THE PLACE OF IDEOLOGY IN POSTCOLONIAL EDUCATIONAL LANGUAGE PLANNING: AN EXAMPLE FROM HONG KONG

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1. Introduction

Hong Kong has been seen as exceptional from many perspectives: the world's last major colony and the first one to have achieved a per capita income level higher than that of its colonizer (World Bank, 1997), a pragmatic mixture of Chinese entrepreneurship and laissez-faire British managerialism, but above all a city that has been able to systematically reinvent itself every decade for the last half-century (from shelter for mainland refugees of the late 1940s to manufacturing outpost in the 1960s to global financial center in the 1990s, all the while maintaining its unique role as window into the world's largest and latest economic superpower).

In such a unique and fast-changing place contradictions inevitably abound, leading to misconceptions and overgeneralizations. Overgeneralization: Hong Kong is a cosmopolitan international city, Pearl of the Orient, Asia's world city, a melting-pot of East and West. In fact it is a relatively homogenous society: its seven million inhabitants may be usually referred to as "residents" rather than "citizens" since most of them are also citizens of somewhere else, yet 95% are ethnically Southern Chinese and more than 90% claim Cantonese as the only language they regularly use (Hong Kong 2001 Population Census). Misconception: the colonial government followed a policy of "positive non-interventionism" (Haddon-Cave, 1984) from the 1960s, mainly through the agency of Sir Philip Haddon-Cave who was chief secretary and financial secretary from 1962 to 1985. In fact during that period it intervened massively in those two sectors of most concern to residents, housing and finance, by creating the world's most comprehensive public housing programme to provide subsidized accommodation for over half of the population, pegging the currency to the US dollar in 1983 and, one year

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after the change of sovereignty in 1998, the new government bought US$15 billion of shares on the Hong Kong stock exchange, making itself by far the largest shareholder.

In educational language planning (ELP) too the myth of laissez-faire during the colonial period has also been accepted largely uncritically; in this paper I shall describe the role that ideology has played particularly since 1997, but also attempt to show that an ideological motivation behind recent planning has its roots in factors which predate the transfer of sovereignty.

2. What is ideology?

So what do we mean by ideology? In his influential review of the concept Eagleton (1991) begins by claiming that "nobody has yet come up with a single adequate definition", and argues that any attempt to do so leads inevitably to the all-too-encompassing ones which would leave hardly anything non-ideological ("if there is nothing which is not-ideological, then the term cancels all the way through and drops out of sight"). He considers the definition of ideology as "interested discourse" and cites approvingly Thompson's (1990) "ways in which meaning serves to sustain relations of domination". However, he readily admits that very little language is ever completely disinterested and that it is most commonly the *dominant* belief-systems which are labeled ideologies by their *opponents*; his dissatisfaction with this bias in the everyday use of the term does not tempt him, however, like Foucault, to abandon the concept altogether. Another line of enquiry is pursued which leads him back to a "person-in-the-street" definition from Turner (1983) of ideology as "performative contradiction" where "what is said is at odds with the situation or act of utterance itself", though not necessarily empirically false. This again is not a neutral definition, as it would tend to be used of other people's positions rather than one's own. Finally he offers six levels of meaning for the concept, from the most inclusive "framework of thinking and calculation about the world –the 'ideas' which people use to figure out-how the social world works, what their place is in it, and what they ought to do" (Hall, 1996) to the most limited and pejorative, which corresponds to how the opponents of any ideology would employ the term against its supporters.

In order to avoid the over-inclusivity trap of labeling every public issue ideological, I wish to make a distinction between choices which have ideological

implications often unintended by the people who make them (which encompasses nearly all public debate) and *decisions on issues*, *or contributions to the debate leading to decisions*, *which are ideologically motivated*. This is a particularly important distinction to make in the context of Hong Kong's form of executive-led policymaking, where decisions are typically implemented by government departments after they have been prepared by teams within the same departments with only two intervening steps in the process: the first, a period of public consultation, and the second, a brief passage through the legislature the composition of which effectively denies it the power of veto ("a rubber-stamp parliament").

I shall attempt to determine to what extent decisions or contributions to the debate on ELP are ideologically motivated by the individuals or agencies responsible for them by trying to find answers to the following three questions:

1. What is the extent and nature of the **colonial legacy** in the Hong Kong government's official language and educational language policies?
2. Who are the **individuals** or **agencies** currently affecting decision-making on the above policies, and how much influence do they exert individually on the process, and on each other?
3. What is the role of **expert opinion and professional input** in the research and practice of ELP in Hong Kong?

3. Context of educational language planning (ELP) in Hong Kong

A casual reading of the relevant consultation documents (Education Commission Reports 1-6, October 1984-December 1995) shows that the one of the most contentious issues in educational policy over the last twenty years has been the so-called MOI issue, a long-running attempt by the Hong Kong Education Department to *regularize* the choice of medium of instruction in secondary schools. This has been described as "the most controversial and thorny language problem in the education arena of Hong Kong amid its highly complex and confusing language context" (Poon, 2000). In primary schools, in common with most international practice, the mother tongue (Cantonese) is generally used as the teaching medium, and at the tertiary level, as is increasingly the case in East Asia, English is preferred. The reason why the situation needed regularizing was that there had never been a specific policy to segregate schools (and therefore students) according to the language used as the teaching medium, unlike for example in postcolonial Singapore. Secondary schools –and the two universities which existed 20

years ago– had chosen the language according to the desires of their founders, governors and parent bodies, or the charitable foundations that united them, and rarely on the advice of the Education Department (ED). In any case school principals have traditionally been accountable to these agencies rather than to the ED, which has little real leverage over the day-to-day running of schools, and are largely free to choose which curriculum to follow, although most choose to adhere to those leading to examinations administered by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority. More significantly, the vast majority of schools have been completely free until very recently to ignore or at least delay implementing any new policies proposed by the ED with regard to the language of instruction. Such non-interventionism on the part of the ED has hardly been positive in its outcome, since it led to a smorgasbord of institutions all claiming to use English as MOI (the "Anglo-Chinese schools"), spanning the whole range from genuine English-medium environments in which it was unacceptable to use any other language in class to establishments where the only English was the printed word and teachers invariably used Cantonese to teach all subjects, even English. The situation of these (over 90%) of schools can be aptly characterized by the Chinese proverb "Gua yang tou, mai gou rou" ("Hang a sheep head but serve dog meat").

4. Extent and nature of the colonial legacy in ELP

The reality of Hong Kong's status as a British colony led to English being first the sole official and then (since the 1974 Official Languages Bill) joint official language in Hong Kong. According to the latest statement from the Official Languages Agency, the current aim of the government is to "promote an even wider use of Chinese in the civil service…[but] to maintain a good standard of English to ensure Hong Kong's continued success as an international business and financial centre" (Allcock, 2001). This policy has been consistently followed for at least 20 years, since Hong Kong's return to China was first anticipated and planned for, and the necessary bilingualism of Hong Kong civil servants (Chinese for communication with the public, English for internal use and international communication, and now Chinese for liaison with Mainland Chinese authorities) has been well supported by successive governments to the extent that most senior figures in Hong Kong are equally comfortable communicating in Cantonese, English or Mandarin Chinese (and the Official Languages

Agency has an annual budget of over US$12 million). Outside the civil service, however, the implementation of the desired "trilingualism and biliteracy" official language policy has been less successful, particularly in those areas where language skills have been traditionally undervalued in favour of technical expertise. A case in point for Hong Kong, as with many post-colonial societies, has been the shortage of bilingual (or at least biliterate) judges and magistrates, since the judiciary had been kept firmly under the control of the colonial power through the spread of the English legal system, still enshrined in the Hong Kong Basic Law This can be seen as a predictable outcome, however, and detracts only slightly from my contention that Hong Kong's official language policy, insofar as it is a legacy of colonialism, has been generally pragmatic and non-ideologically motivated.

There is just one sense in which it can be argued that the current policy is ideological: we cannot ignore the fact that the need for a language policy at all in Hong Kong derives from a response to much larger political realities. Following Eagleton (1991), if the rejection of English in favour of Malay as the official language in post-colonial Malaysia in 1957 is viewed as an ideological move (presumably by its opponents then and now), the preservation of English in Hong Kong 40 years later should reasonably be considered one too.

Unlike the official language policy, the colonial administration had no policy on the language of education; it was left entirely to the schools and universities and the 1974 white paper confirmed that "it is the Government's intention that individual school authorities should themselves decide whether the medium of instruction should be English or Chinese for any particular subject" (Education Department, 1974). It was crucially the Llewellyn Report of 1982 which overturned the comfortable applecart of colonial educational policies (or lack of them) on MOI and led directly to the establishment of the now highly influential Education Commission. The report lambasted "the present lamentable situation concerning the use of English as a medium of instruction" and decried "the spectacle of a born-and-bred Hong Kong speaker of Cantonese going through the ritual of instructing Cantonese-speaking pupils by means of a language in which both teacher and taught have very little competence" (Llewellyn *et al*., 1982). This came closer than any before or since to capturing the reality on the ground of an educational system which delegated responsibility for the choice of MOI

largely to the successful alumni of the previous generation (founders, governors, school principals and treasurers of charitable bodies); it also had serious implications for the system of teacher training at the time. It could even be viewed as a "wake-up call" to the prevailing ideology of a hands-off approach to educational policymaking.

It was acted on, but at a pace that now seems slow. In 1984 the Education Commission (EC), a non-statutory body which in spite of its present high profile is invested with advisory powers only, published its first report which recommended only that "all other things being equal, teaching and learning would be generally more effective if the medium of instruction were the mother tongue". Boyle (1995) lists the incentives that were offered to schools in what turned out to be a fruitless effort over the following 13 years to persuade them to switch MOI from English to Cantonese. Eventually it took the transfer of sovereignty in 1997 and the new Chief Executive's less consultative (or more ideologically motivated?) style, coupled with a new willingness in a newly established government to unfreeze the stalled process of educational language reform.

While we may at this point view the colonial legacy on the educational language policies of the Hong Kong government as at most mildly ideologically motivated, a more extreme position can also be supported. For example, Pennycook (1998) argues that this very *laissez-faire* approach to the choice of language medium ("We'll provide for English, but allow the "natives" to use their language if they so wish") was strongly ideological in its origins. He cites the founder of one of today's elite "Anglo-Chinese" schools, E.R. Belilios, a member of the EC in 1883, as insisting "I don't see why the English [sic] Government should encumber itself with the teaching of Chinese…I maintain the English government should teach English…to anglicize its subjects". But Pennycook also goes further. In his view this attitude has persisted through what he terms "colonial continuities": "One of the most striking aspects of these colonial records…is the similarities with current discourses in Hong Kong" (Pennycook, 1998).

5. Agencies which influence ELP in Hong Kong

In order to pursue further these continuities between colonial and postcolonial policy discourse it is necessary to establish the individuals or agencies involved. In fact

they can be easily identified as the following, all of whom are stakeholders to varying degrees in the educational language planning process:

- The Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB), and more specifically the **Education Department (ED)**, the **Education Commission (EC)** and the **Examinations and Assessment Authority**.
- School **principals** and administrators (including **governors** and/or **parents** and their associations in some schools).
- **Schoolteachers** and their **unions**.
- **Employers** and their associations.
- The **general public** and **media** organizations.
- Tertiary education authorities (mainly **universities**).
- School and university **students**.

As I have already shown,the **Education Department** (soon to be merged with the EMB) had very little direct control over the choice of MOI until five years ago. It was surely no coincidence that it chose September 1997, just two months after the handover, to resolve the long-running debate over the issue with the publication of its initially named (then hastily renamed, dropping the adjective) "*Firm* Guidance on Secondary Schools' Medium of Instruction". Although based on educational research findings which I will discuss in my answer to the third question, its timing as well as its title were wide open to charges of ideological motivation since the new Chief Executive Tung Chee-Hwa had openly expressed admiration for the hands-on approach to governance taken by former Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yew. In an attempt to preempt such charges the report itself took pains to demonstrate that it was only the culmination of a 13-year process of research and previous policy recommendations: "This policy has been re-affirmed over time:

> - *In 1984*, **Education Commission** Report (ECR) No. 1 established a clear policy to encourage secondary schools to teach in the mother tongue;
> - *In 1986*, Government introduced support measures to schools using Chinese as MOI;
> - *In 1990*, ECR4 endorsed the principles for MOI and recommended regular reviews to monitor progress and stronger measures to encourage Chinese-medium instruction and minimize mixed-code teaching;
> - *In 1994*, Government started to advise schools on the language proficiency of their Secondary 1 intake to assist them in choosing an appropriate MOI;

> • *In 1994*, Government announced a Policy Commitment to issue **firm guidance** to all secondary schools on MOI by 1997/98; and
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> • *In 1996*, ECR6 re-affirmed the policy of mother-tongue teaching, supported the publication of advice on the appropriate MOI in 1997 for adoption by individual schools in 1998 and asked for clear indications of **sanctions for non-compliance**". [original italics, my bold] (Education Department, 1997)

In spite of the report's affirmations however, which are revealing in the sense that they anticipate criticism that its timing *was* ideologically motivated, the document arrived much like a bombshell in secondary schools at the beginning of the new school year; it was swiftly followed in December by memoranda to individual schools indicating whether each school would now be considered as EMI or CMI (English- or Chinese-medium of instruction), based on the results of tests which purported to determine whether a minimum 85% of students fell into the Medium of Instruction Grouping Assessment (MIGA) band I or III and were thus capable of studying through the medium of English, a scaling system that had been first proposed in ECR4 (1990). It was already clear, and uncontroversial, that "mixed code teaching" would no longer be tolerated, but this document at a stroke abolished the autonomy that schools had enjoyed in respect of the choice of MOI prior to 1997 and furthermore threatened schools with *sanctions* for refusal to follow advice on which MOI they should adopt.

Reactions varied from the very supportive (from Cheung Man-Kwong, a Democratic Party legislator) "Today, when colonial rule is about to come to a close, it is not only a political change but also an education need to adopt Chinese instead of English as our medium of instruction" (cited in Li, 1997) to shock and protest, 124 out of a total of more than 400 Hong Kong secondary schools had applied to retain English as their medium of instruction but 24 were deemed to have failed the satisfy the three requirements: student ability [85% of their enrolment attaining MIGA bands I or III], teacher capability and support strategies and programmes. As Poon (2000) colourfully narrates: "Of the 20 schools that [subsequently] appealed, 14 won and the students cheered, jumped and hugged each other as if they had won a big battle upon hearing the result in March 1998…in the losing schools students bowed their heads and some parents burst into tears".

The strength of **public** feeling that had been kindled by interested agencies (the **media** fuelling the protests of **principals**, **governors**, **teachers**, **parents** and **students**

at the affected schools, which were all ideological in the sense that they were struggling against an outside agency, the ED, to preserve their *status quo*) was palpable in Hong Kong at that time, despite the more general concerns of the Asian financial crisis. For a few elite schools Hong Kong's reputation was also a rallying-cry: one student from St Stephen's College (founded 1903) argued for retaining English by saying "we don't want to be like Malaysians but Singaporeans, who are more international" (cited in Kwong, 1997). With hindsight, even though none of the threatened sanctions have been imposed so far, the decision in 1997 by the ED (and thus directly by the new government of the Hong Kong SAR) to impose its *advice* on a choice of MOI on even as few as 24 schools has fatally undermined the previously unchallenged autonomy many of them had been so proud of enjoying for up to a century.

There are a number of other aspects apart from the timing of the move which should also be examined in order to determine to what extent we could consider this crucial decision to be ideologically motivated, in particular the presentation style of the ED and the number of schools chosen. For many observers, this new forthright style when coupled with the first direct action ever to be taken by the ED over MOI, was unexpected but welcome. For more than 20 years, regularization of this issue had effectively been held up by a coalition of forces associated with many of the prestigious schools supported by considerable lobbying from, ironically, the Chinese-language media. The outcome of this resistance to change was that in the end 112 schools were permitted to continue using English, leaving more than 300 to teach in Cantonese, "up from 52 in 1994" (Kwong, 1997). A more decisive approach to solving the problem was clearly facilitated by the fact that it could take place under an executive led, for the first time in 155 years, by a native-speaker of Chinese. Many however suspected that the original number of schools selected to remain as EMI was a suspiciously arbitrary "round" number. Why 100 and not 99 or even 97? Had the number been first suggested by someone, then the statistical process designed to produce it rather than the other way around?

ECR4 had acknowledged that many schools (i.e. school principals and governors) may prefer to stick to the label of English-medium in the belief that it will attract the parents of more academically-able students to send them there, even though the majority of their current students may be unable to learn effectively through English,

thus obliging the teachers to use mixed code to communicate with them. That this was a reality in many cases had been made possible by a very open admissions policy, through which most secondary schools –and in particular the older and more prestigious ones– have traditionally been free to select their own intake of students outside the constraints of a rigidly enforced catchment system, and thus the elite schools have retained an academically higher level of student intake. Such self-perpetuating elitism enabled most of the top 30% of Hong Kong's schools to reach the arbitrary cut-off point of 85% of their students being deemed capable of studying through the medium of English. Given that the ED had fixed this percentage, determining which 30% of schools should be permitted to remain EMI would only have been difficult if the ED had been seeking to select them based on criteria other than academic performance and social status. As it was, the three assessment measures of student ability, teacher capability and the existence of support strategies were ones which the elite schools had no difficulty satisfying.

Parental choice became the rallying-cry of opponents to imposed selection of MOI, but revealingly it was only ever invoked by those schools which wished to remain EMI. Parents in Hong Kong prefer EMI in the belief that somehow more English "rubs off" on a child when he or she learns all their subjects through that medium rather than just studying English as a subject in a CMI environment, and because there are just too many variables in the sociolinguistic and educational context to prove or disprove this belief, the general status of EMI schools has remained higher than that of most CMI schools. The perception that English is a higher-status language than Cantonese has also been reinforced by increasing globalization. Thus an alliance of agencies in a relatively small number of schools (principals, governors, teachers, parents, students, supported by the general public and the media) fought back against the newly-discovered power of the ED, ideologically motivated in part by the new Chief Executive, and 14 out of 24 were successful on appeal in retaining the right to use English as a medium of instruction. MOI had finally become an ideological concern in the public arena, confirming Cooper's point that all education is political in nature: "Since education is, from the state's point of view, a primary means of social control and, from the individual's or family's point of view, a means for social mobility, it is scarcely

surprising that the language of instruction should be an important political issue" (Cooper, 1989).

Other agencies in the educational arena, such as all eight predominantly English-medium **universities** and the **employer associations**, were unanimous in their support for improved learning of English whether that took place in an EMI or CMI environment, although the **teacher unions** were more noticeably supportive of CMI from an ideological standpoint. The ED continued its fight for mainly parental hearts and minds by producing a string of television advertisements in 1998-2000 featuring successful local public figures who had attended CMI schools; it had been made clear by the events of 1997, however, that the department was only one of a number of agencies in Hong Kong making meanings, in Thompson's (1990) terms, in an attempt to sustain relations of domination, i.e. acting ideologically. This situation, it needs to be repeated, stands in stark contrast to the pre-1997 *status quo* of stalemate, which in an earlier analysis was characterized thus: "the current system is more a product of infrastructural than ideological and English language planning factors" (So, 1987).

5.1. Role of expert opinion and professional input in ELP in Hong Kong – research

A final concern from the perspective of anyone probing for ideological motivation must be exactly how the 100 or so "winning" EMI schools were selected and, more generally, to what extent expert opinion and professional input are solicited by educational language policymakers in Hong Kong.

In answer to the first part of the question, the only available published research is the so-called ERE projects, referred to in ECR4 as "the research projects jointly carried out by the University of Hong Kong and the Educational Research Establishment…[which] indicated that only some 30% of Secondary 3 students could perform effectively in English" (Education Commission, 1990), details of which can be found buried in an annex to ECR2 published 4 years earlier. At first sight it appears uncontroversial, but it is the very thinness and age of the research support in this crucial document, as in many others, which is worrying.

The 3 relevant research projects, termed Projects A, B and C, have the following titles:

> A "An investigation of the effectiveness of various language modes of presentation, spoken and written, in Form 3 in Hong Kong Anglo-Chinese secondary schools"
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> B "The effects of the medium of instruction on the achievement of Form 2 pupils in Hong Kong secondary schools" (reported by Brimer *et al.,* 1985) *and*
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> C "Studies on the modes of language of instruction at junior secondary levels in Anglo-Chinese secondary Schools" (Education Commission, 1986)

Project A administered a standard videotaped lesson with supporting printed texts to 1296 EMI Form 3 students in English, Cantonese/Chinese and bilingually (using mixed code), then the subjects were given a written test on their comprehension of the lesson content in English and Chinese. Results "indicate that some 30% or so of pupils can perform effectively in English. Another 30% or so have severe difficulty and the remainder come somewhere between". Project B (Brimer *et al*, 1985) involved teaching Form 2 students from 29 schools and a wide range of ability groups history and science over a period of six weeks, then testing them in English only. Such a longitudinal study of a larger population certainly suggests a methodology more likely to yield meaningful results, yet the conclusion is remarkably similar: "for 70% of pupils English texts are a definite disadvantage, even if enhanced in Chinese, where testing is in English". The assumption that projects A and B are measuring the same thing is misleading, however, because Project B was evaluating purely written comprehension and Project A mainly oral. The project also found a strong correlation between proficiency in English and written Chinese.

Project C, perhaps the most promising of all, investigated 7500 students in Forms 1-3 from 15 EMI schools over a period of two years from 1983-85. Subjects were given bilingual questionnaires on which they recorded their understanding of English in history, science and mathematics lessons at regular intervals. Findings are reported "to confirm a correlation between proficiency in language and proficiency in other subjects. In other words, the good student will not find the language of instruction a significant barrier" (Education Commission, 1986). Such correlations are unremarkable to most linguists brought up on Oller and Labov, and suggest either that Hong Kong students perfectly exemplify the paradigms prevalent in the 1970s linking language proficiency, through logical thinking, with general academic achievement, or (more likely in my opinion) the interpretation of the findings of these three research

projects ignores complex social and sociolinguistic factors like the specific cultures or even ideologies of Hong Kong (especially EMI) secondary schools.

It is my contention that, rather than interpreting what evidence these research studies provided with an open mind to its possible implications, the EC chose in its reports 2 and 4 to focus on those findings which support the ED's preferred position that:

1. Most Hong Kong students are more comfortable studying through the medium of Chinese.
2. But some EMI schools, which have traditionally enjoyed a very high level of autonomy, will resist a change to CMI, and in any case a locally-educated tranche of school leavers with a higher level of English will be need to ensure Hong Kong's "international" position.
3. Therefore evidence should be found (by commissioning studies) which supports the uncontentious view that a given percentage (say 30%) of students at every level are capable of studying through the medium of English, and a corresponding percentage of EMI secondary schools should be allowed to remain so.

In short, expert opinion in the form of research commissioned more than a decade earlier was used to justify a pre-determined ideological position, that 30% of the secondary school population of Hong Kong should be given the chance to continue studying through the medium of English while the remaining 70% were to be "firmly guided" to use Cantonese because "most students prefer learning in the mother tongue and generally perform better than their counterparts using English as medium of instruction (Education Department, 1997).

5.2. Role of expert opinion and professional input in ELP in Hong Kong – practice

Given that the ED and the Hong Kong government have a strong ideological imperative to preserve the elite EMI secondary schools, whose alumni uncoincidentally fill a high percentage of senior positions in government and education, while at the same time publicly promoting their policy of mother tongue schooling, what measures and professional input could be called upon to provide practical support for this seemingly contradictory standpoint? At the implementation level there has been considerable debate on the feasibility of allowing even 112 schools to continue using EMI, now that a genuine "sheep's head" of English-medium rather than mixed-code teaching is required. Attention has focused, with reason, on the qualifications and

experience of local teachers to use oral English in their teaching when perhaps fewer than half of them had been doing so in the past. Two measures were introduced to address this problem, both with the overwhelming support of the business community but noticeably not of the teaching profession itself.

The most recent was the decision to assess all in-service teachers of English on their level of English. Rather like asking trained doctors to sit a test of their medical knowledge (a suggestion which has incidentally been proposed and rejected before in Hong Kong), teachers' professionalism was called into question in the wake of public perceptions (fuelled by the media) of falling standards in societal and particularly workplace use of English. Pointing the finger of blame at, first, the frontline teachers of English led to language proficiency assessment tests being introduced in October 2000 and made compulsory for the majority of primary and secondary school English teachers. These tests are strictly focused on norms of language use and not pedagogy; teachers who are proficient *in* English are now "benchmarked" as competent teachers *of* English. The origin of this measure can be traced to the business community which began an ambitious project called the Workplace English Campaign in February 2000 with a prestigious World Wide Web address at http://www.english.gov.hk/; this wide-ranging project is funded by private companies but headed by a civil servant and seeks to establish the standards of English required at six levels of employment from "professionals" to clerks. It is surely no coincidence that the same term "benchmarking" was proposed by the ED a few months later for its attempt to extend regulation of the language qualifications of teachers.

Boyle comments at length in a later article (Boyle, 1997) on the second measure, an attempt to insert more "real" English into the Hong Kong secondary school environment by the pilot hiring of native-speaker teachers of English as a foreign language from the U.K. and Commonwealth countries. First introduced on a small scale (75 teachers) in 1987, less than half of the host schools wished to continue with the scheme after the initial two-year trial period had elapsed, but it was continued nonetheless. He speculates on the core reason for its unpopularity: "The root of the problem was that the Education Department had not really tuned in to the local teachers' resentment at the implication of the [scheme] that an expatriate native-speaker teacher of English was better than a local teacher". There is also evidence that the ED, having

failed to prepare for the measure adequately beforehand, then attempted to bury the results of it in the form of an interim report commissioned in 1986 which was never made public but found its way to the press. Although the report was not strongly critical of the department, it did note "a certain arrogance about the view…that the expatriate teachers saw themselves as the spearhead for curriculum change" (Boyle, 1997).

After a further report a decade later (ECR6) which glossed over the evident failure of the pilot programme, it was relaunched on the direct instructions of the new Chief Executive in his first Policy Address as the "Native-speaking English Teacher" (NET) scheme, but local teachers' resentment at the scheme's implication that a native-speaker teacher of English was better than a local teacher was still barely addressed. In a "key" speech archived at the Hong Kong government website, the Secretary for Education and Manpower urged "that local teachers and teachers' unions…put aside their prejudice" and support the NET scheme, including the provision of a substantial monthly cost-of-living allowance to be paid to the NETs on top of their local salary, on the understanding that the scheme was a "just a transitional measure" to alleviate a situation in which "only 30% of English teachers in secondary schools have received teachers' training and obtained degrees in English" (Wong, 1997). Once again, the inadequacy of local teacher standards was cited as the implicit reason for the measure, but the full implications of this connection were not elaborated. A comprehensive review of the scheme was also promised for five years later, i.e. this year, 2002.

By the end of the first school year for which they had been actively recruited (1998-99) there were "387 NETs…in post. They are recruited from countries including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United States and the United Kingdom" (Board of Education, 1999). It is estimated that in August 2002 numbers peaked at around the 450 level since the ED guaranteed financing for one NET per English-medium and two for every Chinese-medium secondary school, but the scheme was extended, albeit on different terms of service, to recruit a further 500 NS primary school English teachers (PNETs) –one for every two schools– and English language teaching assistants (ELTAs) for the current school year 2002-03. If we judge from these figures alone, the secondary NET scheme appears to enjoy the complete support of the ED, and the internationally competitive salaries and allowances it offers make it easy to attract high-calibre applicants for the positions; more crucial, however, to the success of this costly

operation (over US$50 million per year) is the support from within the schools, which has often been grudging at best. While most local teachers of English (LETs) are aware of the relative short supply (30%) of "subject specialists" (i.e. trained teachers who are degree-holders in English language or literature) in Hong Kong schools, they do not feel that the buying-in of expertise from overseas compensates for this because the Western teachers will have no understanding of the local Hong Kong Chinese educational culture.

Ironically, it is clear that the ED had actually been hoping for collaboration between NETs and LETs, and this ("Assisting in school-based teacher development") was in fact the second of three objectives to be reported on in the promised comprehensive review of the scheme, the Monitoring and Evaluation Report or MENET report commissioned in 1998, the executive summary of which was released in March this year. The summary highlights "a rather limited achievement of the second objective…ascribed to a lack of a sharing culture in Hong Kong schools" and further comments: "Other problems hindering the collaboration required for achievement of this objective include lingering feelings of unfair and differential treatment among local teachers who seem to resent aspects of the way NETs are treated" (SCOLAR, 2002). With these issues mainly connected with allowances and workload still unresolved, it is unlikely that even a start can be made on the central problem of helping NETs and LETs to work together more collaboratively.

While the root cause of this resistance and conflict is the very existence of the NET scheme, it is equally clear that another major problem is one that the Education Department has created for itself, namely its lack of transparency and poor communication with those stakeholders in the Hong Kong education system who are most affected by the presence of the NETs, the local teachers of English. The principal investigator of the MENET report recently commented that "it might have been predicted that the expected [second objective] role of the NETs was not well conceived" (Storey, 2002), and nothing in my own experience of being employed by (1992-95) or working on projects with (since November 2001) the ED predisposes me to expect that it is capable of effectively communicating its intentions and consulting the interested parties prior to making policy decisions. Instead it confines itself to making very few decisions, in a continuation of the laissez-faire approach of the colonial administration.

Referring to "the questionable practices of the [Hong Kong secondary school] system", one which has evolved over time with the connivance of or at least non-interference from the ED, the report concluded that "indications…suggest that this may require a culture shift which is unlikely to be achieved" (SCOLAR, 2002).

It is the organizational culture of the ED, finally then, which appears to present the greatest obstacle to successful educational reform in general and educational language planning support measures in particular. In the case of the first measure, the language proficiency assessment or benchmarking of local teachers of English was imposed without consultation within months of a similar (but voluntary) initiative being launched by the powerful business lobby in government; in the case of the second, the ED (again on government prompting) relaunched on a vastly increased and ambitious scale a scheme the unpopularity of which in schools was an open secret, very much as a "quick fix" solution to a systemic problem which had never been addressed, namely how to maintain or even improve levels of student attainment in English while enforcing a segregation between schools according to their MOI. It is tempting to see in this costly appeal to outside expertise (rather than investment in retraining local teachers of English) an example of Pennycook's "colonial continuities", and as he says in an earlier book, the very use of the term "native speaker", not to mention the enthusiastic recruitment of them in their hundreds, "supports a very particular ideology of the primacy of those born into a particular language" (Pennycook, 1994). Both expert opinion and professional input are manipulated to serve an ideological objective which is, I would argue, the maintenance of the *status quo* in Hong Kong society through the systematic selection of those students with higher social capital (the top 25-30%) to enjoy greater opportunities for exposure to English. Compensatory measures are offered to the rest, but by their very nature they undermine the status of the teachers best placed to help them learn English, and are widely seen as little more than token gestures to the business community.

6. Future trends in ELP in Hong Kong

Hong Kong can be said, somewhat simplistically perhaps, to have had language policies but little or "no language planning" (Poon, 2000) in the 156 years of colonial rule prior to 1997, but in the last five years the debate has become increasingly

ideologically charged, with even a suggestion of changing the MOI in primary schools to English *or Mandarin Chinese* (Michael Tien, chairman of SCOLAR, cited in Cheung, 2001). As So (2000) notes, there are the regional precedents of Malaysia, Singapore and Taiwan, all of which effectively changed the MOI in their secondary schools within a generation. In the case of Taiwan it was from the Hokkien dialect to Mandarin Chinese, which has interesting implications for Hong Kong's future ELP, and may point to the next turn in the road ahead.

In conclusion, it seems that there is ample evidence of ideological motivation in educational decision-making leading to insufficient attention being given to obtaining sound research data and investing in teacher reeducation. The agencies implicated are interested parties in government and big business attempting to "sustain relations of domination" (Thompson, 1990). The Hong Kong government, mainly through the Education Department and Commission, has been using the carrot and now more recently the stick of policy (Boyle, 1995) or, in Fullan's (1991) terms, the principles of support and pressure. He argues that "support without pressure leads to drift or waste of resources: pressure without support leads to resistance and alienation" and I would suggest that the two characterizations perfectly capture the situation in Hong Kong educational circles pre- and post-1997. Ideology is an overused word in many contexts, but in the educational language planning and policy of the Hong Kong government and in particularly in the debate over the medium of instruction in secondary schools, I believe there is no immediate danger that it will "lose its cutting edge and dwindle to an empty sound" (Eagleton, 1991).

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