English courses, in the first year of study. These GE English courses usually teach students academic writing and reading. The former is to teach how to compose an essay in a particular referencing style (e.g., APA, MLA, etc.). In line with other local English teachers, who normally defer to guides produced upon the standard ex normative models<sup>[32]</sup>, university English teachers are also expected to teach the standard norms of academic writing. Students are in turn expected to write Standard English in their assignments. These expectations, unsurprisingly, have posed challenges to a considerable number of freshmen whose writing habits are influenced

by Cantonese or Chinese, especially on the Internet or smartphone. They may pick up forms from HKE, which is used in spoken interaction and informal online talk, in their academic assignments without realizing they are non-standard. Teachers, on the other hand, spend time on correcting students' mistakes at the expense of training their abilities to reasoning<sup>[33]</sup>. The possible drawback is that some students keep receiving criticisms of their mistakes, feeling embarrassed, and unknowingly losing the passion for and confidence in moving up the academic ladder.

### 2.3 Summary of the Literature Review and Research Questions

The above brief review has delineated 1) the importance of English in Hong Kong society and higher education, 2) the negative label of HKE, and 3) its invisible impact on university students' learning of academic writing. As a linguistic capital, English represents not only the current interests of the adults who have the power to assess it but also the future interests of the youngsters who have the opportunities to reproduce it. However, the picture has been complicated by their attachment to Standard English, repulsion against HKE, lack of knowledge of negative transfer, and the societal move to mass tertiary education. While it is difficult to directly subvert the linguistic order or popular discourse, it is possible to effectively mediate between the dominant and suppressed voices. Scholarly voices have called for more space for discussing the local variety in the curriculum<sup>[34]</sup>. Such discussion will encourage students to accept (at least partially) the non-standard and advance their learning of the standard<sup>[35]</sup>, cultivating the next generation of global citizens. Notwithstanding, virtually no studies in Hong Kong, an international and multicultural city, have directly explored the role of discussing HKE in higher education. In view of this knowledge gap, this action research is centered on higher education in Hong Kong, aiming at addressing two questions:

- How will a discussion about Hong Kong English benefit students in terms of grammar and essay writing?
- How will such a discussion benefit students in terms of English learning in general?

It is hoped that through addressing these questions could English teachers and applied linguists be motivated to examine possible approaches to teach Standard English and acknowledge the non-standard Englishes shared by students. Such ways will be alternatives to the traditional ways of teaching English in the classroom.

### 3. Methods

This study was conducted in a non-government-funded tertiary institution in Hong Kong (the college

henceforth). The college offered full-time associate degree (AD) programs for secondary school leavers and top-up degree programs for AD graduates. While English was the medium of instruction for most courses in the college, the AD students normally had obtained level 2 (i.e. marginal pass) in the English subject of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE). The level reflects their low proficiency in English<sup>[36]</sup>. In the college, approximately 85% of AD students were teenagers who had grown up in Hong Kong and tended to use HKE in daily English communication. All year-one AD students in the college had to take two compulsory courses, College Writing I and College Writing II. Both courses taught students English academic writing in APA (6th ed.) style. Compared to the former, the latter focused more on academic reading.

One hundred students from College Writing II were invited to participate in this study. It employed the qualitative experiment method to examine the possible impact of HKE on the academic writing classroom. The method has been conceptualized by Gerhard Kleinging's works on qualitative-heuristic methodology since the early 1980s<sup>[37]</sup>. Unlike the traditional quantitative experiment, the qualitative experiment enables researchers to use a qualitative technique (e.g., interviews, non-participant observation, text analysis) to examine whether the participants who have been executed a treatment will behave and/or think differently from those who have not<sup>[38][39]</sup>. If they do, the treatment is *arguably* correlated to such differences or transformations, subject to a follow-up and larger scale quantitative study to validate and structure the findings. This method aims at collecting unstructured and textual data, instead of numbers, to scrutinize the possible effect of an extra, intervening event that is difficult to immediately measure or objectively quantify. Although it lacks an authoritative code of practice and does not provide space for generalization to the target population, it has played an important role in the natural sciences<sup>[40]</sup>. It is also frequently used in innovation research that involves the perspective of practitioners in the social sciences<sup>[41]</sup>.

The 100 participants were divided into two groups. In week 4 of the semester, Group A (n=48) learnt academic writing as scheduled, and the students were *not* given any additional knowledge of HKE in class. By contrast, Group B (n=52) was given an *additional* one-hour tutorial on the grammatical features of HKE and their deviations from Standard English. These features have been reported by sociolinguists in Hong Kong and are traditionally considered "negative transfers" from Cantonese, the participants' first language<sup>[42]</sup>. The typical HKE variants discussed in the tutorial are summarized as follows:

- No tenses or incorrect tenses<sup>[43]</sup> (e.g., *Last weekend I go to Lantau Island.*)

- Incomplete verb phrases<sup>[44]</sup> (e.g., *He Ø arriving.*)

- Inappropriate linking verbs<sup>[45]</sup> (e.g., *There have two trees.*)

- Zero relative pronouns<sup>[46]</sup> (e.g., *Filial piety should be something Ø comes from heart.*)

- Zero conjunctions<sup>[47]</sup> (e.g., *WhatsApp is an important tool for communication, Ø every teenager use it to interact with friends, Ø however we cannot over reliant on it, even Ø it is so convenient.*)

- Double conjunctions<sup>[48]</sup> (e.g., *Although he is not my friend, but he helps me a lot.*)

The tutor who gave this extra session was an academic with substantial experience in teaching linguistics. At the end of the tutorial, the tutor also briefly discussed the *descriptive* linguistic view of such features (i.e. seeing them as “variants” vis-à-vis “errors”).

One week afterwards, all the 100 participants from Groups A and B were given a two-hour mass lecture on common learner errors in essay writing. It was a regular lecture scheduled in week 5 of the semester, and the contents covered were part of the endorsed syllabus of College Writing II. Using the traditional grammar-translation method, the lecturer *prescriptively* discussed the grammatical mistakes commonly made by Hong Kong students in academic writing. Students learnt the following topics in the lecture: 1) inappropriate use of tenses in essay writing, and 2) run-ons and fragments in essay writing.

One week after the mass lecture (i.e. in week 6), four students from Group A and four students from Group B were further invited to a one-hour focus group discussion *separately*. They were selected by the convenience sampling method, based on three criteria: 1) the same number of males and females, 2) a similar English background, and 3) a similar level of English proficiency. The data collection was aimed at reducing the impacts of the particular context and individual difference (as in traditional quantitative experiment)<sup>[49]</sup>. The profiles of the students are summarized below:

Pseudonyms	Gender	Level in the DSE English examination	Mol of the secondary school	Participation in the HKE tutorial
Participant A1	M	2	Chinese	No (Group A)
Participant A2	F	2	Chinese	No (Group A)
Participant A3	M	2	Chinese	No (Group A)
Participant A4	F	2	Chinese	No (Group A)
Participant B1	F	2	Chinese	Yes (Group B)
Participant B2	M	2	Chinese	Yes (Group B)
Participant B3	M	2	Chinese	Yes (Group B)
Participant B4	F	2	Chinese	Yes (Group B)

The chair (the moderator) asked the participants to

discuss the following questions in a relaxed manner:

- To what extent have you understood the use of tenses in academic writing?

- To what extent are you comfortable with writing long sentences in academic writing?

- How do you think about HKE and the use of it in communication?

These questions were designed to elicit textual information about participants’ perceptions of academic writing and HKE. Any remarkable differences between the two groups would *discover* (rather than *verify*) a possible influence of the HKE tutorial on them; and by inference, would in turn *address* the two research questions. The chair did not intervene in the discussion, except when the participants were off topic or failed to understand the spontaneous questions emerging from the conversation. The focus group was conducted in a semi-structured manner; and mainly in English. The two groups had the discussion on different days in week 6. The process of each was audio-recorded and transcribed into written form for text analysis.

## 4. Results

To summarize the transcription result, the one-hour focus group for Group A generated approximately 3500 words of spoken discourse. Approximately 30 minutes and 2000 words were spent on discussing the first two questions about academic writing; approximately 20 minutes and 1500 words on the last question about Hong Kong English. The one-hour focus group for Group B generated approximately 3900 words of spoken discourse. Approximately 35 minutes and 2300 words were spent on discussing the first two questions; approximately 20 minutes and 1600 words on the last question.

The raw data contained obvious grammatical flaws, and for clarity purposes some of them were corrected when used as direct quotes in this article. The coding and cleaning stage generated two transcripts, one for Group A and another for Group B. The transcript of Group A was compared and contrasted with that of Group B for locating any obvious similarities and differences in the three aspects below:

- Ideas about using tenses in academic writing and the learning of it;

- Ideas about sentence length and grammar complexity in academic writing and the learning of them; and

- Ideas about HKE.

The two transcripts were read against each other several times. The analysis of Group A was especially centered on ideas surrounding common learner problems of academic writing; the analysis of Group B was especially focused on ideas relevant to the contents of the additional HKE

tutorial. Based on the overall analysis, a number of quotations were purposefully selected on two criteria: 1) the perspective showed a sharp contrast with that from another group, and 2) the perspective referred to the HKE tutorial, something stated in the HKE tutorial, and/or the mass lecture. Both criteria were directed at capturing the *possible* existence of qualitative changes in and new experiences with the tutorial. The selection processes involved inductive interpretation, rather than instruments or deductive calculations. The following subsections discuss the major findings from the preliminary data analysis.

### **Possible Effects of the HKE Tutorial on Learning Tenses in Academic Writing**

When asked to share their learning experience in using tenses in academic writing, most participants agreed that using tenses was a challenge. They said that the future tense was easier to use, and that continuous tenses were not common in academic writing. However, the participants who had attended the HKE tutorial showed more confidence in switching between different tenses in discussing previous research. They demonstrated more awareness of the present and past tenses in English academic writing. For example:

*"I am sensitive to (the) change between tenses when writing essays... At least I am comfortable (with) shifting between simple past (and) simple present... Unlike (in) Chinese, When we mention publish(ed) finding(s), we should change to (use) simple present, because they are already consider(ed) knowledge. But the action verb(s) in (the) citations should be in (the) past tense because they refer to other scholars' past behaviors like reporting, finding, suggesting, etc."* (Participant B2)

*"I pay attention to tense(s) when I borrow an external point... Time of event(s) is not shown in Chinese, but it (is) carefully shown in English... Each tense has (a) different meaning to the sentence. [This] is very different from Chinese. When I write Chinese essay(s), I don't care (about) tenses."* (Participant B3)

By contrast, the participants who were not given the HKE tutorial seemed to be more confused by the use of tenses in academic writing. In particular, they tended to inappropriately simplify the use of tenses in the literature review. They also said that English tenses made them "puzzled" or "confused". For instance:

*"Even (when) you allow me to use Chinese to think, I am still not sure how to use tense(s) to discuss other studies correctly. To me, they (have been) already published. But their findings (are) paraphrase(d) sometimes to (the) present tense and sometimes (the) past tense, and even (the) present perfect (tense). It's very*

*confusing to me. Why not just use (the) past tense all the time?"* (Participant A1)

*"It really puzzle(s) me (why) we have to change between tenses when we cite (previous studies). When I am writing the essay, the writing action is (ongoing) right now, so I think it should be in (the) present tense. When I refer to other people's research, they are all done, so I think it should be in (the) past tense... I also took the Chinese writing class. Their rules are easier."* (Participant A3)

The results suggest that the HKE tutorial might render students attentive to the differences in tenses between HKE and Standard English. In the Oxford English Grammar, Greenbaum stated that "[g]ood English is good use of the resources available in the language."<sup>[50]</sup> Tenses are important resources in English. They not only function as time referencing in an essay, but also indicate the status of the existing studies being discussed<sup>[51]</sup>. On the other hand, Cantonese (Chinese) is a language without restricted rules of using tenses. In the Chinese language, time is often indicated by use of adverbs or inference from context. Although, from an ELF perspective, using no tenses or incorrect tenses in the English classroom may have become variants for Chinese<sup>[52]</sup>, teaching academic writing aims at socializing students into the scholarly world in the written setting – where Standard English is normally expected<sup>[53]</sup>. This justifies the need to conform to the standard norms of utilizing tenses for time reference and stylistic purposes in academic writing<sup>[54]</sup>. The findings suggest that knowledge of HKE seems to play a subtle role in drawing Hong Kong students' attention to such a need, raising their awareness of using tenses properly in English. A discussion on HKE will be helpful to facilitate their learning of using tenses in English academic writing. Such learning, if successful, may also increase their cognitive skills in analyzing the features of English tenses, then decreasing part of the negative transfers, enhancing their grammatical competence, and empowering them as an English user in the Hong Kong context.

### **Possible Effects of the HKE Tutorial on Using Sentences in Academic Writing**

The second discussion question concerns the use of sentences in academic writing. When asked to state their understanding of sentence use in academic writing, many participants recognized that long sentences could indicate the writer's complex thoughts more effectively and the logical relations more clearly than short sentences could. Yet, those who had been given the HKE tutorial appeared to be more comfortable with long sentences. They seemed to be particularly aware of the use of conjunctions in compound and/or complex English sentences. For example:



*"I think we need to use long sentence(s) in essay(s). We need to use long sentence(s) to discuss complex ideas... so I think I will not avoid long sentences but when I put (a) comma between two long sentences, I will think whether they should be connected by (a) conjunction... We always use (a) comma to separate sentences in Chinese, but we can't do the same thing to English. My grammar is not good but I know we should use a conjunction to connect two clauses. When I see two verbs in a sentence, I will be careful."* (Participant B2)

*"Long sentences may be bad in Chinese, but they are common in English... And there [are] logical relationships between ideas. For example, the meaning(s) of thesis statement and topic sentence are too complicate(d) to write in short sentences, and need to use one sentence to make a definition... of course we make (fewer) mistakes in short sentences but we can't always use short sentences like children."* (Participant B4)

The participants who had *not* been given the HKE tutorial were more conservative of using long sentence in academic writing. Two of them even explicitly stated that they would avoid long sentences for the sake of not making grammatical mistakes. The use of conjunctions seemed to be the root. For instance:

*"In the past, my teachers always (said)... the main verb (was) missing, the conjunction (was) missing, the conjunction should be delete(d)... Teachers often say I make a lot of mistakes when I write long sentences, so I prefer to use short sentences even (when) I talk about some complex things... Like (in) Chinese, we can use several short sentences together to describe the idea. When their meanings are combined correctly, they can still show complex idea(s). I think it's also okay in English."* (Participant A2)

*"I rather separate them (into) two to three sentence(s). In this way I can make sure that there (are) not many problems... Of course I (have) already learn(t) English conjunctions but I (am) unsure about (using) them correctly... When it is need(ed) (and) when it is not need(ed)... Anyway I was always wrong when I use(d) long sentence(s) in secondary school. I don't want to (lose) marks so I will use more short sentences for safety."* (Participant A4)

The data suggest that the HKE tutorial might encourage students to use longer sentences when necessary in academic writing. In English academic writing, complexity and length of sentences often reveal academic maturity and ability to argue for or against a point<sup>[55]</sup>. This stylistic feature of academic writing is sometimes even more important than grammatical correctness, as the latter can be achieved by proofreading and professional

editing. Students who are weak or unconfident in academic writing tend to separate a complex idea into different components<sup>[56]</sup>. While the tendency to use simple structure is a feature of all learner language, for Hong Kong students, especially students with low proficiency in language, the origin of the problem can be three-folded. First, short sentences are preferable in idiomatic or traditional Chinese, which may influence their preferences of sentence length in English. Additionally, in Chinese communication, conjunctions are often omitted when the logical relationships among clauses can be drawn from the co-text or context. Moreover, owing to their experiences in incorrect use or inappropriate omission of conjunctions, they may blindly avoid using long sentences in academic writing, which restricts their ability to make sense of information or data and participate in academic work. The topic sentence, for instance, is one sentence that "carries one or more propositions that the remaining contents prove, explain, illustrate, elaborate upon, or carry out in some way"<sup>[57]</sup>. The topic sentence of a sophisticated body paragraph, which frames the sub-argument, may be substantiated, and therefore, long and complex in terms of structure. To encourage Hong Kong students to deal with the difficulties in using long sentences or conjunctions correctly, probably one way is to let them understand the properties of their own variety but simultaneously teach them the standard norms of written English<sup>[58]</sup>. When they know how their first language has influenced their use of conjunctions in English, they will become more sensitive to the correct use of English conjunction, through which they will consciously avoid the transfer from Chinese and be more willing to compose longer, more complex sentences in academic writing, thereby increasing the cohesion, coherence, and finally readability of their essays and power of their positioning in academic conversation.

### **Possible Effects of the HKE Tutorial on Forming a Critical but Open View of English**

In the last 20 minutes, the focus-group participants were asked to share their views of Hong Kong English. The sharing concentrated on the grammatical issues surrounding it. Although all participants said that they felt inferior and disadvantaged because of the HKE label, those who had understood the descriptive view of HKE from the extra tutorial showed a more open and optimistic attitude to their own variety. Two of them pointed out the differences in using HKE between the written and spoken settings. For example:

*"I think Hong Kong English is not good to formal situation(s) but it is okay to (be used) between friends especially in WhatsApp... On (the) Internet we Hong Kong people use Hong Kong English because the environment*



*is informal. And it shows (that) we are from Hong Kong. But in formal situation(s) like academic writing grammar is important... and so I think Hong Kong English should be accepted in oral, but we should not totally accept (it) in formal writing.” (Participant B1)*

*“When it comes to writing, it means we have time to proofread (or) edit (it) before submitting the work. It’s not like in oral... we have to continue speaking and we have no time to correct, so speak(ing) Hong Kong English is no problem if the listener understand(s)... But the mistakes should be avoided in academic writing because it is supposed to be read by foreigner(s), but sometimes they are not harmful in oral among Hong Kong people themselves. (Being) too worried about the mistakes will decrease our fluency.” (Participant B3)*

On the other hand, those who were not given the HKE tutorial equated HKE and “grammatical mistakes” or “poor language skills”. They tended to emphasize that it was “incorrect”, “wrong”, and “impure”. Three of them even reported that there should be no space for HKE in all forms of communication. For instance:

*“You read newspapers and you know the mistakes, the errors of Hong Kong English are reported again and again... The errors can be document(ed) and summarize(d), so from another point of view they are so common and shameful and should not appear in all situations. I don’t want other people (to) say my English is poor, my grammar is too bad, etc.” (Participant A1)*

*“Hong Kong English is incorrect and not pure. People laugh at Hong Kong English all the time... People more often laugh at my pronunciation (of English) but (my) grammar is also a big problem. It’s wrong. Then it’s wrong, no matter in oral or writing... I never see teachers or famous people accept Hong Kong English... sometimes I feel sad that I (was) not born as a native English speaker.” (Participant A3)*

*“I already try my best not (to) use Hong Kong English, because they always represent bad language skills. I try to listen (to) English songs and BBC (programmes) and I force myself to read English newspapers every week. But it seems (that) I am not successful... my pronunciation (is) still very bad and my grammar is always wrong.” (Participant A4)*

The final discussion in the focus group postulated that the HKE tutorial, which allowed the students to understand HKE from a linguistic perspective, probably helped them to look at their own variety more positively and objectively. Regardless of educational levels and professions, people who are not trained in linguistics are often unwilling to accept English varieties other than Standard English<sup>[59]</sup>. This affective factor makes them

believe that non-standard norms are always inferior and therefore unacceptable. Sociolinguists, on the contrary, seldom see the features of HKE as intolerant “mistakes”, but as the outcomes of negative transfer from modern Chinese structure and Chinese thought patterns<sup>[60]</sup>. They are invisible mediators (i.e. interlanguage) between existing knowledge of L1 and the new language, namely English, being learnt. Although the non-standard features of an English variety need not be formally taught to the learners<sup>[61]</sup>, linguistic understanding of how those features are developed or fossilized may eventually help the users accept the variations that do not impede communication and take a less negative attitude to it. After all, no learner will feel pleasant when being criticized without knowing why. In addition, allowing students to address the linguistic view of HKE does not mean that the standard norms are given up<sup>[62]</sup>, but the knowledge will help them evaluate which settings enable the variety and which contexts require the standard. This can help to develop a holistic view of how English is used in actual communication, especially in the expanding circles. Only after that can the students build confidence in using their variety as a tool to master the standard norms. When they develop communicative competence to utilize HKE to learn, they are likely to see the symbolic power of English they can possess in the future.

## 5. Discussions, Implications, and Conclusion

The study examined the viability of introducing the discussion about Hong Kong English into an academic writing course. It concentrated on AD students who tended to use HKE in their written assignments. Results of the qualitative experiment incorporating a focus group suggested that prior knowledge of the grammatical features of HKE might raise students’ awareness of the grammatical similarities and differences between the variety and the standard, through which they might decrease negative transfer and become more confident and skillful in using tenses and sentences in English academic writing. The results also suggested that introducing the descriptive, linguistic view of HKE to students could render them more open to or less negative about their variations. It could help students to pay attention to written situations where the non-standard features would be acceptable or tolerant of and settings where Standard English would be expected. Such understanding would eventually facilitate their learning of Standard English for academic purposes and practices of English in actual communication, thereby powering up themselves as native-like English speakers.

In view of the preliminary findings and their implications, this action research proposes that linguistic

knowledge of HKE may be productive to students' learning and practices of academic writing. The characteristics of tenses and sentence structures, albeit often seen as mistakes, have their subtle roles in the curriculum. Compared to dwelling on such mistakes and the corrections using the grammar-translation method, teaching them why such mistakes will be easily made can be more efficacious and less demotivating. Penalizing learners on non-standard linguistic items is not always useful<sup>[63]</sup>. By contrast, it often creates an unpleasant classroom surrounding that can be devastating to second language learning<sup>[64]</sup>. While external intervention from non-linguists is unavoidable, learners' behaviors of "changing English should be respected instead of being criticized"<sup>[65]</sup>. Thus, college teachers may describe the HKE features when they enter discussions about the academic register or style. Even for college teachers themselves, understanding HKE from a linguistic viewpoint will help them cope with English varieties and their students' home language<sup>[66]</sup>. This research also advocates the co-existence of HKE and Standard English in English language teaching in tertiary education. While Standard English is preferred in most academic contexts, HKE is sometimes acceptable or even rhetorically effective in other informal settings. The dominant voices, which often despise HKE, are not necessarily the "reality". Rather than prescriptively rejecting the existence of HKE across all contexts, it appears more practical and realistic to raise students' awareness about when and where it is tolerated or not tolerated. One way to achieve this is to create a learning setting where the non-standard norms are acknowledged to some extent<sup>[67]</sup>. College teachers may share with students how linguists or ELF proponents perceive the role HKE in the globalized society, so as to build their competence in evaluating use of English in context. This should be the ultimate goal of teaching English as a second language if college teachers are really concerned about the interests of the next generation and the symbolic power they will possess after graduation.

The above propositions and suggestions are based on analyses and projections of self-reports from the qualitative experiment, rather than a quantitative assessment of students' learning experience or performance. There were two weeks between the HKE tutorial and the focus group sessions; rather than the tutorial alone, there might be external variables (e.g., self-reading) beyond the classroom setting that had impacted on Group B representatives' perceptions of HKE and academic writing as reported in the focus group. Additionally, due to the administrative constraint, only eight representatives (out of 100 participants) from the dataset were invited to the

focus group. Further studies could determine the veracity and conditionality of the functional and/or pedagogical roles of HKE in teaching academic writing and speaking in university. A longitudinal text analysis of students' essays before and after a discussion about HKE would be particularly helpful in justifying the formal causal link, if any, between learning HKE and learning English academic writing. Researchers could also conduct similar research on the role of another aspect of HKE, namely the Hong Kong accented pronunciation, in academic speaking and presentation courses.

To summarize, this paper urges that an English academic writing course, where Standard English for academic purposes is taught, could reserve a space in which non-standard English plays an educational role. In the Digital Age, English has more or less become a *lingua franca* across the globe. People not only speak different accented Englishes face to face, but also write different Englishes on the Internet, where new words and new usage emerge easily. When negative transfer becomes so common, its label in folk theories may also become less negative than it used to be. Simultaneously, when there is more variation in language use because of the increasing diversity of speakers, students may find a gap between the English required in the classroom and the Englishes used in social interaction<sup>[68]</sup>. The dichotomy between correct use and incorrect use blurs. In such a situation, it may be no longer persuasive to simply emphasize the standard and decline the non-standard as teachers did half a century ago.

But still, normative evaluations of good and bad English remain in place among non-linguists and in the academic world. Learning English as a second language for academic purposes is not only about grammar or pronunciation, but also background of the L2 learners, especially the features of their shared L1. If language teaching also aims at helping students become global citizens who acknowledge diversities of language<sup>[69]</sup>, the variety of the locals should not be totally excluded from the syllabus<sup>[70]</sup>. It is unhelpful to "keep imposing a single restricted pedagogical model to the students while they actually have options to choose from"<sup>[71]</sup>. There should be "a pedagogical value in incorporating the 'non-standard' into the curriculum as a variety to be discussed and contrasted"<sup>[72]</sup>. To encourage students to learn the standard and simultaneously appreciate the non-standard, once more, English teachers should create space for discussing the students' variety (or varieties) in the English classroom, to promote a positive, global view of English and help them take a healthy, open attitude to the varieties – including the standard ones.

## Acknowledgements

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors. Part of this study was presented in the name of “Embracing Hong Kong English in the English academic writing classroom” at The 6th International Conference on English, Discourse and Intercultural Communication, Bell Centre of English, Macao Polytechnic Institute, Macao in June 2017. I would like to thank the editor and two reviewers for excellent feedback that greatly improved this article. I am solely responsible for the content and any inaccuracies.

## References

- [1] Li DCS. Towards ‘biliteracy and trilingualism’ in Hong Kong (SAR): Problems, dilemmas and stakeholders’ views. *AILA Review* 2009; 22: 72-84.
- [2] Fang FG. World Englishes or English as a lingual franca: where does English in China stand? *English Today* 2017; 33(1): 19-24.
- [3] Lee JFK, Collins P. Linguistic acceptability in Hong Kong English. *Asian Englishes* 2016; 9(1): 24-40.
- [4] Hung TTN. Hong Kong English. In *English in Southeast Asia: Features, policy and language in use* Edited by Low EL, Hashim A. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2012. pp.113-133.
- [5] Poon A. Language policy of Hong Kong: its impact on language education and language use in post-handover Hong Kong. *Journal of Taiwan Normal University* 2004; 49(1): 53-74.
- [6] Hui PK. Boredom and fear in the undergraduate classroom: the medium of instruction controversy in Hong Kong. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 2015; 16(2): 253-262.
- [7] Evans S, Morrison, B. Learning and using English at university: lessons from a longitudinal study in Hong Kong. *The Journal of Asia TEFL* 2012; 9(2): 21-47.
- [8] Bourdieu P. Language and symbolic power. [Translated by Raymond G, Adamson M] Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991.
- [9] Tung P, Lam R, Tsang WK. English as a medium of instruction in post-1997 Hong Kong: what students, teachers, and parents think. *Journal of Pragmatics* 1997; 28: 441-459.
- [10] Evans S. The medium of instruction in Hong Kong revisited: policy and practice in the reformed Chinese and English streams. *Research Papers in Education* 2009; 24(3): 287-309.
- [11] Pang TTT. Hong Kong English: A stillborn variety. *English Today* 2003; 19(2): 12-18.
- [12] Evans S. Historical and comparative perspectives on the medium of instruction in Hong Kong. *Language Policy* 2011; 10: 19-36.
- [13] Sweeting A. Education policy and the 1997 factor: the art of the possible interacting with the dismal science. In *Education and political transition: implications of Hong Kong’s change of sovereignty*. Edited by Bray M, Lee, WO. Hong Kong: The University of Hong Kong, 1997. pp.25-39.
- [14] Tsui APY, Ngo HY. Students’ perceptions of English-medium instruction in a Hong Kong university. *Asian Englishes* 2017; 19(1): 57-78.
- [15] Bransford JD, Brown AL, Cocking RR (Eds.). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school*. Washington DC: National Academy Press, 2000.
- [16] Weinreich U. *Languages in contact*. The Hague: Mouton, 1953.
- [17] Yule G. *The study of language* (7th ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- [18] Zhang Q. The emergence and development of Hong Kong English. *Annual Review of Education, Communication and Language Sciences* 2006; 3: 1-16.
- [19] Bolton K, Kwok H. The dynamics of the Hong Kong accent: social identity and sociolinguistic description. *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication* 1990; 1: 147-172.
- [20] Zhang Q. The attitudes of Hong Kong students towards Hong Kong English and Mandarin-accented English. *English Today* 2013; 29(2): 9-16.
- [21] Cummings PJ, Wolf HG. *A dictionary of Hong Kong English: Words from the fragrant harbor*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011.
- [22] Hung TTN. Towards a phonology of Hong Kong English. *World Englishes* 2000; 19(3): 337-356.
- [23] Sung CCM. Hong Kong English: Linguistic and sociolinguistic perspectives. *Language and Linguistics Compass* 2015; 9(6): 256-270.
- [24] Groves JM, Chan HT. Lexical traps in Hong Kong English. *English Today* 2010; 26(4): 44-50.
- [25] Bolton K. Chinese Englishes: From Canton jargon to global English. *World Englishes* 2002; 21(2): 181-199.
- [26] Chan JYH. Contextual variation and Hong Kong English. *World Englishes* 2013; 32(1): 54-74.
- [27] Li DCS. op. cit.; 2009. pp.72-84.
- [28] Choi PK. op. cit.; 2003. pp.673-694.
- [29] Pang TTT. op. cit.; 2003. p.15.
- [30] Poon FKC. Hong Kong English, China English and World English. *English Today* 2006; 22(2): 23-28.
- [31] Hui PK. op. cit.; 2015. pp.253-262.
- [32] Tsui ABM, Bunton D. Discourse and attitudes of English teachers in Hong Kong. *World Englishes* 2000; 19(3): 287-304.
- [33] Tian J, Low GD. Critical thinking and Chinese university students: a review of the evidence. *Language, Culture and Curriculum* 2011; 24(1): 61-76.
- [34] Cogo A, Dewey M. *Analyzing English as a lingua franca: A corpus-driven investigation*. London: Continuum, 2012.

- [35] Luo WH. Teacher perceptions of teaching and learning English as a lingua franca in the expanding circle: a study of Taiwan. *English Today* 2017; 33(1): 2-11.
- [36] Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority. HKDSE core subjects: English language – level descriptors. The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority Website, 2015; Retrieved from [http://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/en/hkdse/assessment/subject\\_information/category\\_a\\_subjects/hkdse\\_subj.html?A1&l&2\\_4](http://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/en/hkdse/assessment/subject_information/category_a_subjects/hkdse_subj.html?A1&l&2_4)
- [37] Naber A. Qualitative experiment as a participating method in innovation research. *Historical Social Research* 2015; 40(3): 233-257.
- [38] Ravasio P, Guttormsen-Schär S, Tscherter V. The qualitative experiment in HCI: definition, occurrences, value and use. *ACM Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction* 2004; 5, 1-24.
- [39] Robinson S, Mendelson AL. A qualitative experiment: research on mediated meaning construction using a hybrid approach. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* 2012; 6(4): 332-347.
- [40] Ravasio P, Guttormsen-Schär S, Tscherter V. op. cit.; 2004. pp.1-24.
- [41] Naber A. op. cit.; 2015. pp.233-257.
- [42] Gisborne N. Aspects of the morphosyntactic typology of Hong Kong English. *English World-Wide* 2009; 30(2): 149-169.
- [43] Sung CCM. op. cit.; 2015. pp.256-270.
- [44] Gisborne N. op. cit.; 2009. pp.149-169.
- [45] Lee I. Error correction in L2 secondary writing classrooms: the case of Hong Kong. *Journal of Second Language Writing* 2004; 13: 285-312.
- [46] Schröter V, Kortmann, B. Pronoun deletion in Hong Kong English and Colloquial Singaporean English. *World Englishes* 2016; 35(2): 221-241.
- [47] Hung TTN. op. cit.; 2012. pp.113-133.
- [48] Chan AYW. Toward a taxonomy of written errors: investigation into the written errors of Hong Kong Cantonese ESL learners. *TESOL Quarterly* 2010; 44(2): 295-319.
- [49] Ravasio P, Guttormsen-Schär S, Tscherter V. op. cit.; 2004. pp.1-24.
- [50] Greenbaum S. *The Oxford English Grammar*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, p.17.
- [51] Matthews JR, Bowen JM, Matthews RW. *Successful scientific writing: A step-by-step guide for the biological and medical sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000; First published in 1996.
- [52] Jenkins J. Current perspectives on teaching world Englishes and English as a lingua franca. *TESOL Quarterly* 2006; 40: 151-181.
- [53] Johnson TS, Thompson L, Smagorinsky P, Fry PG. Learning to teach the five-paragraph theme. *Research in the Teaching of English* 2003; 38(2): 136-176.
- [54] Sifakis NC, Sougari AM. Pronunciation issues and EIL pedagogy in the periphery: a survey of Greek state school teachers' beliefs. *TESOL Quarterly* 2005; 39(3): 467-488.
- [55] Christie F, Derewianka B. *School discourse: Learning to write across the years of schooling*. London: Continuum, 2008.
- [56] Miller RT, Pessoa S. Where's your thesis statement and what happened to your topic sentences? Identifying organizational challenges in undergraduate student argumentative writing. *TESOL Journal* 2016; 7(4): 847-873.
- [57] Poplen RL. A study of topic sentence use in academic writing. *Written Communication* 1987; 4(2): 209-228. p.211.
- [58] Luo WH. op. cit.; 2017. pp.2-11.
- [59] Suzuki A. Introducing diversity of English into ELT: student teachers' responses. *ELT Journal* 2011; 65(2): 145-153.
- [60] Poon FKC. op. cit.; 2006. pp.23-28.
- [61] Jenkins J. English as a lingua franca: interpretations and attitudes. *World Englishes* 2009; 28(2): 200-207.
- [62] Sewell A. English as a lingua franca: ontology and ideology. *ELT Journal* 2012; 67(1): 3-10.
- [63] Björkman B. English as a lingua franca in higher education: implications for EAP. *Iberica* 2011; 22: 79-100.
- [64] Yule G. op. cit.; 2017.
- [65] Wang Y, Jenkins J. "Nateness" and intelligibility: impacts of intercultural experience through English as lingua franca on Chinese speakers' language attitudes. *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics* 2016; 39(1): 38-58. p.41
- [66] Magrath D. Understanding dialects helps ESL instructors. *Multibriefs: Exclusive*, 2018, February 28; Retrieved on March 3, 2018 from: <http://exclusive.multibriefs.com/content/understanding-dialects-helps-esl-instructors/education>
- [67] Luo WH. op. cit.; 2017. pp.2-11.
- [68] Jenkins J. op. cit.; 2009. pp.200-207.
- [69] Risager K. *Language and culture pedagogy: From a national to transnational paradigm*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2007.
- [70] Suzuki A. op. cit.; 2011. pp.145-153.
- [71] Mairi S. An English as a lingua franca (ELF) perspective in Asian English language teaching. *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics* 2016; 39(4): 401-420. p.413.
- [72] Sewell A, Chan J. Patterns of variation in the consonantal phonology of Hong Kong English. *English World-Wide* 2010; 31(2): 138-161. p.157





ARTICLE

## The Bilingual Competence of Local Council Staffers in the Centre and Littoral Regions of Cameroon

Kouega Jean Paul<sup>1\*</sup> Sama Alexandre Sihna<sup>2</sup>

Department of English, Faculty of Arts, University of Yaounde I, Yaounde, Cameroon

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history

Received: 10 April 2018

Accepted: 30 April 2019

Published: 31 May 2019

#### Keywords:

Cameroon

Bilingual competence measurement

Individual bilingualism

Institutional bilingualism

Local council

### ABSTRACT

This work sets out to appraise the state of individual bilingualism in francophone local councils in Cameroon. The work checks the use of English by francophone local council workers and of French by their anglophone mates with the focus on the four communicative language skills, i.e., speaking, reading, writing and listening. The ethnographic approach to data collection was adopted, and self-rating through a questionnaire was the major tool used. The eight-item questionnaire was administered to 192 local council staffers. They were 177 (91.14% of 192) francophone workers selected out of a pool of over 500 workers in six local councils situated in two big francophone towns i.e., Douala and Yaounde on the one hand, and 15 (8.85% of 192) out of a total of 16 anglophone workers in these same localities. The analysis of the data collected revealed that very low percentages of francophone workers could perform the following tasks using English: discuss office issues with their bosses (10.16% of 177 subjects), read out a speech (8.47%), write a letter to their collaborators (4.51%), and listen to someone with understanding (20.33%). Conversely, a high proportion of anglophone workers were able to perform these same tasks using French i.e., discuss office issues with their bosses (73.33% of 15 subjects), read out a speech (20%), write a letter to a collaborator (33.33%), and listen to someone with understanding (80%). In short, 63.28% of 177 francophone workers reported having a low performance in receptive skills in English as opposed to 20% of 15 anglophone workers who said the same for French; similarly, 7.34% of 177 francophones claimed to have a good command of productive skills in English as opposed to 53.33% of 15 anglophones who claimed to have a command of French. The implications for the study are that official French-English bilingualism in Cameroon is a mere political wish which is not a reality on the field.

### 1. Introduction

When a country opts for two official languages, there is always a problem with the size of the users. Should one of these languages be given

preferential treatment? Or, should both languages be used on equal basis so as to curb down linguistic assimilation, and facilitate social peace and harmony in the country? Since the independence of French Cameroon in 1960 and

\*Corresponding Author:

Kouega Jean Paul, Professor,

Department of English, Faculty of Arts, University of Yaounde I, Yaounde, Cameroon;

E-mail: [jkouega@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:jkouega@yahoo.co.uk).



its Reunification with British Cameroon in 1961 to form a Federal Republic, a decision was taken by Government to establish English and French as the two official languages of the newly born Federal Republic of Cameroon. It was pledged that the two languages were to function on equal basis and that Government was to take appropriate measures to promote bilingualism in these two languages. These measures have been applied for over half a century and it is expected that they are bearing fruit today. The purpose of this work is to check whether local council workers are capable of rendering services at their places of work using both official languages. The following central question was set to guide the exercise: How bilingual are anglophone and francophone Cameroon local council workers? This is supplemented by four specific questions, i.e.: can Cameroonian local council workers discussed office issues with their bosses in French and English, the two official languages? Can they perform tasks like reading out a speech, writing letters and listening with understanding in these two official languages? The work is divided into four sections labelled background to the study (1), literature review (2), methodology (3), and data analysis and discussion (4). These are considered in turn.

### **Background to the Study**

This section first defines the term bilingualism and examines a number of attributes that tend to go with it (1.1); then it considers the language situation in Cameroon (1.2), and the structure of Central and local Governments in the country (1.3).

### **1.1 Bilingualism and its Attributes**

Several researchers like Bloomfield (1933)<sup>[5]</sup>, Mackey (1970)<sup>[19]</sup>, Haugen (1953)<sup>[11]</sup>, Ayafor (2005)<sup>[1]</sup>, and Baker (2006)<sup>[2]</sup>, to name only these, have worked extensively on the issue of bilingualism. To all of them, it can be regarded as the alternate use of two languages. To Bloomfield (1933)<sup>[5]</sup> cited in Baker (2006)<sup>[2]</sup>, it refers to the native-like control of two or more languages. To Haugen (1953)<sup>[11]</sup>, individual bilingualism is attested when a speaker of one language is able to produce complete meaningful utterances in another language. According to Ayafor (2005)<sup>[1]</sup> bilingualism is the ability to speak more than one language with proficiency; it is also a side by side co-existence of two languages in a country or in a community. It can therefore be concluded that a bilingual person is someone who is capable of using two languages with varying degrees of competence. This issue of degree of competence has pushed Baker (2006)<sup>[2]</sup> and other researchers like Wei (2000)<sup>[22]</sup> to assign some attributes to bilingualism: active, passive, balanced, minimal, maximal. Active bilingualism refers to someone who speaks and writes in two languages well

while passive bilingualism refers to someone who has receptive abilities of understanding and reading in their second language. A balanced bilingual, also referred to as equilingual, symmetrical or ambilingual, is said to use two languages with equal proficiency, even though Fishman (1971)<sup>[9]</sup> argues that rarely are there bilinguals or multilinguals with equal ability in their use of two or more languages. Maximal competence is when a bilingual has native-like control of two or more languages (Bloomfield 1933)<sup>[5]</sup> while minimal competence is when a bilingual has some control of his or her two languages. Other attributes, which are based on such factors as the age of the bilingual, the ability of the bilingual, the process of development of bilingualism, and the context of acquisition of bilingualism, to name only these, include the following: simultaneous, sequential, late, incipient, receptive, productive, ascendant, recessive, circumstantial, and elective. Simultaneous bilingualism is the acquisition of two languages at the same time and age; in sequential bilingualism, the individual acquires one language first, and then learn the other language later. As for late bilingualism, it occurs when an individual has learned and used a language from childhood and, later in life, he/she decides to learn another language. Incipient bilinguals can utter a few utterances in their other language, like a tourist who can successfully ask for the way to a given destination like a museum. Ascendant and recessive bilingualism are two extremes of a continuum; it occurs when someone is developing a second language at the expense of a language he or she had acquired previously. Elective bilingualism has to do with freely choosing to learn a language, usually in the school context while circumstantial bilingualism is the learning of a new language in order to survive, as it is usually the case with immigrants.

### **1.2 Language Situation in Cameroon**

Cameroon is a multilingual country where several languages of various statuses co-exist peacefully. First close to 300 indigenous languages are spoken natively by the various tribes that constitute the country's 22 million inhabitants. These languages are listed in a number of works including the following: Dieu and Renaud (1983)<sup>[6]</sup>, Kouega (2007)<sup>[16]</sup> and Lewis et al (2016)<sup>[18]</sup>. Next above these are some major lingua francas whose speakers span three or more of the ten regions of the country. These are: Pidgin English, Fulfulde, and Beti. Pidgin is actively used in the Southwest and Northwest region and the neighbouring Littoral and West regions, especially for business transactions. Fulfulde is spoken in the three northern regions of the country i.e., the Adamawa, Far-North and North regions. Beti is the name of a language

group that includes major dialects like Bulu, Eton, Ewondo, and Fang, which are spoken from the Centre region through the South region of Cameroon up to the northern provinces of Gabon and Equatorial Guinea. Speakers of these dialects share many cultural and linguistic features, though intelligibility decreases to some extent as one moves across this vast territory. Reigning above these languages are French and English, which are the joint official languages of Cameroon. French came into the country when Germany lost the First World War and its colonies in Africa had to be shared between the victors i.e. France and Britain. France took 4/5 of German Kamerun as it was called then, and Britain took 1/5. French Cameroon evolved as a League of Nations Trust Territory, then as a United Nations Mandated Territory, before becoming independent in 1960, with French being adopted as its official language. British Cameroons were two discontinuous strips of land, one strip being in the north and the other in the south. The two strips were attached to Nigeria, a large British colony. These two strips of land became League of Nations Trust Territories and then United Nations Mandated Territories. Under the pretext that these two strips of land could not evolve on their own, their citizens were asked to choose between joining the Nigerian Federation or joining Cameroon that became independent in 1960. A referendum was organised and Northern British Cameroons decided to join Nigeria while Southern British Cameroon whose official language was English, joined French Cameroon. In 1961, British Cameroon and French Cameroon formed a federation with French and English being the joint official languages of the new state. Today, the country is divided into 10 regions of which eight fall in the francophone zone and two in the former Anglophone territory.

In short, three classes of languages coexist in Cameroon i.e., close to 300 indigenous languages which are used for in-group communication, some three major lingua francas which are used for out-group communication, and two official languages i.e., English and French, which are used for Government transactions and as languages of instruction in all schools.

### **1.3 Structure of Central government and local councils in Cameroon**

This section defines “central government” and “local councils” in Cameroon, outlines the types of councils in the country, and the duties of council officials and workers. Central government in Cameroon is headed by the President of the Republic who is assisted by ministers in charge of various departments. The country is divided into ten administrative units called “Regions”. Each region is run by a Governor appointed by the President

of the Republic. The administrative unit next below the region is known as “Division” (in French “Département”) and is headed by a “Divisional Officer” in short D.O. (in French “Prefet”). The lowest administrative unit is the “Sub-division” (in French “arrondissement”) which is headed by a “Sub-divisional officer”, in short S.D.O (in French “Sous-prefet”) (see Kouega 2006<sup>[15]</sup> for details).

Local councils, also known as local governments, are legal entities elected by the people to cater for their services. As Article 1 of Law No. 74/23 of December 5, 1974 stipulates a council is “a decentralized public community having public rights as well as administrative and financial autonomy. It manages local affairs under the protection of the State”. Though local councils are run by officials elected by the people, they work under the supervisory authority of the Governors and the Divisional officers appointed by the President of the Republic.

In Cameroon, there are two main types of councils, i.e., city councils and sub-divisional councils. City councils are found in Regional headquarters and in large towns; they are headed by “government delegates” (in French “Délégués du Gouvernement”) appointed by a decree of the President of the Republic. Sub-divisional councils are run by a team of elected councillors whose number depends on the population size of the councils’ jurisdiction. When these councillors take up duty, they elect one of them as mayor of the council. The main legislative texts pertaining to local government in Cameroon are: Law No. 2004/017 on decentralization; Law No. 2004/018 on local councils; Law No. 2004/019 on regions (see <http://www.clgf.org.uk> for details)

What is relevant to this study is that some of the duties of the mayors and other council officials require that they are in contact with their population. These duties include: solemnising marriages, certifying birth and death certificates, assigning work to council staff, and leading the councils on public occasions such as official ceremonies, to name only these. The problem at issue is: Are these mayors and other council clerks capable of performing these duties in their other official language, which is French for Anglophones and English for francophones? In other words, how bilingual are the local councils and their staffers?

## **2. Literature Review**

There are a number of works that focus on the assessment of bilingualism, including the following: Macnamara (1967)<sup>[20]</sup>, Hamers and Blanc (1989)<sup>[10]</sup>, and Stokes and Duncan (1989)<sup>[21]</sup>. These researchers have proposed various formal and informal ways of measuring bilingualism, but these proposals tend to compare bilinguals with monolinguals. To Hideyuki Taura

(1996)<sup>[12]</sup>, ideal bilingual measurements “should take into consideration such variables as affective variables, bilingual types (sequential, simultaneous, etc.), the age of exposure to languages, socio-economic and educational background, and level of intelligence.” (p. 8). Examining these variables falls outside the scope of the present paper, which is limited to how the informants rate their performance in specific bilingual tasks.

In Cameroon, researchers who have attempted to evaluate individual bilingualism include: Biloa (1999)<sup>[4]</sup>, Echu (2004)<sup>[7]</sup>, Essomba (2013)<sup>[8]</sup>, and Kouega (2005)<sup>[14]</sup>. These studies have in common the fact that they focus on the acquisition of English by francophones. Works on the acquisition of French by Anglophones are rare. Biloa (1999)<sup>[4]</sup> examined the teaching of French to anglophone students in the University of Yaounde I. His main objective was to assess the effectiveness of the daily French language taught to anglophone students of this institution. He collected data using participant observation and a questionnaire administered to anglophone students in this institution. The analysis revealed that “... the programme on the teaching of French to Anglophone students in this institution is pedagogically inadequate and not adapted”. He concluded that the administration of the University of Yaounde I was unable and unwilling to effectively apply the policy of bilingualism as stipulated by the Constitution. The present work is related to that of Biloa in that both works focus on bilingualism in Cameroon. However, they differ in that Biloa’s focus is pedagogy whereas the focus of this study is individual bilingual competence.

Echu (2004)<sup>[7]</sup> worked on the implementation of bilingualism in the educational system of Cameroon from the primary through the secondary to the tertiary level, his major objectives being to evaluate the immersion of francophone pupils in anglophone primary schools and to check the experience of bilingual training in the Government Bilingual High School in Buea. He collected data using a questionnaire and participant observation and the analysis revealed that on the whole, the policy of bilingualism in the domain of education needs special care from legislators of this country; there should be a well organised text of orientation which clearly defines the goals to be achieved.

Essomba (2013)<sup>[8]</sup> considered the level of individual bilingualism in Yaounde. His major objective was to check the bilingualism competence of some individuals living in Yaounde, the political capital of Cameroon. The materials he used were a questionnaire and a language test and his informants were some 240 pupils. These pupils were randomly chosen from three bilingual high schools

in Yaounde, with the researcher making sure that each of the ten regions of the country was represented in his pool. The questionnaire revealed that these subjects made alternate use of English and French at varying degrees, and possessed each at least one language skill in these two languages. The language achievement test revealed that the subjects had a fair mastery of the grammar of both languages. Moreover, a significantly high number of participants came up with sensible translations from one language into the other. On the basis of these results, he concluded that both francophone and anglophone pupils living in Yaounde can be termed bilingual individuals. An inspection of this work shows that it does not follow the basic canons of research. For example, the informants came from three bilingual high schools in Yaounde. This gives the impression that in Yaounde, all high schools are bilingual, which is wrong. Actually bilingual high schools are rare in the city of Yaounde and usually the pupils admitted into these schools are screened. The bulk of secondary pupils attend French-medium schools where English is taught as a subject (see Kouega 2007<sup>[16]</sup> for details). In other words, the subjects chosen for this research do not represent high school goers in Yaounde, let alone in the rest of the country. Second, previous publications on this same issue were not reviewed. This work is however related to the present one as it attempts to assess individual bilingualism.

Kouega (2005)<sup>[14]</sup> examined the official syllabus for the teaching of English in francophone elementary grades in Cameroon and concluded that it is practically impossible for pupils to learn even the basics of English in a context where teachers are not trained when they are available. He suggested that English should start not at the primary level as is the case today, but at the secondary level instead. It should start with a clear objective: to teach English to francophone secondary pupils so that by the time they graduate, they are capable of sitting for the First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC for short), which is the exit certificate for primary school pupils in English-medium schools in Cameroon. In other words, the syllabus for primary education in English-medium schools should be used for the teaching of the English subject in French-medium secondary schools. If this suggestion is taken into account, then before leaving secondary education, all pupils would have sat for the First School Leaving Certificate and many of them would surely have passed this examination. Presently, no francophone secondary pupils that have gone through French-medium schools can make it. The subjects of the present study i.e., local council workers, have all learnt English as a subject or French as a subject in secondary education in Cameroon.

### 3. Methodology

The informants and the material of this study are outlined here. The informants were 192 local council workers of whom 177 were francophones and 15 anglophones. They were drawn from local councils located in the cities of Yaounde in the Centre region and of Douala in the Littoral region of Cameroon. In Douala, three local councils out of the six in the city were visited. These are: Douala I Council, Douala II Council and Douala III Council. In these three councils, a total of 90 subjects were contacted, of whom 48 returned their filled copies of the questionnaire, giving a response rate of 53.33%. In Yaounde, three local councils out of seven were visited, i.e., the Yaounde City Council, the Yaounde III Council, and the Yaounde IV Council. Some 200 subjects were contacted and 144 returned their copies, giving a return rate of 72%. The information provided in the questionnaire was used to work out the relevant sociolinguistic details on these informants, i.e., their gender, their level of education, and their second official language which is English for francophones and French for anglophones. Regarding gender, there were 100 males (52.08 of 192 informants) and 92 females (47.91%).

Concerning their level of education, they had all completed primary education; 126 had had secondary level education (65.62% of 192 informants) while 66 had done tertiary level education (34.38%). As for their second official language, they were asked an indirect question: what was your language of instruction in primary school? It is known that in Cameroon, francophone people generally attend French-medium primary schools while Anglophones attend English-medium primary schools. On the basis of the answer to this question which confirms information gathered during the administration of the questionnaire, it was found that of the 192 informants, 15 (i.e., 7.81%) were Anglophones while 177 (i.e., 92.18%) were francophones.

These informants were contacted at their place of work and were encouraged to fill in an eight-item questionnaire which was designed to elicit their ratings of their performance in a number of bilingual tasks.

### 4. Data Analysis

The analysis takes up the respondents' self-reported ability to read out a speech (reading), to listen to the radio/TV news with understanding (comprehension/listening), to discuss office matters with their bosses (speaking), and to write letters (writing). These are considered in turn.

The 177 francophone informants were asked if they could read out a speech written in English (Q1a). Reading aloud was targeted as it was not possible to assess all the

sub-skills of reading. These informants were expected to choose one of these proposed answers: "Yes", "A little bit", "No", and "Others". The range of definite answers was limited to three, with a fourth slot provided for these informants to indicate other possible answers. These informants made the choices presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Reading of a Speech Written in English by Francophone Workers**

Q1a. Can you read out a speech written in English?						
Answers / Regions	Yes	A little bit	No	Others		Total
Centre	11 (8.2%)	43 (32.08%)	80 (59.7%)	-	-	134 (100%)
Littoral	4 (9.3%)	9 (20.93%)	30 (69.76%)	-	-	43 (100%)
Total	15 (8.47%)	52 (29.37%)	110 (62.14%)	-	-	177 (100%)

In Table 1, 62.14% of 177 francophone local council workers reported that they could not read out a speech written in English; while only 8.47% claimed that they could do so. In-between these two extremes are 29.37% subjects who claimed that they can do so a little bit. It can therefore be concluded that the proportion of bilingual francophone workers who can read out a speech written in English is very low.

The 15 anglophone informants were asked the same question i.e., whether they could read out a speech written in French (Q1b) and they gave the answers in Table 2.

**Table 2. Reading of a Speech Written in French by Anglophone Workers**

Q1b. Can you read out a speech written in French?						
Answers / Regions	Yes	A little bit	No	Others		Total
Centre	3 (30%)	4 (40%)	3 (30%)	-	-	10 (100%)
Littoral	-	2 (40.4%)	3 (60%)	-	-	5 (100%)
Total	3 (20%)	6 (40.4%)	6 (40%)	-	-	15 (100%)

Table 2 shows that 40% of 15 anglophone local council workers said that they could not read out a speech written in French, while 20% of them claimed that they could do so. It means that the proportion of bilingual anglophone workers who can actually read out speeches written in both English and French is very low. These are likely those Anglophone workers who make personal efforts to communicate in French.

Q2a asked the francophone informants whether they could understand the radio/TV news broadcast in English, which was assumed to be a good comprehension exercise. Their answers are presented in Table 3.



**Table 3. Understanding of the Radio/TV News Broadcast in English by Francophone Workers**

Q2a. Can you understand a radio/TV news broadcast in English?						
Answers / Region	Yes	A little bit	No	Others		Total
Centre	27 (20.74%)	8 (5.97%)	99 (73.88%)	-	-	134 (100%)
Littoral	9 (20.93%)	19 (44.18%)	15 (34.88%)	-	-	43 (100%)
Total	36 (20.33%)	27 (15.25%)	114 (64.4%)	-	-	177 (100%)

As Table 3 shows, 64.4% of 177 francophone workers reported that they could not listen with understanding to a radio/TV news broadcast in English while 15.25% claimed that they could do so a little bit. Only 20.33% of them disclosed that they could listen to the news with understanding, which is a very low proportion.

The anglophone informants were asked the same question and they made the claims in Table 4.

**Table 4. Understanding of a Radio/TV News Broadcast in French by Anglophone Workers**

Q2b. Can you understand a radio/TV news broadcast in French?						
Answers / Region	Yes	A little bit	No	Others		Total
Centre	8 (80%)	2 (20%)	-	-	-	10 (100%)
Littoral	4 (80%)	1 (20%)	-	-	-	5 (100%)
Total	12 (80%)	3 (20%)	-	-	-	15 (100%)

As shown in Table 4, 80% of 15 anglophone workers in the Centre and Littoral Regions claimed that they could fully understand a radio/TV news broadcast in French. It means that anglophone council workers in francophone Regions are highly bilingual. This may be probably due to the fact that they are living in French-dominated areas.

The 177 francophone informants were asked whether they could discuss office issues with their bosses in English (Q3a). It was assumed that if they were not able to discuss office issues, they would obviously not be able to discuss such issues as sports, costumes, or food. Their responses are reported in Table 5.

**Table 5. Discussing Office Issues with Bosses in English by Francophone Workers**

Q3a. Can you discuss office issues with your boss in English?						
Answers / Regions	Yes	A little bit	No	Others		Total
Centre	13 (9.7%)	34 (25.37%)	87 (64.92%)	-	-	134 (100%)
Littoral	5 (11.62%)	15 (34.88%)	23 (53.48%)	-	-	43 (100%)
Total	18 (10.16%)	49 (27.68%)	110 (62.14%)	-	-	177 (100%)

As Table 5 shows, some 62.14% of 177 informants said they could not discuss office issues with their bosses in English. Actually even those who said "a little bit"

(27.68%) cannot interact with their bosses in English. In other words, only few workers (10.16% of 177) reported that they could successfully discuss office issues with their bosses in English.

The 15 anglophone informants were asked this same question and their responses are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6. Discussing Office Issues with Bosses of in French**

Q3b. Can you discuss office issues with your boss in French?						
Answers / Region	Yes	A little bit	No	Others		Total
Centre	7 (70%)	3 (30%)	-	-	-	10 (100%)
Littoral	4 (80%)	1 (20%)	-	-	-	5 (100%)
Total	11 (73.33%)	4 (26.66%)	-	-	-	15 (100%)

Table 6 indicates that 73.33% of 15 Anglophone informants claimed that they could discuss office issues with their bosses in French while only some 26.66% claimed that they could only try a little bit.

Q4a asked the 177 francophone informants whether they could write a letter to their bosses in English. If one can write a formal or informal letter to one's boss, one can also write a shopping list or a short message on social media. The answers given are displayed in Table 7.

**Table 7. Writing of Letters in English by Francophone Workers**

Q4a. Can you write a letter to your boss in English?						
Answers / Region	Yes	A little bit	No	Others		Total
Centre	6 (4.47%)	31 (23.13%)	97 (72.38%)	-	-	134 (100%)
Littoral	2 (4.65%)	4 (9.3%)	37 (86.04%)	-	-	43 (100%)
Total	8 (4.51%)	35 (19.77%)	134 (75.7%)	-	-	177 (100%)

In Table 7, some 75.7% of 177 francophone local council workers declared that they could not write a letter in English whereas a very low proportion i.e., 4.51% of 177 subjects, affirmed that they could do so. Their 15 anglophone counterparts answered this same question as shown in Table 8.

**Table 8. Writing of letters in French by Anglophone workers**

Q4b. Can you write a letter to your boss in French?						
Answers / Region	Yes	A little bit	No	Others		Total
Centre	3 (30%)	4 (40%)	3 (30%)	-	-	10 (100%)
Littoral	2 (40%)	1 (20%)	2 (40%)	-	-	5 (100%)
Total	5 (33.33%)	5 (33.33%)	5 (33.33%)	-	-	15 (100%)

In Table 8, some 33.33% of 15 anglophone local council workers in the two Regions indicated that they could not write a letter in French. Another 33.33%



claimed that they could do so.

These findings can be brought together under the dichotomy receptive and productive skills. Reading and listening (Tables 1-4) are receptive skills while discussing and writing fall under productive skills (Tables 5-8). The overall performance of the informants in receptive skills is presented in Tables 9-10. It is obtained by adding up the figures for reading and listening and dividing the sum by the figure 2.

**Table 9. Overall Performance of Francophone Informants in Receptive Skills**

Skills of reading and listening					
Answers / Regions	Yes	A little bit	No	Others	Total
Centre	19 14.17%	25.5 19.02%	89.5 66.79%		134 100%
Littoral	6.5 15.12%	14 32.56%	22.5 52.33%		43 100%
Total	25.5 14.41%	39.5 22.32%	112 63.28%		177 100%

**Table 10. Overall Performance of Anglophone Informants in Receptive Skills**

Skills of reading and listening					
Answers / Regions	Yes	A little bit	No	Others	Total
Centre	5.5 55%	3 30%	1.5 15%		10 100%
Littoral	2 40%	1.5 30%	1.5 30%		5 100%
Total	7.5 50%	4.5 30%	3 20%		15 100%

As Tables 9 and 10 show, 63.28% of 177 francophone council workers have a low performance in receptive skills as opposed to 20% for their anglophone counterparts. On the other hand, only 14.41% of 177 francophone workers reported having a high performance in receptive skills as opposed to 50% for their anglophone counterparts. It can therefore be stated that anglophone council staffers in the Centre and Littoral regions are more bilingual than their francophone counterparts. This high performance may be due to the fact that these anglophones reside and work in a francophone environment. If residing in a francophone milieu is actually a facilitating factor, then francophones working in councils in anglophone Cameroon would be bilingual. This hypothesis will be checked in a future study.

Tables 11-12 present the overall performance of the informants in productive skills.

**Table 11. Overall Performance of Francophone Informants in Productive Skills**

Skills of discussing and reading out a speech					
Answers / Regions	Yes	A little bit	No	Others	Total
Centre	9.5 7.09%	32.5 24.25%	92 68.66%		134 100%
Littoral	3.5 8.14%	9.5 22.09%	30 69.77%		43 100%
Total	13 7.34%	42 23.73%	122 68.93%		177 100%

**Table 12. Overall Performance of Anglophone Informants in Productive Skills**

Skills of discussing and reading out a speech					
Answers / Regions	Yes	A little bit	No	Others	Total
Centre	5 50	3.5 35	1.5 15		10 100%
Littoral	3 60%	1 20%	1 20%		5 100%
Total	8 53.33%	4.5 30%	2.5 16.67%		15 100%

As Tables 11-12 show, only 7.34% of 177 francophone informants claimed to have bilingual competence as opposed to 53.33% of 15 anglophone informants. On the basis of this finding, it can be put forward that bilingualism in Cameroon means that Anglophone workers must learn and use French while francophones may remain officially monolingual if they so wish. This imbalance seems to be one of the root causes of what has become known today as “the Anglophone problem in Cameroon” Konings and Nyamjoh (1997)<sup>[13]</sup>, BAPEC (2017)<sup>[3]</sup>, Kouega (2018)<sup>[17]</sup>.

## 5. Conclusion

This work examined the self-reported French-English bilinguality of local council staffers in Cameroon, using the ethnographic data collection method. There were 177 francophone workers whose competence in English was checked and 15 anglophone workers whose competence in French was assessed. A questionnaire was devised, with the focus on the communicative skills of reading and listening on the one hand, and speaking and writing on the other. Some 192 copies were returned and the analysis revealed a number of interesting facts. First, some 10.16% of 177 francophone informants could discuss office issues with their bosses in English while 73.33% of 15 anglophone subjects could do the same using French. Second, 8.47% francophones could read out a speech in English as opposed to 20% of 15 anglophones who could do the same in French. Third 4.51% of francophones could write a letter to their collaborators in English as opposed to 33.33% of anglophones who could do the same. Fourth, 20.33% of francophones could listen to the news with understanding as opposed to 80% of 15 anglophones who could do the same. In short, anglophone informants who claimed to have a good control of receptive skills in French (53.33%) and of productive skills in French (53.33%) were found to be proportionately more numerous than francophones who claimed to have control of receptive skills in English (14.41%) and of productive skills in English (7.34%). It may be argued that the imbalance observed in the findings of this study is due to work environment, as the data were collected in a francophone area. If work environment is a major

factor in the performance of anglophones, then a similar study conducted on the English of francophones working in an anglophone setting will show a higher proportion of francophones having a command of English. This will be the subject of a future study. The implications of this study are that successive governments in Cameroon have been overlooking researchers' findings on the implementation of the official French-English bilingualism policy. As a result, anglophones have over the years been pondering over the observation that bilingualism in Cameroon means that anglophones should learn French and francophones should speak French.

### Questionnaire (English Version)

Dear Respondent,

I am conducting a research exercise and would be grateful if you could spare a minute to answer the questions below. I have chosen you because I know that you can provide accurate answers to these questions. In some cases, you will simply tick the correct answer.

You are advised to read through all the questions first before answering them.

#### I. Identification of the informant

1. Gender: Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_

2. In what language did you do your primary education?

A) English \_\_\_\_\_ B) French \_\_\_\_\_

C) Others \_\_\_\_\_

3. Did you do secondary education?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

4. Did you do tertiary education (in any university or institution)?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

#### II. Evaluation of individual bilingualism

5. Can you discuss office issues with your boss or colleague using your second official language?

A) Yes \_\_\_\_\_ B) A little bit \_\_\_\_\_

C) No \_\_\_\_\_ D) Others \_\_\_\_\_

6. Can you read out a speech using your second official language?

A) Yes \_\_\_\_\_ B) A little bit \_\_\_\_\_

C) No \_\_\_\_\_ D) Others \_\_\_\_\_

7. Can you write a letter to someone using your second official language?

A) Yes \_\_\_\_\_ B) A little bit \_\_\_\_\_

C) No \_\_\_\_\_ D) Others \_\_\_\_\_

8. Can you listen with understanding a radio/television news in your second official language?

A) Yes \_\_\_\_\_ B) A little bit \_\_\_\_\_

C) No \_\_\_\_\_ D) Others \_\_\_\_\_

### References

- [1] Ayafor, I. M. (2005). Official bilingualism in Cameroon: Instrumental or integrative policy? *ISB4: Proceedings of the 4th International Symposium on Bilingualism*, (eds). Cohen J., McAlister K. T., Rolstad K., and MacSwan J., 123-142. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press.
- [2] Baker, C. (2006). *Foundation of bilingual education and bilingualism*. 4th edn, British Library Cataloguing in Publication.
- [3] BAPEC (Bamenda Provincial Episcopal Conference) (2017) Memorandum to President Paul Biya on the Current Situation in the Northwest and Southwest Regions.  
<http://www.cameroon-info.net/article/cameroon-bamenda-provincial-episcopal-conference-memorandum-to-president-paul-biya-on-the-current-situation-in-278001.html>
- [4] Biloa, E. (1999). Bilingual education at the University of Yaounde I: The teaching of French to English-speaking students. In Echu, G. and Grundstrom A, W. (eds.), *Official bilingualism and linguistic communication in Cameroon*. New York: Peter lang, 53-74.
- [5] Bloomfield, L. (1933) *Language*. New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston.
- [6] Dieu, M. & Renaud, P. (eds). (1983). *Atlas linguistique du Cameroun*. Paris: CERDOTOLA and ACCT
- [7] Echu, G. (2004). The language question in Cameroon. *Linguistik Online* 18(1) 19-33 [http://www.linguistik-online.de/18\\_04/echu.pdf](http://www.linguistik-online.de/18_04/echu.pdf)
- [8] Essomba Fouda, S. M. (2013). Evaluating the degree of individual bilingualism in Yaounde. *Journal of Literature, Languages and Linguistics*, 2, pp. 46-54
- [9] Fishman, J. A. (1971). The sociology of language: An interdisciplinary social science approach to language in society. In Fishman, F. A. (ed.), *Advances in the sociology of language* Vol I, Mouton, The Hague, 217-104.
- [10] Hamers, J. F. and Blanc, M. H. (1989). *Bilinguality and bilingualism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [11] Haugen, E. (1953). *The Norwegian language in America: A study in bilingual behaviour*. Philadelphia: UP of Pennsylvania.
- [12] Hideyuki Taura (1996). *Bilingual measurement*. U.S. Department of Education, Educational Resources Information Center, ED 413763.
- [13] Konings, P. and Nyamnjoh, F.B. (1997) The Anglophone Problem in Cameroon. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 35, 207-229. <https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/4616/ASC-1246231-023.pdf;sequence=1>  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X97002401>
- [14] Kouega, J. P. (2005). Promoting French-English indi-

- vidual bilingualism through education in Cameroon. *Journal of Third World studies* 22(1), 185-196.
- [15] Kouega, J. P. (2006) *Aspects of Cameroon English usage: A lexical appraisal*. Muenchen, Germany: Lincom Europa
- [16] Kouega, J. P. (2007). The language situation in Cameroon. *Current Issues in Language Planning* (CILP), 1-94
- [17] Kouega, J. P. (2018). The Anglophone problem in Cameroon: Focus on education. *Open Access Library Journal*, 5: e4408. <https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1104408>
- [18] Lewis, M. P., Simons, G. F., & Fennig C. D. (eds.). (2016). *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 19th edn. Dallas, Texas: SIL International. Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com/19/>.
- [19] Mackey, W. F. (1970). A typology of bilingual education. In Andersson & Boyer, *Bilingual Schooling in the United States*, Vol. 2, pp.-65-83,
- [20] Macnamara, J. (1967). The bilingual's linguistic performance: A psychological overview. *Journal of Social Issues* 23, 58-77.
- [21] Stokes, J. and Duncan, D. (1989). Linguistic assessment procedures for bilingual children. In Duncan, D (ed.) *Working with bilingual language disability*. London: Chapman & Hall.
- [22] Wei, Li (Ed.). 2000. *The bilingualism reader*. Routledge. UK.

ARTICLE

# Attitudes Towards the Official Recognition of Hong Kong Sign Language by Hong Kong Citizens

Linghui Gan<sup>1\*</sup> Federico Gobbo<sup>2</sup>

Faculty of Humanities, University of Amsterdam, PC Hoofthuis, Spuistraat 134, 1012 VB, Amsterdam, Netherlands

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history

Received: 14 March 2019

Accepted: 28 May 2019

Published: 30 June 2019

### Keywords:

Sign language recognition

Official language

Status planning

Language attitude

HKSL

## ABSTRACT

This paper is a pilot study that investigates the attitudes towards the official recognition of Hong Kong Sign Language (HKSL) by Hong Kong citizens. We used video-chat software (mainly WhatsApp, and Facebook Messenger, but also FaceTime) to conduct long-distance semi-structured interviews with 30 participants grouped as deaf, hearing-related (hearing people that are closely involved in the Deaf community), and hearing-unrelated (hearing people that have little contact with deaf people and the Deaf community). Results show that the majority of participants (N=22) holds a supportive attitude towards the recognition of HKSL; Five participants hold a neutral position, and three participants hold a negative attitude towards it. We discussed each type of attitude in detail. Results show that participants' attitudes are positively related to their awareness of deaf people's need, the understanding of 'language recognition', and personal world views. In other words, the more participants are aware, the more they foster official recognition, at least as a general trend. Results also indicate that hearing people who are not involved in the Deaf community know very little about deaf people and the Deaf community, in general. At the end of the paper, we also reflect on two issues: we argue that the standardization of HKSL plays an important role in deaf education and empowering citizenship awareness and participation.

## 1. Introduction

With the increasing awareness among deaf people of their culture and identity, efforts fighting for equal human right with the majority hearing world have been carried out in different places around the world. In this study we adopt the general term 'deaf' when referring to deaf people, as some of the participants involved in this study do not consider themselves Deaf in identity. As sign languages are widely used among deaf people, calling for recognition of sign

languages have been one of the efforts to emphasize their linguistic rights (De Meulder, 2015<sup>[2]</sup>; Murray, 2015<sup>[3]</sup>; Parisot & Rinfret, 2012<sup>[4]</sup>; Quer, 2012<sup>[5]</sup>). In particular the UN General Assembly in 2006 states that countries should "accept and facilitate the use of sign languages (Article 21, e)". The recognition of a language influences relevant policies on the practical use of that language in the whole society, fields in education, media, and government work are closely related (Johnson, 2013)<sup>[7]</sup>. On the other hand, the authors' participant observation in the field – lasting at

\*Corresponding Author:

Linghui Gan,

Research Master Student of Linguistics, Faculty of Humanities, University of Amsterdam, PC Hoofthuis, Spuistraat 134, 1012 VB, Amsterdam, Netherlands;

E-mail: [ganlinghui@gmail.com](mailto:ganlinghui@gmail.com).



least five years of active research – shows that the lack of knowledge or misunderstandings about deaf people and sign languages still exist in many societies. For example, many still regard that deaf people are inferior to hearing people; every deaf people can and should lip-read; the hearing impairment of deaf people can be cured by hearing aids; sign language is artificial and deaf people all around the world share one sign language; sign language is a signed version of a spoken language, or it is gesture. With the various perspectives of the social members, attitudes towards the request of recognizing a sign language as an official language could vary significantly.

Compared to spoken languages, studies on the attitudes towards sign languages and related issues are relatively rare (Kannapell, 1989)<sup>[8]</sup>, yet it is of great importance for language planning and language policy of sign languages (Cham, 2002<sup>[9]</sup>; Geraci, 2012<sup>[10]</sup>; Peddie, 1991<sup>[11]</sup>). Given the fact that there is little literature on this topic, this study aims to fill the gap by investigating the attitudes towards the official recognition of Hong Kong Sign Language (hereafter HKSL) by Hong Kong Citizens. The Hong Kong case study is interesting at least for two reasons: first, the relation between language and identity in Hong Kong is rich and complex in general, as shown by (Lai & Poon, 2011<sup>[12]</sup>; D. C. S. Li, 2017<sup>[13]</sup>; Pennycook, 2002<sup>[14]</sup>; Poon, 2004<sup>[15]</sup>); second, there is no study as such, to the extent of the authors' knowledge. The general research question we pose is: what are factors impacting attitudes towards the official recognition of HKSL? Our aim is to give an answer to this research question that is relevant for the HKSL case study but not only. In other words, after the necessary adjustments, HKSL could work as case study used in comparison with others, stating the same research question, or a similar one.

This paper is organized as follows: Section 2 provides the background of this study; Section 3 introduces the sociolinguistic environment in Hong Kong; Section 4 elaborates the methodology; Section 5 presents the result of the interviews; Section 6 discusses the results, while Section 7 offers some concluding remarks that can be useful for sign linguistics research in general.

## 2. Background

### 2.1 The Motion on Recognizing HKSL as an Official Language

On January 11th, 2017, in the Council meeting of the Legislative Council of Hong Kong, a member of the Legislative Council, Leung Yiu-chung, proposed a motion to make HKSL an official language of Hong Kong. Before the meeting, there was also a small scale of campaign fighting for the recognition of HKSL. For example, the slogan 'Strive for the official recognition of HKSL' signed in HKSL were spread on Facebook, and a group of supporters of this motion also organized a demonstration in front of the parliament venue before the meeting. In his proposal, Leung argued that the Hong Kong government should fulfill the obligations in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which was signed by the People's Republic of China in 2008. In addition, the recognition of HKSL will promote building a real inclusive society in Hong Kong.

On the other hand, other members raised four main dissenting opinions: First, there has not been a standard version of HKSL. Deaf people from different groups use different variants in referring to the same thing. Therefore, the priority at this stage is to promote a standard HKSL and to provide relevant training courses to sign interpreters and sign language instructors (raised by the Secretary for the Hong Kong Labour and Welfare Bureau, retrieved and translated from HKSAR, 2017a, p. 2082)<sup>[16]</sup>. The second dissenting opinion is that the official recognition of HKSL may lead to misallocation of social resources. This opinion was raised by Cheung Yu-Yan, a member of the Executive Council of Hong Kong SAR. He mentioned that "not everyone has the talent to learn a sign language, and not everyone needs to do it." Therefore, requiring every employee from the government and public sectors to learn HKSL will bring unnecessary burden to the individuals and the resource allocation. Also, convenient techniques such as smartphones and tablets enable deaf people and hearing people to communicate in written Chinese. This

<sup>1</sup>There are distinctions between 'Deaf' and 'deaf'. According to Paddy (2003)[1]: "'Deaf' refers to those who are born Deaf or defended in early (sometimes late) childhood, for whom the sign languages, communities, and cultures of the Deaf collective represents their primary experience and allegiance" (p. xviii).

<sup>2</sup>The content cited by the proposal from UNCRPD (UN General Assembly, 2006)[6] also includes: "States Parties should ensure that the education of persons, and in particular children, who are blind, deaf or deafblind, is delivered in the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication for the individual, and in environments which maximize academic and social development (Article 24, 3c)"; and "Persons with disabilities shall be entitled, on an equal basis with others, to recognition and support of their specific cultural and linguistic identity, including sign languages and deaf culture (Article 30, 4)".

can achieve basic communication purposes. Third, there are not enough eligible sign interpreters to ensure the follow-up measures to be brought after the recognition of HKSL (ibid.<sup>[16]</sup>, p. 2071). The fourth and last dissenting opinion is that the law will have to be amended (raised by the Acting Chairman of Business and Professionals Alliance for Hong Kong, ibid.<sup>[16]</sup>, p. 2056).

This motion was voted down in the Council meeting (see Table 1 for the voting result). There were 11 affirmative votes, 19 abstention votes in the functional constituencies; 14 affirmative votes and ten abstention votes in the geographical constituencies. Interestingly, although some members proposed dissenting opinions on the motion before the voting, there were no negative votes in the result.

**Table 1. The Voting Result of the Motion on ‘Striving to Make Sign Language an Official Language of Hong Kong’**

(retrieved from the Legislative Council website, [https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr16-17/english/counmtg/motion/mot\\_1617.htm#cm20170111](https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr16-17/english/counmtg/motion/mot_1617.htm#cm20170111) )

	功能團體 Functional Constituencies	地方選區 Geographical Constituencies	最後結果 Final Result
出席 Present	31	24	
投票 Vote	30	24	
贊成 Yes	11	14	
反對 No	0	0	
棄權 Abstain	19	10	
結果 Result	否決 Negated	通過 Passed	否決 Negated

## 2.2 Language Recognition

Language recognition belongs to one aspect of language planning activity: status planning. De Meulder (2015)<sup>[2]</sup> summarized two types of legal recognition of sign languages: explicit and implicit. Explicit legal recognition refers to those that recognize a sign language in legislation, such as a constitution, law, or act. It contains different subtypes: (1) constitutional recognition; (2) recognition by means of general language legislation; (3) recognition by means of a sign language law or act; (4) recognition by means of a sign language law or act, including other means of communication; (5) recognition by means of legislation on the functioning of the national language council (ibid.<sup>[2]</sup>, p. 500). The differences in types and their respective subtypes can be influenced by factors in the national context. For example, some countries do not have a constitution or language legislation (ibid.<sup>[2]</sup>). Implicit legal recognition includes two subtypes:

(1) mentioning a sign language only in legislation on disability, equality, or education; (2) granting recognition by declaration or government decision.

As mentioned, the recognition of a language could influence the practical use of that language in the whole society, such as media, education, and government work. Take media, for instance, a recognized language often obtains a higher exposure rate. For example, Maori was recognized as an official language of New Zealand in 1987 (Benton, 1996)<sup>[17]</sup>: by 1991, there were more than 20 radio channels on Maori set up by the Broadcasting Commission; moreover, the Maori channel started to broadcast in 2002 (Cham, 2002)<sup>[9]</sup>. In educational settings, a recognized language is more likely to be used. For instance, in Ontario, a province of Canada, Quebec Sign Language (LSQ) has been officially recognized as a language of instruction, and the governments have carried out actions to include LSQ in educational settings across the provincial jurisdictions (Parisot & Rinfret, 2012)<sup>[4]</sup>. On the other hand, the implementation of the follow-up measures after language recognition could fall short of the expectation (McKee & Manning, 2015)<sup>[18]</sup>.

## 3. The Sociolinguistic Environment in Hong Kong

This section introduces the sociolinguistic situation for the deaf and HKSL in Hong Kong. Hong Kong is a Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China since the sovereignty of Hong Kong was returned in 1997. Since the handover, the Hong Kong SAR (HK-SAR hereafter) government adopts “Biliteracy and Trilingualism” as the language-in-education policy. It refers to the use of standard English and Chinese as the written languages; and English, Cantonese and Putonghua (the national language of the People’s Republic of China, also known as Mandarin) as spoken varieties (Lai & Poon, 2011<sup>[12]</sup>; D. C. S. Li, 2017<sup>[13]</sup>). According to the Basic Law of HKSAR, Chinese and English are the official languages (Chinese version: ‘正式語文’) of HKSAR (Chapter I, Article 9). On the other hand, Hong Kong Sign Language (HKSL), which is widely used in the Deaf community in Hong Kong, is not mentioned.

We lack certain data on the number of deaf HKSL users. According to the report of a selected survey conducted by the Census and Statistics Department in Hong Kong in 2014 (sample rate: 0.3% of all Hong

<sup>3</sup> Although in other related activities on this motion, HKSL was specified, the original wording in the official record of the motion was ‘striving to make sign language an official language of Hong Kong’, i.e., HKSL was not specified.

<sup>4</sup> The original table in the file was bilingual, which is the convention for the official documents in Hong Kong.

Kong households), the estimated population with hearing impairment was 155,200, among which 4,300 (2.8%) were unable to hear at all. There are 3,900 (2.5%) persons who knew how to use sign language (HKSAR, 2014)<sup>[19]</sup>.

In history, deaf education in Hong Kong has been predominantly adopted oralism especially after the mid-1970s (Siu, 2016)<sup>[20]</sup>. Paddy (2003)<sup>[11]</sup> defines Oralism in terms of the belief that the best way in order to integrate deaf students is learning speech, therefore they should learn to lip-read. Moreover, according to Oralism, sign languages as such are considered a tool that alienates deaf students from the ultimate goal of integration. As a result, oralists believe that sign languages should not be encouraged in educating deaf people. In the early 1960s, the oralist approach and inclusive education started to be stressed and gradually overrode manual approach. As a result, many members of the Deaf community in Hong Kong – meaning, with the sense of belonging to the Deaf, as briefly illustrated above – who were born after the 1960s grew up in deaf schools where speech and lip-reading was the primary medium of instruction, and signing was generally discouraged (Chan, 2017<sup>[21]</sup>; Siu, 2016<sup>[20]</sup>; Sze, Lo, Lo, & Chu, 2013<sup>[22]</sup>). In the mid-1970s, all schools adopting sign language in instruction were closed, only four deaf schools remained, and they all employed the oralist approach (Sze et al., 2013)<sup>[22]</sup>. Due to the growing concern about poor educational results of Oralism, in the latest decades, the use of sign language has been re-introduced to the education systems in many parts of the world. In spite of this rehabilitation of sign languages as the main tool of instruction for the deaf, in the 2000s, in Hong Kong, two of the four deaf schools closed down, one (the Lutheran School for the Deaf) has converted to a mainstream school and is phasing out the deaf students, only one remains until the present. A relatively small number of deaf students enter this school, and they are encouraged to use either speech or total communication (Siu, 2016<sup>[20]</sup>; Yiu & Tang, 2014<sup>[23]</sup>). The majority of deaf children enter mainstream schools, where no support of HKSL is provided. There is also one experimental sign-bilingual co-enrolment education program (the SLCO program) run by the Centre for Sign Linguistics and Deaf Studies of The Chinese University of Hong Kong (Tang, Lam, & Yiu, 2014)<sup>[24]</sup>. This program runs through kindergarten to secondary school. There is one co-enrolment class in each grade, where deaf and

hearing children learn together with both signed and spoken languages.

As for sign interpreters in Hong Kong, according to the registry organized by the Hong Kong Council of Social Service, the number of sign interpreters is 51 (HKCSS, 2018)<sup>[25]</sup>. From July 2018, the two major television channels started to provide sign interpretation to at least one news program during the period of 6 pm to 12 am each day. The total length has to be longer than 15 minutes. This was the implementation of the regulations on the TV channels issued by the Office of the Communication Authority of Hong Kong SAR (OFCA) in October 2017, that the condition of granting a TV channel the ‘License of Providing Local Free Program Broadcasting Service (本地免費電視節目服務牌照)’ is that it provides sign interpretation to Cantonese News programs (HKSAR, 2017b)<sup>[26]</sup>. In terms of recourses for normal people to learn HKSL, the Chinese University of Hong Kong is the only university in Hong Kong that provides courses for students to learn HKSL. There are also a few deaf associations and spare time learning centers that teach HKSL, to the deaf as well as to the non-deaf.

From the motion striving for the official recognition of HKSL, we can see that there are opposing opinions towards the necessity of a sign language to be recognized. In addition, there is little literature on the topic of recognition of sign languages and attitudes toward sign languages. These two factors motivate this study. We aim to fill the gap by investigating the attitudes towards the official recognition of HKSL by Hong Kong Citizens. Our general research question can be stated concretely in two different steps: first, what are the attitudes in general towards the official recognition of HKSL? Second, what are the impacting factors on the attitudes? Our hypothesis is that attitudes vary according to the awareness of the HKSL and eventually to the engagement in terms of language activism.

## 4. Methodology

We conducted long-distance semi-structured interviews with three groups participants. In this section, we will introduce in detail the procedure of this study and the design of the interview.

### 4.1 Participants

As a preliminary investigation, we narrowed down the range of target aspects involved in the topic. We anticipate

<sup>5</sup>It refers to the philosophy which encourages the use of whichever forms of communication were deemed appropriate for the individual deaf child. It led to the use of signed system, that is using signs in the word order of a spoken language. Under this philosophy, sign language is still regarded as an ‘educational tool’ rather than a bearer of an organic, holistic approach to the lives and experience of deaf children and deaf community.

two possible factors that might influence attitudes:

1) Whether the participant is deaf. We predict that deaf people will widely be supportive towards the recognition of HKSL, whereas the attitudes will vary among the hearing group.

2) Whether the participant is involved in the Deaf community. We anticipate that among hearing participants, those who are involved in the Deaf community tend to support the recognition of HKSL more than those who are not.

We took the two anticipated, controlled variables just stated as for the selection of participants in terms of purposeful sampling for our qualitative research. We recruited three groups of participants: 1) deaf: deaf participants who use HKSL as one of their major languages for daily communication; 2) hearing-related: hearing participants who are involved in the Deaf community in Hong Kong on (or nearly on) a daily basis; and 3) hearing-unrelated: hearing participants who do not have contact with the Deaf community in Hong Kong on a daily basis.

We recruited ten participants for each group on a friend-of-a-friend basis, following the snowballing method normally used in qualitative research. In this process of selection, we tried our best to even the distribution of gender and age in each group and the varieties of their vocations. However, limited by various factors, we did not manage to achieve a perfectly even distribution. The majority of the participants are from the age group of 20-40. The distribution of gender, age is shown in Table 2 and Table 3, respectively.

**Table 2. Distribution of Gender of the Three Groups of Participants**

Gender	deaf	hearing-related	hearing-unrelated	Total
Female	6	7	4	17
Male	4	3	6	13

**Table 3. Distribution of Different Age Ranges of the Participants**

Age range	deaf	hearing-related	hearing-unrelated	Total
20-30	0	5	4	9
30-40	5	4	5	14
40-50	3	1	0	4
50-60	2	0	1	3

The distribution of the educational attainment and the

vocations of the participants are shown in Table 4 and Table 5.

**Table 4. The Educational Attainment of the Participants**

Education attainment	deaf	hearing-related	hearing-unrelated	Total
Lower secondary	0	0	1	1
Upper secondary	7	0	0	7
Post-secondary	3	10	9	22

**Table 5. The Distribution of the Vocations of the Participants (by Fields)**

Field of vocation	deaf	hearing-related	hearing-unrelated	Total
Agriculture, forestry, and fishing	1			1
Import/export, wholesale and retail trades			2	2
Information and communications			1	1
Financial service activities			1	1
Professional, scientific and technical	3	4		7
Administrative and support service activities	1		1	2
Public administration			1	1
Education	3	4		7
Human health and social work activities		2	3	5
Other service activities	1		1	2
Work activities within domestic households	1			1

(Note: The fields listed in the table follows the industrial classification defined in Hong Kong Standard Industrial Classification (HSIC) Version 2.0, HKSAR, 2009.<sup>[27]</sup>)

The participants in the group of hearing-related are mainly from three fields: professional, education, and social work activities. They are researchers doing sign language research or Deaf studies, teachers of deaf students, sign interpreters, and staff from organizations that are related to the Deaf community. One participant also has deaf siblings. The vocations of the deaf group and the hearing-unrelated group are more varying. Their jobs include farm worker, research assistant, teacher, office clerk, individual businessman, housewife, civil servant, nurse, social worker, salesman, editor, and actuary.

## 4.2 The Form of Data Collection

In this study, we adopted a one-on-one long-distance

<sup>6</sup>Differ in factors such as level of hearing loss, family/socio-environment one is in, educational background, and personal preference, a few deaf participants interviewed in this study also use Cantonese on a regular basis, for example, in interacting with hearing families, or with hearing colleague at work. But the proficiency of their Cantonese is unknown, and such data is not relevant for the purposes of this study.

<sup>7</sup>The proficiency in HKSL is not a mandatory criterion of this group. However, most of them are highly proficient in HKSL.



semi-structured interview to collect the attitudes. The interviewer (the first author) is a native speaker of Mandarin and is fluent Cantonese and HKSL; interviews were conducted in Cantonese and HKSL, according to the situation. With the participants' consent, we recorded the interviews. For deaf participants, HKSL was used, and the videos were recorded; for hearing participants, Cantonese was used, and the audio-recordings were made.

There are three main reasons for choosing the method of semi-structured interview: first, in this study, considering the limited written proficiency of Chinese of the deaf participants, we did not adopt an anonymous written survey, although it might be more comfortable for the participants to express their attitude explicitly. Second, as mentioned above, the topic can be sensitive to some extent, therefore, some interviewee may not be willing to reveal their opinions explicitly. Concerning this problem, compared to a full-structured interview, a semi-structured interview could ensure enough rooms for the researcher to follow up or to back up according to the participants' various responses, and to get the answer to the research questions as much as possible. Third, although we anticipated two factors that might affect the attitudes, we do not have a clear idea of other possible affecting factors. Also, we want to know the specific opinions on the official recognition of HKSL. Therefore, an interview is more informative than a questionnaire. Above all, we argue that a semi-structured interview is the most suitable approach for this study.

### 4.3 The Design of the Interview

The researcher firstly sent the information brochure and the consent form of this study (in Traditional Chinese) to the potential participants. In the information brochure, we informed the purpose of the study, the target number of the participants and the form of the investigation. We also provided an ethical agreement. Each interview was scheduled after the participants gave us their consent for participating in the interview, being recorded during the whole conversation, and the use of the data for this study. The interviews were conducted on different dates from October 2018 to January 2019 using various messaging apps (WhatsApp, Facebook messenger, and Facetime). After the interview with each interviewee, demographic information was collected by several oral/signed questions.

The interview contains one warm-up question (Question 0), five real guiding questions that serve to answer the research questions (Question 1-Question 5), and one closing question (Question 6). The questions are shown in Table 6.

**Table 6. List of the Interview Questions**

#	Questions
0	Do you know how many people in Hong Kong rely on HKSL in communication? How do you know?
1	Have you read any news on the event of striving for the official recognition of HKSL?
2	What do you think of the provided news/the voting?
3	Have you followed the progress of this motion?
4	How do you think the recognition of HKSL would influence you?
5-1	Taking into account the official recognition of HKSL and the social environment in Hong Kong for deaf people, what do you think is the best situation in ten years?
5-2	What do you think is the worst situation in ten years?
5-3	What do you think is the best situation for now?
6	Do you have anything to add? Or, did you have anything else to say?

In general, by the five guiding questions we expect to detect participants' knowledge of the Deaf community, their attentions and perspectives on the motion and relevant deaf issues, and their attitudes towards the recognition of HKSL. Considering that the motion strives for rights for deaf people – who are often regarded as a 'vulnerable group' in Hong Kong society, participants with negative attitude might have concerns to reveal it, as it might seem 'unkind'. Therefore, we designed Question 2 as a 'buffer question' that allows participants to comfortably comment as a bystander, yet still reveal their positions. The questions in 5 also direct participants to mention specific aspects such as sign interpretation, deaf education, and the relationship between hearing and deaf people, etc., which will enable us to find out possible factors affecting their attitudes on the official recognition of HKSL.

Before the real interviews, we conducted two pilot interviews with two other participants. The pilot interviews were useful to test the robustness of the very structure of the interview itself. During the actual interviews, the sequence of the questions was adjustable according to the participants' response. For example, some participants already mentioned their involvement in the campaign (target answer to Question 3) while answering Question 1 and Question 2, in such case, Question 3 was skipped. On average, each interview lasts for 30-45 minutes. For a few participants who were too talkative or too reticent, we adopted steering and prompting strategies. The most useful strategy was asking confirmations: if a participant gradually talked off track of the topic, then the researcher asked him/her for the confirmation of the opinions that s/he expressed previously; if a participant is less talkative, then the researcher also asked for confirmation for a certain point and asked for elaboration or reasons of thinking so.

### 4.4 After the Interviews: Some Observations

Generally, the designed questions worked well. It is important to note that all participants were aware that the researcher's job is related to sign language before the interviews started. We took into account this problem in our design and during the interviews. However, it is also important to underline the fact that the degree of knowledge on the researcher's occupation varies among different groups. In particular, all participants in the hearing-related group, as well as some participants in the deaf group, know exactly that the interviewer is a sign linguist specialized in (socio)linguistic research of sign languages. On the other hand, most of the participants in the hearing-unrelated group only generically know that the interviewer 'does research on sign language'. In other words, they did not have a clear idea of the working content of the interviewer in detail. Moreover, many of them thought that the job of sign linguists is to learn as many sign languages as they can. Admittedly, one could argue that the knowledge of the researchers' involvement in the Deaf community might cause a positive bias in the participants' response, i.e., a bias in favour of the official recognition of HKSL, in order to please the interviewer. We tried to avoid the researcher's influence as best as we could. In particular, during the interview, it could still be told that bias exists, particularly in the hearing-unrelated group: A few participants in this group with neutral or negative attitudes towards recognition of HKSL used proper wording on purposely. Let us report two individual cases of particular interest. Two interviewees almost used 'move' ( 挪 ) in referring to the use of hands by deaf people, and then they swallowed the word and changed to 'sign' ( 打 ). One participant also asked the researcher 'Is such answer okay?' after she responded: 'The recognition of HKSL will not influence my life.' When asked about 'What do you think of the voting?' (Question 2), one participant with negative attitude talked about why the council members and other social members do not support the recognition, s/he used 'they' all the time, instead of 'I'. We believe that it is a clear indication that s/he was avoiding clarifying her/his position on the issue. By contrast, participants in the deaf and hearing-related group were franker in expressing their positions and opinions, even for participants who hold neutral and negative attitudes towards recognition.

## 5. Results

In this section, we will elaborate our findings summarized from the response in the interviews.

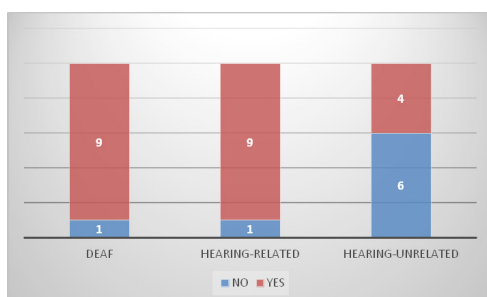
### 5.1 The Attention on the Campaign

Overall, the three groups show a different degree of attention on the campaign of fighting for the recognition of HKSL. This observation mainly bases on the answers

to Question 1 and the interaction during the interview. In the analysis phase, according to the response of all participants, we identify four aspects of knowledge that are related to the topic, the first two addressing status planning, the other ones being more focused on HKSL specifically. First, *the motivation of fighting for official recognition of HKSL*. To be specific, some participants, whether they agree or not, are aware that the motion strives for a better linguistic right for deaf people and aims to bring more resources for deaf people to use sign language in society. Second, *the potential influence of the official recognition of HKSL*. Similar to the first aspect, some participants are clear about the specific consequences that could be brought by the recognition of HKSL, such as in sign interpretation services and deaf education; whereas others show less knowledge of it. The third point is more specific and general at the same time. The fact that HKSL *is a language*, and therefore it has properties common to all human languages, such as having vocabulary variation. Some participants know very well about the above-mentioned linguistic nature of HKSL, whereas some others know less about it, and a few of them think that it is a deprived gestural version of Chinese. The fourth point addresses the relation between language and the sense of belonging. *The role of HKSL in the Deaf community* that for many deaf people it is the most comfortable language to communicate. Some participants believe that HKSL is crucial to deaf people, others think that deaf people could learn to speak and use written Chinese as the major language to communicate in the society.

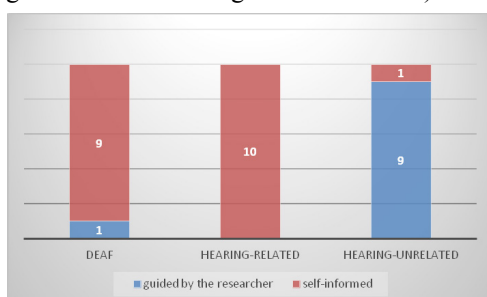
The results show two knowledge patterns in the interviewees: 'self-informed' and 'guided-by-the-researcher'. 'Self-informed' refers to those who clearly showed basic knowledge of all these four aspects; 'guided-by-researcher' refers to those who showed vague awareness of at least one of the four aspects and requested for further explanation by the researcher. Figure 1 presents the distribution of answers to Question 1, and Figure 2 depicts the distribution of the knowledge patterns of three groups.

All participants in the hearing-related group know about the motion and the result of the voting in the Legislative Council and was self-informed during the interview. In the deaf group, only one deaf participant did not hear about it and was guided by the researcher. By contrast, in the hearing-unrelated group, more than half of the participants (N=6) did not hear about the news about the campaign. In addition, during the interview, most of them (N=9) request further information on the topic from the researcher.



**Figure 1.** Count of Answers to Question 1 of the Three Groups

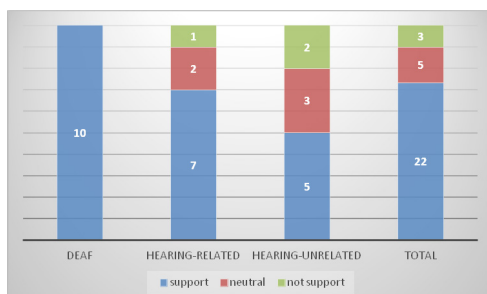
(Question 1: Have you read any news on the event of striving for the official recognition of HKSL?)



**Figure 2.** Distribution of Informed Type in the Three Groups

## 5.2 Different Attitudes of Each Group

According to the responses from the participants, we defined three types of attitudes towards the recognition of HKSL: 1) Support. The participant believes that the official recognition of HKSL is necessary and urgent; 2) Neutral. The participant does not show clear position on whether or not they support the official recognition of HKSL, or the participant thinks that the official recognition of HKSL is necessary for the future, but not now; 3) Not support. The participant does not think that the official recognition of HKSL is necessary. We present the distribution of different attitudes of each group in Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** Different Attitudes towards the Recognition of HKSL by the Three Groups

As can be seen, the majority participant expressed a supportive attitude towards the recognition of HKSL, five out of 30 participants hold a neutral position, and three expressed negative attitudes. Looking closer into the three groups, all deaf participants support the official recognition of HKSL; whereas in other groups, three different attitudes exist. In the following, we will summarize the main reasons for the three types of attitudes expressed by the participants in each group.

### 5.2.1 Deaf Group

We summarized six main reasons mentioned by the deaf participants why they support the official recognition of HKSL. The details of the supporting reasons mentioned by each participant is shown in Table 7, while explanations will follow immediately.

**Table 7.** Details of the Supporting Reasons Mentioned by Each Participant in the Deaf Group

Participant	Reason 1	Reason 2	Reason 3	Reason 4	Reason 5	Reason 6
	Equal human right	Improve sign interpretation and living quality of the deaf	Better education for the deaf	Better social environment for the next deaf generation	Good for the development of HKSL	Legal safeguard
D1			*	*		
D2	*	*				
D3	*	*	*	*	*	
D4	*	*		*	*	
D5		*		*	*	
D6	*	*	*	*	*	
D7	*	*		*		
D8		*			*	
D9		*	*	*	*	*
D10		*				
Total	5	9	4	7	6	1

**Reason 1.** It will ensure deaf people to have equal human right as hearing people.

Five deaf participants believe that by recognizing HKSL as an official language, the government acknowledges that HKSL has the equal social status as Cantonese, English, and Mandarin, and deaf people have the equal linguistic right as hearing people. Besides, one participant also thinks it will show that the government fulfils the obligations in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

<sup>8</sup>One participant in the hearing-related group answered 'no' for Question 1, but s/he was involved in the campaign. As s/he humorously said: "You know, usually people who are involved in a course does not follow the news reports on it."

**Reason 2.** It will improve the sign interpretation service, which will enhance the overall quality of living of deaf people.

Nine deaf participants mentioned that the official recognition of HKSL will urge the government to promote the development of the sign interpretation. It will apply to various aspects of the society both quantitatively and qualitatively. For example, official report, news report, emergency broadcast, and even sitcoms will have sign interpretation; sign interpretation training school and service center may be built up; and public places such as police offices, hospitals, job markets, examination centers, museums, banks, and restaurants will provide sign interpretation service.

**Reason 3.** It could create a better educational environment for deaf people.

There were four deaf participants who believe that if HKSL is recognized as an official language, schools will provide sign language interpretation for deaf students. Moreover, HKSL might be instructed in schools, and deaf students could even be able to use it in exams. These changes will ensure deaf students to have equal access to the educational resources as hearing students. In a long run, it could improve the overall literacy level of the deaf community, enabling deaf people to fit in different vocations and to contribute to society better. At the same time, it could also educate more hearing social members to know about sign language.

**Reason 4.** It will prepare a better social environment for the next generation of deaf people.

Seven deaf participants argue that the official recognition of HKSL will prepare a better social environment for the next generation of deaf people in terms of mental health, educational opportunity, job opportunities, and living environment. As a result, the next generation could live less passively in society.

**Reason 5.** It could create a better social environment for the development of HKSL.

Six deaf people said that, although nowadays there is more and more effort from various civil groups to promote the development of HKSL, the official recognition of HKSL and the measures implemented by the government will be much more efficient and influential, such as in educating the public about HKSL, and conducting HKSL class or sign interpretation training.

**Reason 6.** It acts as a legal safeguard for the linguistic right of deaf people.

One participant mentioned that if HKSL is officially recognized, the public will have the legal reference to urge and supervise the government to implement measures in protecting the linguistic right of deaf people.

## 5.2.2 Hearing-related Group

In the hearing-related group, seven participants support the official recognition of HKSL, two of them are neutral, and one does not support. In the following, we will illustrate each type of attitude in detail.

### (1) Support

The six main supporting reasons raised by the deaf participants were all mentioned by the participants in this group (Table 8).

**Table 8. Details of the Supporting Reasons Mentioned by Each Participant in the Hearing-related Group**

	Reason 1	Reason 2	Reason 3	Reason 4	Reason 5	Reason 6
Participant	Equal human right	Improve sign interpretation and living quality of the deaf	Better education for the deaf	Better social environment for the next deaf generation	Good for the development of HKSL	Legal safeguard
HR2		*				
HR3	*		*	*	*	*
HR4		*			*	
HR5	*	*	*	*	*	
HR6	*				*	
HR7	*	*	*			*
HR8	*	*			*	
Total	5	5	3	2	5	2

The majority of participants with supportive attitudes mentioned that the recognition is good for members of the Deaf community. One participant said that the official recognition of HKSL would create a better society for all members: *“If deaf people have the right to use their language in society, their life will be easier, they might earn more money, getting better educated. As a consequence, their ability to take care of their families, or to educate their children would improve, in this sense, the official recognition of HKSL not only improves the living quality of deaf people but also their families as a whole. Its impact is therefore immense.”*

### (2) Neutral

One participant argues that the official recognition of HKSL is good and necessary for the future, but it is not for the current Hong Kong society. In the following, we summarize the main points of such an argumentation line, which is quite articulated. As a starting point, s/he thinks that many members of the Deaf community in Hong Kong



nowadays are not yet ready for the situations to be brought by the recognition of HKSL. S/He raised two issues: First, the existence of different varieties of signing. S/He argues that given the fact that one concept can have different signs in sign language, among Deaf people, they do not have a consensual version of signing. The argument by this interviewee continues as follows. Deaf people sometimes still fight with each other on which version of signing is correct, making different varieties linger across different groups. According to this participant, that behavior can bring confusion to the governors and social members on how to apply the measures after the recognition of HKSL. In particular, the translation of the official documents and the qualification of sign interpretation, etc. We will reprise and comment on this objection in the Discussion. Moreover, this participant thinks that although deaf people tend to believe that once HKSL is recognized, they will become more informed about their surroundings. In this participant's opinion, a concept such as 'official language' as well as other legal concepts may not be understood correctly by many deaf people, due to their poor educational background in this field. The result, paradoxically, may be that the implementation of sign interpretation could be achieved only formally, but eventually not so useful. S/He believes that the recognition of HKSL would be more effective if done after 10 years or so, because by then a group of deaf children who are now studying in the SLCO program has grown up and have adequate world knowledge to comprehend and promote these things.

Another participant states that whether or not s/he supports the official recognition of HKSL is not important; instead, it is what Deaf people thinks about this topic that matters.

#### Not support

One participant does not support the official recognition of HKSL, because s/he thinks that an official language should be a language widely used by society before to be recognized. This interviewee doubts: "*Apart from HKSL, there are also many other minority languages in the Hong Kong society. They should also be treated equally. Then does it mean that every language has to be officially recognized? To me, it makes little sense.*" Besides, s/he argues that whether or not the government takes measures to promote a language is not directly related to its status of being an official language. Instead, it is the government's willingness and motivation to promote HKSL that decides

the development of HKSL.

#### 5.2.3 Hearing-unrelated Group

In the hearing-related group, five participants support the official recognition of HKSL, three of them are neutral, and two does not support.

#### Support

The details of the supporting reasons given by the hearing-unrelated group is shown in Table 9:

Table 9. Details of the Supporting Reasons Mentioned by Each Participant in the Hearing-unrelated Group

	Reason 1	Reason 2	Reason 3	Reason 4	Reason 5	Reason 6
Participant	Equal human right	Improve sign interpretation and living quality of the deaf	Better education for the deaf	Better social environment for the next deaf generation	Good for the development of HKSL	Legal safeguard
HU1	*	*				
HU5	*	*			*	*
HU7	*	*				
HU9		*				
HU10		*	*			
Total	3	5	1	0	1	1

Overall, the supportive reasons given by this group are more general. Although all of them mentioned 'It (the official recognition of HKSL) will help deaf people communicate better.' Compare to the other two groups, they showed more vague knowledge about how exactly HKSL will enhance the communication. Also, aspects such as deaf education, the impact of the next generation of deaf people, and legal impacts were less mentioned. Four participants mentioned that they feel that the current support to the deaf from the government is not enough, and the government often neglects deaf people's needs.

#### Neutral

Among the participants who reveal neutral attitudes, all of them mentioned that they are not familiar with the exact needs of deaf people. In addition, whether HKSL is recognized or not has little influence on their current life. Nevertheless, they all agree that more support to improve the communication of deaf people is needed. One believes

<sup>9</sup>According to the '2016 Population by Census Thematic Report: Ethnic Minorities' (HKSAR, 2016)[28], there were a total of 58,383 ethnic minorities, constituting 8.0 % of the whole population in Hong Kong. A significant proportion of them is foreign domestic helpers from the Philippines, Indonesia, and immigrants from South Asia and other western countries.

that expanding the influence and the use of HKSL does not need to rely on statutes by the government but can be promoted by civil groups such as sign language activists, via platforms including media and the Internet. Another two participants mentioned they are not sure that the recognition of HKSL could guarantee a better life of deaf people.

### Not support

Analogously to the participant with negative attitude in the hearing-related group, one participant in this group also believes all minority languages spoken by different groups in Hong Kong should be treated equally, therefore recognizing HKSL is not necessary. However, s/he agrees that measures to increase sign interpretation are needed. The other participant expressed the concern that if HKSL is recognized, a great range of aspects in the whole society will require changes, such as facilitating sign interpretation in various of departments, adding sign language in the compulsory course in school, adding statutes in the law, etc. In this participant's opinion, since deaf people form a small group of people in Hong Kong, changes involving the whole society is not 'economically profitable and necessary' -- whatever this would mean. In addition, s/he reveals the concern on the potential conflicts of interest brought by the changes after the recognition: *"If HKSL is recognized, does that mean if I'm not able to sign HKSL, or not able to provide sign interpretation in my business, they (deaf people) have the right to sue me?"*

### 5.3 What is the Best Situation in 10 Years?

When asked to imagine the best social situation in 10 years (Question 5-1), the three groups generally mentioned that they hope that society becomes more inclusive. Deaf people could easily communicate in society, with well-equipped sign interpretation services. Also, deaf people could equally participate in society. They are equally respected, get equal access to information, and could work in various positions as hearing people. Despite the shared hopes, the answers still reveal some slight differences across the three groups, as we will see immediately. In particular, more participants in the hearing-unrelated groups mentioned that they hope the public will get general education on basic HKSL, whereas no participant in the hearing-related group mentioned it. In addition, more participants in the deaf group mentioned that deaf people be treated equally as hearing people; for example, they mentioned the set-up of deaf colleges and deaf TV channels, whereas comparably, hearing participants mentioned more about how the society could become better inclusive by improving sign interpretation services and sign language education. In Table 10, we summarized the different points specified by the participants in the

answers to Question 5-1.

**Table 10. Summary of Answers to Question 5-1 by the Three Groups of Participants**

Best situations in 10 years	deaf	hearing-related	hearing-unrelated	Total
HKSL is recognized as an official language.	1	3	2	6
The society becomes inclusive, such as in education, media, and public services, sign interpretation services are well facilitated and accessible in these areas. Hearing and deaf people can communicate and cooperate easily.	6	8	6	20
The public gets an education on HKSL and Deaf culture. Everyone knows that HKSL is a language and can communicate with deaf people in basic HKSL.	2	0	6	8
Deaf people can equally participate in society as hearing people. They are equally respected; they get equal educational opportunities; they can work in most occupations, and they get the same amount of information.	3	2	2	7
Deaf people are more aware of their identity, culture, and rights	1	0	0	1

### 5.4 What is the Worst Situation in 10 Years?

When asked to describe the worst situation in 10 years, the majority of participants believe that if the situation remained the same as today, it would be the worst. Six participants mentioned that the worst case would be the SLCO program and the only deaf school eventually shut down, and deaf children will no longer have access to sign language. Eight participants mentioned that the worst situation is when the Deaf community and their culture, language eventually extinct, and right defense movements for deaf people gradually disappear. The different points mentioned by the participants in the answers to Question 5-2 are summarized in Table 11.

**Table 11. Summary of Answers to Question 5-2 by the Three Groups of Participants**

Worst situations in 10 years	deaf	hearing-related	hearing-unrelated	Total
The situation for deaf people remains the same. The government does not acknowledge and support the use of HKSL; Deaf people still live passively in the society in their relatively closed circles, with low social status, and little sign interpretation support, many barriers in education, work, and communication; The public knows and cares very little about deaf people's need.	8	5	8	21
Deaf children no longer have access to sign language in schools. The SLCO program shuts down. There is no deaf school, or deaf schools do not use sign language in teaching.	3	3	0	6
People no longer fight for the right of using HKSL and the right for deaf people in Hong Kong. There are fewer and fewer sign interpreters because they do not earn enough money. Deaf community and HKSL eventually disappear.	1	5	2	8

## 5.5 What is the Best Situation for Now?

When asked to suggest the best situation for the current Hong Kong society, the three groups commonly believe that the public should be better informed about deaf community and HKSL (deaf group: N=4; hearing-related group: N=3; hearing-unrelated group: N=6). In particular, the needs and strengths of deaf people, and the vitality of HKSL. This reflects that such knowledge is lacking in the current Hong Kong society. The second most mentioned situation is that deaf people get better informed by having more access to sign interpretation in schools, public services, and media. Four participants (deaf: N=3; hearing-unrelated: N=1) mentioned that more news reports, live streaming TV shows and speeches by politicians should facilitate sign interpretation and subtitles. Table 12 presents the aspects mentioned by the participants.

**Table 12. Summary of Answers to Question 5-3 by the Three Groups of Participants**

Best situations for now	deaf	hearing-related	hearing-unrelated	Total
Governors revisit the issue of recognition of HKSL and listen more about the needs of deaf people.	1	2	1	4
The government actively promote HKSL to the public.	0	2	5	7
The public gets to know more about HKSL and deaf people, and know more about their strengths. The cooperation between hearing and deaf people improves.	4	3	6	13
Deaf education improves. Deaf children and their parents have more access to HKSL.	1	1	0	2
Deaf people better participate in society; they become more confident, explore the world more actively. They have more working opportunities.	2	2	0	4
Deaf people get better access to surrounding information. More sign interpretation in schools, public services, and media, especially emergency announcements and live telecasted events.	4	1	1	6
Training of sign interpretation, HKSL are boosted. The quality of sign interpretation and the number of sign interpreters improve.	3	2	0	5

## 6. Discussion

In this section, we will first discuss the affecting factors of attitudes. Second, we will reflect on two issues: we will discuss the role of HKSL in education, and then touch the issue of language standardization.

### 6.1 Affecting Factors of the Attitudes

In the analysis, we identify three factors that affect the attitudes of the participants.

#### 1) The knowledge of deaf people.

Our anticipations of the two major influencing factors are partially proved. First, every deaf interviewee supports the recognition of HKSL, and they all believe that it could improve their linguistic situation, which will influence

every aspect of their life. Compare to the two hearing groups, deaf participants emphasize more on the equality in accessing and participating the society as hearing people. On the other hand, unlike what we anticipated, the two hearing groups does not differ tremendously in terms of the distribution of three different attitudes.

Nevertheless, the perspectives behind the positions seem to differ. Overall, the hearing-unrelated group tends to be aware of the problem in communication faced by deaf people. They used more wording such as 'help' and 'deaf-mute people', which many Deaf individuals do not agree. By contrast, the hearing-related group is more aware of different aspects of problems faced by deaf people, including education, work, media, and legal rights. They also emphasize more on the equal opportunities for participation in society, compare to the hearing-unrelated group. Such a difference seems to be positively related to the varying level of knowledge of deaf people, including their needs, culture, and linguistic situation, etc. In addition, it shows that the specific opinions expressed by the participants depend on their occupations and working experiences. For instance, teachers of deaf students commonly emphasize the critical role of sign language in schools. They believe that it plays a vital role in getting deaf students equally informed and educated. There is a slight difference between deaf and hearing teachers, though: hearing teachers tend to pay more attention to sign interpretations in class, whereas deaf teachers emphasize more on the opportunities of using sign language for both deaf and hearing students. Compare with other participants, sign interpreters seem to be more aware of the self-independence of deaf people, two of the three sign interpreters mentioned that it is essential for deaf people to understand the mechanism behind the recognition of HKSL, and how different groups in society operate and influence each other.

#### 2) How the participants view the recognition of HKSL.

The responses in the interview reveal that participants view the recognition of HKSL differently. Take its influence as an instance, all deaf participants seem to believe that recognition of HKSL will directly lead to the improvement of sign interpretation service. As a result, it could guarantee the improvement of the living situation of deaf people. On the other hand, some participants from the other two groups reserve judgment on such a direct correlation. Some of them expressed that the promotion of HKSL does not necessarily have to rely on recognition.

Besides, some participants view 'the recognition of HKSL' statically, they see it as an ultimate consequence, whereas others see it as a dynamic process. Several

participants falling into the first type anticipated that before ‘the recognition of HKSL’ succeeds, campaigns striving for the recognition of HKSL, like the one in 2017, will re-occur several times in the future. This perspective could also be one of the reasons why two participants (hearing-related group: N=1; hearing-unrelated group: N=1) believe that the current situation in Hong Kong is not ready for the recognition of HKSL. In comparison, among those who see the recognition of HKSL as a dynamic process with several stages, six participants (hearing-related group: N=3; hearing-unrelated group: N=3) mentioned that the government should set a schedule to achieve the recognition of HKSL step by step. They raised that before recognizing HKSL in the law, promoting HKSL to the public, making it widely known by social members is an urgent and reachable step; likewise, revising and adjusting the implemented measures in the latter stage is also a necessary step for the whole process of recognition of HKSL.

### 3) How the participants view the achievement of the things in general.

About the fact that there are still many unsolved problems that are closely related to the official recognition of HKSL, such as lack of adequate deaf teachers, sign interpreters, and research, different ways of thinking of the participants also influence their attitudes towards the issue. Some participants argue that the recognition of HKSL should be first taken as a pioneering step, regardless of the tendency that many unexpected problems will pop up. They are convinced that only after this step is achieved, would the following problems be fixed once they present themselves, one by one. On the other side, some participants insist that before HKSL could be recognized, more work should be done to avoid the anticipated problems as much as possible.

## 6.2 How Important is HKSL?

As can be seen from Section 5, the opinions on whether the recognition of HKSL could guarantee a better promotion of HKSL in society vary among the participants. A core motivation to support the recognition of HKSL is that people hope the recognition will eventually make it easier for deaf people in Hong Kong to use HKSL in society. It would then allow them to communicate more comfortably, to become better informed about the surroundings, to better participate in the society, and to change the existing situation in which deaf people are often at disadvantaged positions in different aspects of the society. We do not have an answer to the question of how directly the recognition of HKSL will influence the achievement of these hopes of improvement. However, from the deaf participants’

responses, it is obvious that deaf people in Hong Kong still encounter many obstacles in communication and in getting information about the society. The barriers range from daily life activities such as going to the bank, visiting doctors, studying in schools to spiritual achievements, such as getting access to amusement and art, and being respected as deaf.

When it comes to the consensus that ‘actions should be taken to strive for a better situation’, the next questions will be “How urgent is it?” and “What are the best choice of actions?” As mentioned earlier, during the interviews, many participants from the hearing-unrelated group asked questions about the Deaf community. This reflects that the majority of social members still know very little about deaf people’s needs. As one hearing-unrelated participant said, *“We know that many deaf people need help, but we don’t know what they need exactly.”* In fact, several participants from the deaf and hearing-related group also observed and mentioned this problem. Concerning the urgency, social members that have little contact with the Deaf community also tend to feel vague about it. On the other hand, hearing people that are closely involved in the Deaf community show stronger eagerness to the implements of the actions, even stronger than the deaf group. Most of these hearing people commit to various occupations that serve the Deaf community, such as sign interpreters, teachers of deaf students, and researchers. At the same time, they are hearing people who have free access to the majority of society. Being at such positions, they show clearer awareness of the problems. One hearing teacher of the deaf puts it: *“Whenever I think of the many deaf students being absent in mind in class, just because they could not hear well, I feel worried and sad. It (the use of HKSL in deaf education) really needs to be implemented as soon as possible. The kids are growing up!”*

Deaf education is a crucial issue. It was mentioned frequently by the deaf and hearing-related participants (Section 5, Reason 3 and Reason 4 for the supportive attitude). It is intimately related to the well-being of the next generation of deaf people and the development of the Deaf community. In our opinion, strategies adopted in deaf education should consider the characteristics of deaf people, such as their culture, nature of identity, and their language, etc., so that deaf people can get equal opportunities to education as hearing people, without trying to assimilate themselves into the hearing world at all costs. In the interviews, several participants from the deaf and hearing-related group mentioned the use of HKSL in deaf education. Some of them worry about the sign bilingual program -- the SLCO program --



no longer exists due to lack of financial support. Two participants believe that the students under the program could grow up with sufficient world knowledge to sustain the future campaigns that strive for the benefits of deaf people. More than one deaf interviewee expresses their hope that one day a Deaf college using HKSL as the medium of instruction could establish, so that they could take the courses that they like, instead of envying hearing people's abundant choices. These comments imply a shared position: HKSL plays a vital role in deaf education in Hong Kong. Actually, adopting HKSL as a medium of instructions in an educational setting has been proved helpful for deaf students to acquire Chinese literacy, proficiency in Cantonese, and to build up a healthy identity (Ho, Yiu, & Pun, 2014<sup>[29]</sup>; J. Li, Lee, Tang, & Lam, 2014<sup>[30]</sup>; Q. Li & Tang, 2014<sup>[31]</sup>; Tang et al., 2014<sup>[24]</sup>). Therefore, it is more a matter of coming up with a practical measure that could timely meet this need of the deaf, and at the same time optimize its influence on the whole society.

As mentioned, some participants with negative attitudes concern about that once HKSL is recognized as an official language, the implementation of measures to promote HKSL would cost too much of the social resources, yet it seems only to benefit a small group of people society. In other words, it is not so economically profitable. In our opinion, despite the small population, deaf people should be respected the right of using the languages which they feel comfortable with, be it a sign language or a spoken language. As stated in the Declaration on the Rights of the Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities: "...persons belonging to... linguistic minorities have the right... to use their own language, in private and in public, freely and without interference or any form of discrimination (Article 2)" and "persons belonging to minorities may have adequate opportunities to learn their mother tongue or to have instruction in their mother tongue (Article 4)" (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1992)<sup>[32]</sup>. Besides, it is a fact that HKSL is the essential language for many deaf people in Hong Kong to get information and to communicate. Imagine how much information a person needs in a day to fulfill a convenient daily life, and how much information one needs to obtain a higher educational level or a set of world knowledge that could sustain his/her living and self-development. Unfortunately, in Hong Kong society nowadays, a large percentage of such information is only assessable to hearing people. In our opinion, easier access to use HKSL in Hong Kong society will not only benefit deaf people but the whole Hong Kong society. It would not only bring more

convenience to the daily life of deaf people but will also influence the education and career of deaf people. This will bring them more possibilities and better abilities to participate and contribute to society. Therefore, efforts for a more inclusive community is tremendously profitable.

### **6.3 On the View of Standardization**

One of the main counterinterviews and concerns against the official recognition of HKSL is that there exist many variations in vocabulary, for example, there exist 13 versions referring to the geographical name 'Lantau Island'(CSLDS, 2019)<sup>[33]</sup>. So far, there is no standardized version of HKSL that all HKSL users agree on for official use. This situation could cause stagnation if the official documents provide an HKSL version after the official recognition of HKSL. On the other hand, some deaf signers of HKSL expressed their concerns about the standardization of HKSL. During a recent personal communication, one deaf friend of the researcher argued that such a standardization would have as a direct consequence that many dialects gradually die out because the next generation does not acquire the dialects anymore, like what happened after the spread of Putonghua in Mainland China. In other words, once HKSL is standardized, different varieties of words will be gradually lost. In the following, we will discuss our views on such concerns.

As for Putonghua, it is the standard form of modern Chinese which is commonly used across the vast territory of Mainland China. The promotion of Putonghua was to remove the barrier created by dialects across the nation that hinders social development in China (People's Daily, 1998)<sup>[34]</sup>. Chinese citizens are asked to use Putonghua conscientiously on formal and public occasions, such as in broadcasts, education, and official business, to remove the communicative obstacles and to improve the efficiency of communication (Guo, 2002)<sup>[35]</sup>. The relationship and coexistence of a standardized language version and the varieties/dialects is another big topic to explore. Due to space, we are not diving in.

Nevertheless, in comparison to Mainland China, the territory of Hong Kong SAR, where HKSL is used, is much smaller. Although there are only a tiny amount of studies on the varieties of HKSL (c.f. Siu, 2016<sup>[20]</sup>), we estimate that differences between the varieties of HKSL are not as massive as the many dialects and ethnic languages in Mainland China. Therefore, the potential problems caused by the standardization of HKSL would be less challenging. Moreover, in our view, the existence of varieties of HKSL should not be an excuse to put off the promotion of HKSL, which strives for a more convenient use of HKSL for deaf people in society. To

conclude, the current situation in Hong Kong requires a compromise proposal that could promote the development of HKSL, and at the same time sustain a linguistic environment which allows a natural coexistence of different varieties of the language. In our opinion, setting standards for vocabularies in official use is necessary.

## 7. Conclusion

Align with our anticipation, deaf participants widely support the recognition of HKSL. In general, they commonly argue that the official recognition of HKSL would guarantee a more active promotion of HKSL, which closely affects their daily life and well-being. For the two hearing groups (i.e., hearing participants who are intimately involved in the Deaf community, and those who are not), the majority of them also support the recognition. The distributions of different kinds of attitudes between these two hearing groups are similar, indicating that – out of our initial hypothesis – the involvement of the Deaf community is not directly related to the types of attitudes. This reflects that the majority of our interviewees hold a supportive opinion on the recognition of HKSL. Nevertheless, compared to the hearing interviewees who merely have contact with deaf people and the Deaf community, hearing participants who involve in the Deaf community show more knowledge and awareness of the situation of deaf people, including their needs and the specific barriers that they face in Hong Kong society.

Finally, as mentioned at the beginning, this is a preliminary study. Overall, the methodology worked out well. But in future studies, we should consider better strategies to eliminate the influence of the researcher. The size of the participants is relatively small. Also, because the participants were recruited on a friend-of-a-friend basis, the diversity of the background of the interviewees might be limited. Therefore, the attitudes we gathered in this study may not be representative enough for the whole population of Hong Kong citizens. Nevertheless, the study presents a picture of different perspectives that Hong Kong citizens hold on the recognition of HKSL. Moreover, we also hope to provide several insights for future effort in improving the linguistic situation of deaf people. For future studies, other methods such as questionnaire, could be used, in order to gather quantitative data with a larger sample size. We believe that whatever methods are to be used, the characteristics and different perspectives of the three groups should be considered. Similarly, governors working on the language planning of sign language should be aware of the differences when they take the various attitudes as a reference.

## Acknowledgements

We thank the participants for their contributions to this study. We also thank the editors and two anonymous reviewers, whose comments and suggestions helped improve our paper significantly. We are solely responsible for the content and any inaccuracies.

## References

- [1] Paddy, L. (2003). *Understanding deaf culture — In search of deafhood* [M]. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- [2] De Meulder, M. (2015). The legal recognition of sign languages [J]. *Sign Language Studies*, 15(4), 495–506.
- [3] Murray, J. J. (2015). Special issue: Language planning and sign language rights [J]. *Sign Language Studies*, 15(4), 375–378. (<http://doi.org/10.1353/sls.2015.0019>)
- [4] Parisot, A.-M., & Rinfret, J. (2012). Recognition of Langue des Signes Québécoise in Eastern Canada [J]. *Sign Language Studies*, 12(4), 583–601. (<http://doi.org/10.1353/sls.2012.0013>)
- [5] Quer, J. (2012). Legal pathways to the recognition of sign languages: A comparison of the Catalan and Spanish sign language acts [J]. *Sign Language Studies*, 12(4), 565–582. (<http://doi.org/10.1353/sls.2012.0012>)
- [6] UN General Assembly. Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities and optional protocol (2006). UN General Assembly..
- [7] Johnson, D. C. (2013). *Language policy* [M]. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- [8] Kannapell, B. (1989). An examination of deaf college students' attitudes toward ASL and English [J]. *The Sociolinguistics of the Deaf Community*, 191–210. (<http://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-458045-9.50015-X>)
- [9] Cham, H.-K. (2002). Aotearoa/ 紐西蘭的語言規劃 (Translation: The language planning in Aotearoa/ New Zealand) [M]. In C.-F. Shih (Ed.), 各國語言政策——多元文化與族群平等 (pp. 151–198). Taipei: 前衛出版社.
- [10] Geraci, C. (2012). Language policy and planning: The case of Italian Sign Language [J]. *Sign Language Studies*, 12(4), 494–518. (<http://doi.org/10.1353/sls.2012.0006>)
- [11] Peddie, R. A. (1991). *One, two, or many? The development and implementation of languages policy in New Zealand* [D]. PhD dissertation of University of Auckland: Auckland, NZ.
- [12] Lai, M.-L., & Poon, A. Y. K. (2011). Cultural identity and language attitudes – into the second decade of postcolonial Hong Kong [J]. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural*

- Development*, 32(3), 249–264. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14664201003682327>
- [13] Li, D. C. S. (2017). Towards ‘biliteracy and trilingualism’ in Hong Kong (SAR): Problems, dilemmas, and stakeholders’ views. [M] In D. C. S. Li (Ed.), *Multilingual Hong Kong: Languages, Literacies and Identities. Multilingual Education*, vol 19 (pp. 179–202).
- [14] Pennycook, A. (2002). Language policy and docile bodies: Hong Kong and governmentality [M]. In J. W. Tollefson (Ed.), *Language Policies in Education: Critical Issues* (pp. 179–200). London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- [15] Poon, A. Y. K. (2004). Language policy of Hong Kong : Its impact on language education and language use in post-handover Hong Kong [J]. *Language*, 49(1), 53–74.
- [16] HKSAR. (2017a). The minutes of the meeting of Hong Kong legislative council on 2017, 1st, January [R]. Retrieved from [https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr16-17/english/counmtg/motion/m\\_papers/cm20170111cb3-244-e.pdf](https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr16-17/english/counmtg/motion/m_papers/cm20170111cb3-244-e.pdf)
- [17] Benton, R. (1996). Language policy in New Zealand: Defining the ineffable [M]. In M. Herriman & B. Burnaby (Eds.), *Language Policies in English-Dominant Countries* (pp. 62–98). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- [18] McKee, R. L., & Manning, V. (2015). Evaluating effects of language recognition on language rights and the vitality of New Zealand Sign Language [J]. *Sign Language Studies*, 15(4), 473–497. (<http://doi.org/10.1353/sls.2015.0017>)
- [19] HKSAR. (2014). Special topics report No.62 – Persons with disabilities and chronic diseases [R]. Retrieved from <http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp380.jsp?productCode=C0000055>
- [20] Siu, W. Y. R. (2016). *Sociolinguistic variation in Hong Kong Sign Language* [D]. PhD dissertation, Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington.
- [21] Chan, Y. H. (2017). Negotiating lexical gap when fingerspelling is not an option: The case of Cantonese to Hong Kong Sign Language interpreting [D]. Unpublished manuscript, Gallaudet University, Washington DC.
- [22] Sze, F., Lo, C., Lo, L., & Chu, K. (2013). Historical development of Hong Kong Sign Language [J]. *Sign Language Studies*, 13(2), 155–185. (<http://doi.org/10.1353/sls.2013.0002>)
- [23] Yiu, K. C., & Tang, G. (2014). Social integration of deaf and hard-of-hearing students in a sign bilingual and co-enrollment environment [M]. In M. Marschark, G. Tang, & H. Knoors (Eds.), *Bilingualism and Bilingual Deaf Education* (pp. 342–367). New York: Oxford University Press.
- [24] Tang, G., Lam, S., & Yiu, K. C. (2014). Language development of deaf children in a sign bilingual and co-enrollment environment [M]. In M. Marschark, G. Tang, & H. Knoors (Eds.), *Bilingualism and Bilingual Deaf Education* (pp. 313–341). New York: Oxford University Press.
- [25] HKCSS. (2018). 香港手語翻譯員名單 (Translation: Registry of Hong Kong Sign Language interpreters) [S]. Retrieved from [http://www.hkcss.org.hk/c/cont\\_detail.asp?type\\_id=37&content\\_id=3065](http://www.hkcss.org.hk/c/cont_detail.asp?type_id=37&content_id=3065)
- [26] HKSAR. (2017b). Press release of the communications authority (October 3rd, 2017) [R]. Retrieved from [https://www.coms-auth.hk/sc/media\\_focus/press\\_releases/index\\_id\\_1532.html](https://www.coms-auth.hk/sc/media_focus/press_releases/index_id_1532.html)
- [27] HKSAR. (2009). Hong Kong standard industrial classification (HSIC) version 2.0 — Index of Industry Codes [S]. Retrieved from <https://www.statistics.gov.hk/pub/B2XX0004012008XXXXB0300.pdf>
- [28] HKSAR. (2016). 2016 Population by-census thematic report: Ethnic minorities [R]. Retrieved March 1, 2019, from <https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201712/29/P2017122900294.htm>
- [29] Ho, C., Yiu, C., & Pun, A. (2014). Deaf teachers’ involvement in the SLCO Programme: views from students [R]. Paper presented at the *2014 Symposium on Sign Bilingualism and Deaf Education*. The Chinese University of Hong Kong. Jun, 2014.
- [30] Li, J., Lee, J., Tang, G., & Lam, S. (2014). Development of HKSL by deaf children in the SLCO Programme [R]. Paper presented at the *2014 Symposium on Sign Bilingualism and Deaf Education*. The Chinese University of Hong Kong. Jun, 2014.
- [31] Li, Q., & Tang, G. (2014). Deaf students’ literacy development in the SLCO Programme [R]. Paper presented at the *2014 Symposium on Sign Bilingualism and Deaf Education*. Chinese University of Hong Kong. Jun, 2014.
- [32] Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Declaration on the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities* (1992) [S].
- [33] CSLDS. (2019). Hong Kong Sign Language Browser. <http://www.cslds.org/hkslbrowser/index.jsp?lang=tc>
- [34] 大力推广普通话 (Translation: To promote Putonghua vigorously) [N]. (1998, September 14). *People’s Daily*.
- [35] Guo, L. (2002). Between Putonghua and dialects [M]. In M. Zhou & H. Sun (Eds.), *Language Policy in the People’s Republic of China-Theory and Practice since 1949* (pp. 45–54). New York, Boston, Dordrecht, London, Moscow: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

# Author Guidelines

This document provides some guidelines to authors for submission in order to work towards a seamless submission process. While complete adherence to the following guidelines is not enforced, authors should note that following through with the guidelines will be helpful in expediting the copyediting and proofreading processes, and allow for improved readability during the review process.

## I . Format

- Program: Microsoft Word (preferred)
- Font: Times New Roman
- Size: 12
- Style: Normal
- Paragraph: Justified
- Required Documents

## II . Cover Letter

All articles should include a cover letter as a separate document.

The cover letter should include:

- Names and affiliation of author(s)

The corresponding author should be identified.

Eg. Department, University, Province/City/State, Postal Code, Country

- A brief description of the novelty and importance of the findings detailed in the paper

Declaration

v Conflict of Interest

Examples of conflicts of interest include (but are not limited to):

- Research grants
- Honoria
- Employment or consultation
- Project sponsors
- Author's position on advisory boards or board of directors/management relationships
- Multiple affiliation
- Other financial relationships/support
- Informed Consent

This section confirms that written consent was obtained from all participants prior to the study.

- Ethical Approval

Eg. The paper received the ethical approval of XXX Ethics Committee.

- Trial Registration

Eg. Name of Trial Registry: Trial Registration Number



- Contributorship

The role(s) that each author undertook should be reflected in this section. This section affirms that each credited author has had a significant contribution to the article.

1. Main Manuscript

2. Reference List

3. Supplementary Data/Information

Supplementary figures, small tables, text etc.

As supplementary data/information is not copyedited/proofread, kindly ensure that the section is free from errors, and is presented clearly.

### **III . Abstract**

A general introduction to the research topic of the paper should be provided, along with a brief summary of its main results and implications. Kindly ensure the abstract is self-contained and remains readable to a wider audience. The abstract should also be kept to a maximum of 200 words.

Authors should also include 5-8 keywords after the abstract, separated by a semi-colon, avoiding the words already used in the title of the article.

Abstract and keywords should be reflected as font size 14.

### **IV . Title**

The title should not exceed 50 words. Authors are encouraged to keep their titles succinct and relevant.

Titles should be reflected as font size 26, and in bold type.

### **IV . Section Headings**

Section headings, sub-headings, and sub-subheadings should be differentiated by font size.

Section Headings: Font size 22, bold type

Sub-Headings: Font size 16, bold type

Sub-Subheadings: Font size 14, bold type

Main Manuscript Outline

### **V . Introduction**

The introduction should highlight the significance of the research conducted, in particular, in relation to current state of research in the field. A clear research objective should be conveyed within a single sentence.

### **VI . Methodology/Methods**

In this section, the methods used to obtain the results in the paper should be clearly elucidated. This allows readers to be able to replicate the study in the future. Authors should ensure that any references made to other research or experiments should be clearly cited.

### **VII . Results**

In this section, the results of experiments conducted should be detailed. The results should not be discussed at length in

this section. Alternatively, Results and Discussion can also be combined to a single section.

## **VIII. Discussion**

In this section, the results of the experiments conducted can be discussed in detail. Authors should discuss the direct and indirect implications of their findings, and also discuss if the results obtain reflect the current state of research in the field. Applications for the research should be discussed in this section. Suggestions for future research can also be discussed in this section.

## **IX. Conclusion**

This section offers closure for the paper. An effective conclusion will need to sum up the principal findings of the papers, and its implications for further research.

## **X. References**

References should be included as a separate page from the main manuscript. For parts of the manuscript that have referenced a particular source, a superscript (ie. [x]) should be included next to the referenced text.

[x] refers to the allocated number of the source under the Reference List (eg. [1], [2], [3])

In the References section, the corresponding source should be referenced as:

[x] Author(s). Article Title [Publication Type]. Journal Name, Vol. No., Issue No.: Page numbers. (DOI number)

## **XI. Glossary of Publication Type**

J = Journal/Magazine

M = Monograph/Book

C = (Article) Collection

D = Dissertation/Thesis

P = Patent

S = Standards

N = Newspapers

R = Reports

Kindly note that the order of appearance of the referenced source should follow its order of appearance in the main manuscript.

Graphs, Figures, Tables, and Equations

Graphs, figures and tables should be labelled closely below it and aligned to the center. Each data presentation type should be labelled as Graph, Figure, or Table, and its sequence should be in running order, separate from each other.

Equations should be aligned to the left, and numbered with in running order with its number in parenthesis (aligned right).

## **XII. Others**

Conflicts of interest, acknowledgements, and publication ethics should also be declared in the final version of the manuscript. Instructions have been provided as its counterpart under Cover Letter.

**Journal of Linguistics and Education Research** focuses on the scientific and systematic theoretical research of Language. Through the analysis and study of the human instinctual language ability, spoken language, written language and even sign language, the journal aims to provide an understanding of the nature and development of human beings.

The scope of the papers in this journal includes, but is not limited to:

- Sociolinguistics
- Language Acquisition and Education
- Psycholinguistics and Education
- Computational Linguistics and development
- Corpus Linguistics
- Discourse Analysis
- Conversational Analysis
- Linguistic Anthropology and research
- Language Socialization
- Narrative Research
- Gesture/Symbol/Visual Form Communication
- Language Ideology and development



**BILINGUAL  
PUBLISHING CO.**  
Pioneer of Global Academics Since 1984

Tel: +65 65881289

E-mail: [contact@bilpublishing.com](mailto:contact@bilpublishing.com)

Website: [www.bilpublishing.com](http://www.bilpublishing.com)