

Assessing if the Families that come from Non-Cantonese Speaking areas in China can use the

Dialect of Origin

Institution

Name

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## **1.0 Introduction**

The study of social linguistics is the language and social contexts of different regions, class, age, sex, bilingualism, and other factors that influence language changes. A fundamental question is forwarded by sociolinguistics about language development and change, which is a continuous subject of study because languages evolve and change. Many scholars have researched the issue of language change and how users of language are affected by social contexts (Smith-Hefner, 2009). Through social, linguistic measures such as domain-based questionnaires to get first-hand experiences (qualitative) of language use across different factions and communicative measures (Gal, 1978). Additionally, there are quantitative research methods that have been used to gauge the confidence through hypothesis testing to assess the attitude of the variables in question (Sallabank, 2013). In our study, we are going to study Cantonese language and how it has influenced those whose origin is not Cantonese in Hong Kong. The objective of this study is to assess if the families that come from non-Cantonese speaking areas in China can use the dialect of origin.

## **1.1 Background**

Cantonese is a language that has encompassed all the varieties of Yue, even if they are not mutually intelligible. Yue is a language that is spoken broadly in some parts of Asia Minor, Macau, Guanzhi, Guangdong, and Hong Kong. While the official language of China is Mandarin, Cantonese is among the most important words spoken in China with an estimate of 70,000,000 speakers across the country, with some scholars stating that it is the most potent dialect (Xu, 2013). The scholars believe that Cantonese has established itself as necessary in social linguistics and economic factors to the users. A large number of speakers of Cantonese are the significant reason for its strong influence, in speech, social media, and lingua franca. The use is in some

provinces like Guangdong, Hong Kong, Macau, and other overseas areas that include southeast Asia, North America, Europe, and Pacific Asia. However, Hong Kong is seen as the Centre and hub of the Cantonese language (Lu, 2002). Hong Kong uses this language as the dominant language in all social life even though its origins can be traced to Guangdong. The Chinese language has been evolving over the years, and it has disintegrated into particular identifiable languages that can be located in different regions. This has been due to political, social, economic, historical, environmental, and linguistic factors that have influenced the disintegration of the Chinese language and its evolution. In Hong Kong, the Cantonese language is the identifiable language spoken by approximately 90% of the ethnic Chinese population, which is around 7 million use it as the official and primary language across all sectors and in all social contexts. The Cantonese has been placed itself as having the very distinctive vocabulary and the use of indigenous Chinese characters, standard phonetic features, with conventional forms of writing, loaning of words from the English language through phonological changes and adoption of terms through lexical together with Romanization (Wu & Fung-hoi, 2003). The Cantonese is different from the official Mandarin language, and other languages are spoken in China.

From this understanding of Cantonese being the official language in Hong Kong, this study seeks to investigate if the Cantonese have influenced people who have parents that come from China still use the dialect of the origin or them to the third generation. The study Cantonese and those who have roots in China are affected will also assess if the upcoming young age needs to learn both languages of origin and Cantonese and if they are at a loss in not knowing their language of origin.

### 1.3 Statement of the problem

The study aims to establish if the Cantonese language influences the people whose roots are from China to the extent of forgetting their language. The research focuses on the second and third generations who have the origins of china but are staying in Hon Kong and asses if they are familiar with the language of the roots from where their parents came from in other parts of China. The research is based on an argument that in Hong Kong, the dominant language in use is Cantonese and, therefore, a probable influence on people who stay there and come from different places, especially the generation s that come after the parents. The research study of Cantonese language use in Hong Kong will help asses how essential it is for the young generation to know their dialect of origin and if it is a loss to them, forgetting their language of origin.

### 1.4 Research questions

- ✓ Do families whose parents come from non-Cantonese speaking areas in China still use the dialect of origin?
- ✓ Has the third generation shifted entirely to Cantonese or not?
- ✓ What languages does each generation speak, and how well?
- ✓ How did they learn the language?
- ✓ Is it essential for young people to master each language?
- ✓ Is it a significant loss if they do not know their dialect of origin?

### 1.5 Objectives

The objective of this study is to asses if the families that come from non-Cantonese speaking areas in china can use the dialect of origin

### 1.5.1 Specific objectives

- ✓ To establish if the third generation of people whose parents came from non-Cantonese speaking areas can use their dialect of origin
- ✓ To assess the level of the local dialect apart from Cantonese each generation can speak
- ✓ To determine how they learned there the language of origin
- ✓ To establish if the young must learn the language of origin
- ✓ To determine if it is to their disadvantage if they don't learn their local dialect.

### 1.6 Hypothesis

- ✓ Null hypothesis  
The third generation of people who come non-Cantonese speaking areas cannot speak the dialect of origin.
- ✓ Alternative hypothesis  
The third generation of people who come from non-Cantonese speaking areas can speak the dialect of origin.

### 1.7 Significance of the study/ Policy relevance

The study will be used by sociolinguistics to explain language change according to different contexts and, in this case, going to an area where the dialect of origin is not spoken. It can be used to set policies that can be used to protect languages that are in danger of going extinct by coming up with recommendations on how to preserve languages. This study will help in explaining how some languages acquire dominance and spread across large regions. The

review will also be useful in determining methods that can be used to preserve languages and how important it is to safeguard a language.

### **1.8 Scope of the study**

The study will focus on examining the people who have parents that have origins in non-Cantonese speaking areas and are staying in Hong. The study will determine their level of understanding and use of the dialect of origin and how well they can speak.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Second language /Speech learning model**

Several theories try to explain how the original dialect tends to disappear with time when people are exposed to new languages. And the methods assign the learning of the second language as the cause of attrition of the first language. The speech learning model that was proposed by (Flege, 2002) states that the first and second languages used by a person at the same time exist in the same phonological space, and they influence each other. The next step the model suggests is the categorization of speech remains intact in the first year then the second language starts dominating the original dialect. While some of the people show great adaptation to learn both languages at the same time, some showed weak adaptation to language change. The theory states that language input and dominance influence the language of users ; (Werker & Tees, 1984) Since in our study, we research the third generation of non-Cantonese speakers, the first language that they are exposed to is Cantonese through the various social setups. Getting to know the primary language using the speech learning model shows that they may either adapt to the new language or find it challenging to learn the language of their parents.

## **2.2 Social adaptation model**

The other model that explains language attrition is social adaptation. (Beckner, et al., 2009) in describing how the social adjustment affects language change; they disclosed that social interactions influence language acquisition and change. In their study, they state that this adaption on language takes place throughout a person's life, depending on the social interactions. The factors that influence language input include patterns, the environment, and how they interpret the meaning of words. If the social adaptation is slower, it might explain gradual language acquisition, but when it takes place at a fast rate, then language change can take place faster. This can be used to describe in our study how social change can explain the adaptation of a new language.

## **2.3 Fishman's Language Shift**

The language shift is a concept that was explained by (Fishman, 2008). The writer describes the change in language occurs because of influence from sociolinguistics and ethnography. The research states that people are always seeking opportunities to learn new languages to gain social changes. The study shows that individuals or a community intentionally or unconsciously engage in changing their language and substitute functions that their mother tongue that leads to attrition of the mother tongue. Other theories explain language maintenance, and language shift depends on the following: the size of the population (Brons, 2018), the mode of settlement, the support of institutions, intermarriages, attitude towards a language, language ideology, language planning, and the family language policy among other factors ( (Hlfearnáin, 2013)

### **3.0 Research methods**

In this study, we are going to use exploratory research methods to determine if the third generation of people who have parents whose origin is from the non-Cantonese can speak the local dialect. We are also going to establish a causal relationship of what influences their lack of using the dialect of origin and if they learn how they learned it.

#### **3.1 Qualitative method**

The study will use the qualitative method since we are trying to investigate if the third generation of people whose parents have an origin from non-Cantonese areas can speak the dialect of origin. In this study, we select three families that speak that have a non-Cantonese origin and get responses from them and establish if the third generation can talk about the dialect of origin. We are going to use semi-structured interviews to collect data for analysis.

#### **3.2 Sampling**

Sampling was done of families that have stayed in Hong Kong, and they have managed to arrive at the third generation or more. The sample should also be people whose origins are from areas that speak non-Cantonese. We sampled three families and interviewed to collect data.

#### **3.3 Data collection**

The multiple case study will be our basis for collecting data through semi-structured interviews, observations, and open-ended questions. There is a study that was conducted by (Runfola, Perna, Baraldi, & Gregori, 2017) where he used the case study to explain if the business journals influenced decisions. Additionally, we used voice recorders to confirm the records that we collect and for accuracy.

#### **4.0 Data and discussion.**

The results of the research conducted indicated that in two of the families that I conducted research, the third generation was utterly ignorant of the original dialect of their parents. In contrast, one family, the third generation, showed signs of understanding the dialect of their parents from their place of origin. From two of the families, the second generation, were a bit aware of the local dialect as they could hear everything of the dialect of origin. Still, they found it difficult to pronounce the words that were uttered. The third generation was almost not knowing a word from the dialect of origin of their parents but new basics like greetings. The one family that indicated a more robust understanding of the dialect of origin and they could at least speak though not fluently. However, from all three families, the second and third generation of the families that have an origin from non-Cantonese areas could speak the Cantonese dialect fluently just like other people of Hong Kong. The two families that, to a great extent, no idea of their dialect of origin, stated that they were affected by the social adaptation and lack of continuous use of the language from their dialect of origin. The family that showed strong elements of understanding the local dialect of the parents up to the third generation have preserved knowledge of the dialect of origin from precedence set from their parents. The precedence that they need to understand and know their dialect of origin. The children are raised as bilinguals from childhood. And often they visit their places of origin. All the families agree that it is essential to learn both languages the Cantonese because they reside there. Still, also they will gain more advantages over others when they know both languages. Knowing two languages exposes them to more opportunities than a monolingual person. They, therefore, acknowledge that it is okay if one knows the dialect of origin together with the Cantonese.

## Conclusion

The results of the research conducted agree with the alternative hypothesis that states that the third generation of people who come from non-Cantonese speaking areas can speak the dialect of origin. And from the results of the research that we have done, we conclude that the third generation has little knowledge of the dialect of their parents. The changes occur as generations continue because the dialect of origin is reduced in strength. After all, there is reduced contact. From this study, it can be projected that the fourth generation will most likely know nothing about the dialect of origin. For the dialect to be passed on, it requires a strong commitment from the parents to instill the language to their children. At the same time, they are young even before encountering the Cantonese or learn the two languages simultaneously as bilinguals and grow knowing both languages. Other measures can be used, like making them travel to the origin of the parents once in a while to mix with a broader pool of people speaking the dialect. If that will not happen, this study has shown that the generations will forget the local dialect. The study also shows that all children learn the Cantonese language because it is the language that surrounds them in all social concepts. This makes the children growing up being exposed to Cantonese more than other languages. All three families agreed that it is essential for the young generation to know and understand the dialect of origin as it will expose them to better opportunities compared to their compatriots who use only one language. It will also increase their mobility and flexibility in the market as it can fit in the broader scope as compared to those who understand one language only. Therefore from this, they purposed to set mechanisms to learn both languages even when grown up because they have to purpose to retain or learn the language; otherwise, the Cantonese language will swallow `up their language. The study concludes by stating that the third generation has little knowledge of the dialect from their parent's dialect of origin.

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