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DECONSTRUCTING “MIXED CODE”

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter I propose that the often taken-for-granted, commonsensical notion of “mixed code” as a presumably existing, stably recurring, monolithic, debased language variety is in fact a rhetorical construct. By examining a diverse range of complex language use phenomena that can all be named “mixed code”, I argue that the notion of “mixed code” as asserted in the public and official discourses plays an important role in naturalizing and normalizing a certain language ideology, which, in turn, is appealed to as a rationale for a socially inequitable language education policy. The chapter concludes with the proposal that language and education issues in Hong Kong can be seen in a clearer light only when the official and popular media notion of “mixed code” is problematized and deconstructed, and the diverse range of social interactive actions mediated by multiple language resources seen and understood in their situated contexts, and not through the hidden language ideological lens of the reifying rhetorical construct of “mixed code”.

“What we don’t want is for young people to be taught in Chinglish rather than either English or Chinese and that’s what we are trying to avoid at the moment,” said [former] Governor Chris Patten. (South China Morning Post, May 13, 1994)

“What we must ban in the classroom is mixed-code, commonly known as ‘Chinglish’--that’s not language at all,” Director of Education Helen Yu Lai Ching-ping said. (South China Morning Post, March 14, 1998)

Efforts will be stepped up to ensure schools teaching in English do not use a mixture of Chinese and English to boost standards, the education chief said yesterday. ...

... “If they are found to be teaching in a mixture of languages, we will ask them to switch to teach in the mother tongue,” Secretary for Education and Manpower Joseph Wong Wing-ping said. (*South China Morning Post*, March 15, 1998)

How do language ideologies come about? What makes the difference between a successful language ideology--one that becomes dominant--and other, less successful ones? What is the connection between language ideologies and broader political and ideological developments in a society? How did we arrive at our contemporary views and perspectives on language and our assessments of current linguistic situations? (Blommaert, 1999, p. 9).

[Without a legitimate name, without authority to the words] (Confucius, circ. 500 B.C.)

1. WHAT IS “MIXED CODE”?

“Mixed code”, as constructed in the Hong Kong government official discourses, is portrayed almost as an ugly, insidious, monstrous animal, wildly trampling on and destroying everything, especially young minds, if it is not severely controlled and banned from certain important domains, for instance, the classroom. Government officials *sounded* as if they had already seen and documented the nature of mixed code and all its harmful effects. The interesting phenomenon is that seldom does anybody in the public media pause and ask such important questions as: What is mixed code; what does it look like; when is it used; why and how does it have harmful effects on young people’s language and cognitive development? It seems that people just appear to recognize what it is once the name, “mixed code”, is mentioned, and there does not seem to be any need to find out in the first place what one means by “mixed code” or whether “mixed code” actually means vastly different things in different contexts.

2. THE OFFICIAL CONSTRUCTION OF MIXED CODE AS THE PRIME CAUSE OF EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS

If mixed code refers to the practice of using both Cantonese (L1) and English (L2) in the Hong Kong secondary school classroom, then it might be surprising to the younger reader that such classroom practices did enjoy a much better name in the 1980s. For instance, the famous Llewelyn Report in 1982 suggested that the government could acknowledge the reality of widespread bilingual oral practices in the content classrooms of nominally English medium schools and make serious attempts to improve the effectiveness of this reality by developing genuinely bilingual curriculum strategies. Reporting on the findings of a series of research studies that seemed to be responding to the Llewelyn Report’s recommendation, Johnson referred to the practices of using both L1 and L2 in the Anglo-Chinese

secondary school content classroom as “bilingual switching strategies” (Johnson, 1983) and as “various language modes of presentation” (Johnson, Chan, Lee, & Ho, 1985).

Mixed code officially used as a name to disparagingly label bilingual classroom practices and constructed as the prime cause of educational and language problems came into the lime light in 1990 in the tone-setting Education Commission Report No. 4 (ECR4), whose comments on mixed code would then be repeatedly quoted in subsequent government educational policy documents (e.g., Report of the Working Group on Language Proficiency, 1994; Education Commission Report No. 6, 1995) and the mass media reporting on language educational issues (e.g., see news report excerpts presented at the beginning of this chapter). To get a sense of how the official discourses do this, let us examine the following excerpt from ECR4:

Mixed-code and medium of instruction

We recognise that teaching and learning are generally more effective if the medium of instruction is either the mother tongue or English (for those who are able to learn effectively through this medium). *Unfortunately, however, the use of mixed-code is quite common in many of our classrooms.*

It follows that the use of mixed-code should be reduced as far as possible. The corollary to this is that it is necessary for students to be grouped according to which medium of instruction is most appropriate for them. Students will need to be placed in Chinese-medium classes or English-medium classes on the basis of their ability to learn effectively in that medium.

(Education Commission Report No. 4, 1990, pp. 100-101; italics added)

The above excerpt from ECR4 has become the earliest major rationalizing discourses for the subsequent implementation of the government policy of MIGA (Medium of Instruction Grouping Assessment) in 1994 and the controversial linguistic streaming policy of tracking schools into monolingual streams in 1998 (for details of the policies, see Poon, this volume and So, this volume). It becomes important to show how the construction of the notion of “mixed code” plays a central role in distracting the public’s attention from the more complex but important social-equity issue of how the government should and can help the majority of school children attain the English proficiency to benefit from an English medium education, an important symbolic capital in the socioeconomic context of Hong Kong (Lin, 1996)¹. However, by constructing “mixed code” as the major, if not sole, *cause* of the learning difficulties faced by limited-English-proficiency (LEP) students in English medium (EMI) schools, an easy policy solution was formulated--to track students into monolingual streams, with the majority of students (over 70%) placed in the mother tongue stream, and deprived of access to any form of socially prestigious English medium education.

The rationale for this kind of monolingual reductionism (see So, this volume) and socially inequitable education policy is constituted mainly by the reification and construction of mixed code as the prime cause and culprit of current educational problems (Luke, 1992). This is done through using a name (mixed code) that implicitly draws on and asserts the deep-rooted, often taken-for-granted, language ideology of linguistic purism (Li, 1998) to condemn bilingual classroom practices as the cause of learning problems rather than as strategies to cope with these very problems. Eliminating mixed code from the classroom then becomes the logical solution and the socially inequitable educational policy thus formulated is rationalized by implicitly appealing to the language ideology of condemning mixing, through the construction of the derogative notion of mixed code. If, instead, the name “bilingual switching strategies” (Johnson, 1983) is used, the scenario will become one in which the cause of the learning difficulties lies elsewhere and the practices of using both L1 and L2 in the classroom are seen as the local, pragmatic, coping strategies used by teachers and students to solve their problems which have arisen from the socioeconomic domination of English and the uneven distribution of English linguistic capital among different social groups in the society (for a detailed analysis, see Lin, 1996). To see how an alternative picture of bilingual classroom practices can be conceived beyond the totalizing, negative picture implied by the official notion of mixed code, we shall examine the role of bilingual classroom strategies in the next section.

3. CROSSING BOUNDARIES: BILINGUAL CLASSROOM STRATEGIES

The potential role of the L1 as a bridging tool to help the learner to gradually adapt to using L2 as the medium of instruction (i.e., L2 immersion) is worth more discussion. In early French immersion in Canada, for instance, immersion teachers, although in general upholding the speak-French-only principle, are in fact more flexible than we thought regarding the use of some L1 for sociocultural purposes:

They lessened the children’ frustration by allowing them to speak their native language; and by sometimes speaking to them in English, the teachers showed that they appreciated the children’s accomplishments at their particular ability level. (Salomone, 1992, p. 39)

The constructive role of some L1 use should, therefore, not be simply dismissed out of hand. L1 does seem to have certain important sociocultural and educational roles to play in the classroom; for instance, in establishing a closer relationship with students and in motivating students by relating the unfamiliar academic topic to their familiar L1 daily life experiences, by switching to L1 judiciously and selectively (for detailed analyses of classroom examples, see Lin, 1996). More systematic research in this area has also recently been called for by key researchers in immersion education. Swain (1997), for instance, has outlined a

range of important research questions to which we still need to find empirical answers in further research:

What use should be made of the students' first language? Should the teacher ever use it? Are there ways in which he or she can use the first language to support second language learning rather than undermine it? And what about the students? For what purposes do they use their first language? Is the use of the first language possibly cognitively essential to their learning of both content and the second language? (Swain, 1997, p. 267)

Cummins (1999) also points out the need for breaking away from the either-or simple prescription (i.e., simply prescribing that no L1 is allowed or simply saying that L1 can be used without giving clear, systematic, guidelines). He calls for a more considered and systematic approach to L1 use:

[In the successful example of International High School in New York City], the [language] planning process involved changing the curriculum and assessment procedures to enable students to use their prior knowledge (much of it in their L1) to facilitate their learning and demonstrate what they had learned. Use of students' L1 was encouraged, as was a cooperative and supportive inquiry process. Language itself became a major focus of study within the program.

Within the Hong Kong context, a similar language planning process might explore issues such as:

(1) To what extent might the use of Chinese be encouraged within English-medium schools as a temporary means of enabling higher-order thinking process to be brought to bear on learning? Students, for example, might be permitted to discuss an issue or task in Cantonese, write outline notes and an initial draft in that language, and then a final draft in English.

(2) The scenario sketched above implies a second question: To what extent might classroom organization and instruction be modified to permit a wider range of inquiry into topics (rather than just textbook learning) and more opportunities for use of oral and written language (both L1 and English) to investigate these topics? (Cummins, 1999: 12)

More research along the above questions is obviously needed to develop clearer guidelines on how the L1 can be constructively used in support of the development of L2 and not as a substitute for it (Johnson & Swain, 1994). Nevertheless, given what we have established in research so far, some tentative guidelines regarding L1 use in L2 classrooms can, perhaps, be made. For instance, Bob Meszaros, an experienced secondary school teacher in Hong Kong, has drafted, in consultation with the author, a set of guidelines for the use of

Cantonese in EMI content subject lessons in his school (listed below). The classroom excerpts used to illustrate the guidelines are taken from Lin (1996):

Suggestions on How to Use L1 in the L2 Classroom

1. *A teacher can strategically use L1 when she/he wants to appeal to a shared cultural value, or to address students as a member of the same cultural community, and to invoke some Chinese cultural norm or value.*

Exemplifying Classroom Excerpt 1:

This is Johnson's Example 4 (1985, p. 48), reanalyzed in Lin (1996). The data presentation format is as in Johnson's: tape-recorder counter numbers precede utterances; English translations are put in brackets below the Yale transcriptions of the Cantonese utterances.

A Math teacher is moving round the class checking work and he finds that two pupils have not done their homework:

024 How about you?

025 Oh, neih meih-jouh-hou hah? Chahn Gwai-hou. Laahndi-wo. Neih ne? Neih leuhng go jouh mat-yeh? Hah? Mh-gei-dak-jo dou yauh ge me! Hah? Gung-fo dou yauh mh-gei-dak jouh ge me? Hah? Neih leuhng go jouh mat-yeh?
(Oh? You haven't done it eh Chahn Gwai-hou. So lazy. And you? You two why? What? Forgotten? How can that be? Eh? Is there such a thing as forgetting to do homework? What? You two, what do you think you're doing?)

To understand the interaction in the above excerpt, it requires of the analyst an intimate knowledge of the implicit meanings that can be signalled by the use of the different codes among the Cantonese people in Hong Kong. For instance, a Hong Kong Cantonese does not normally speak to another Hong Kong Cantonese in English; if she/he does, she/he will be interpreted as signalling social distance, power and in short "baahn yeh" (meaning: "acting", "putting on airs"). These interpretations may be waived only in special institutional situations where institutional constraints apply; e.g., in the legal court or in the EMI classroom, where Cantonese social actors typically suspend their ordinary roles and (or) take on (additional) institutionally defined English-speaking roles.

When we examine Excerpt 1, we notice that the teacher has been speaking English to the first student ("How about you?") when he is about to check his work. He then gives out an exclamation ("Oh")², apparently upon noticing that the student, Chahn Gwai-Hou, has not done his homework. This is followed by a "tongue-lashing" done entirely in Cantonese. So, it is the discovery of a student's

not having done his homework that triggers the teacher’s switch from English to Cantonese.

It seems that when the teacher switches from English to Cantonese, he is contextualizing a shift in frame (Goffman, 1974): he is signalling a suspension of both the definition of the situation as an English Math lesson and his institutional role as an English-speaking Math-cum-English teacher whose implicit concerns include the teaching and learning of not only mathematical knowledge and skills, but also academic English for Math and ordinary conversational English. That explains why English is used even when the topic is not related to academic Math, e.g., when he is about to check the student’s homework, he speaks to him in conversational English, “How about you?”. However, by switching from English to Cantonese, he is highlighting to his students a different set of concerns that he now demands them to pay attention to: the extremely unacceptable behaviour of the two students, who have not fulfilled their responsibilities and obligations as students.

It seems that the teacher is appealing to implicit native cultural norms and values to admonish the students for not having done their homework. What is being both appealed to and reaffirmed is the cultural logic that when students have not done their homework, it is culturally appropriate for the teacher to call them lazy and in our culture students cannot absolve themselves of their responsibility by saying that they have forgotten to do their homework. The force of the teacher’s admonition lies in its appeal to the cultural logic of what a teacher is entitled to say in a certain type of situations in the culture shared by the teacher and students (c.f. Heap, 1986). It is both typical of and culturally acceptable for Cantonese teachers to say harshly and ironically things like “Gung-fo dou yauh mh-gei-dak jouh ge me?!” (meaning: “Is there such a thing as forgetting to do homework?!”) in such situations. It is likely that the admonition would not have the same force if it were done in English rather than Cantonese, the native language of both the teacher and students. By switching to their shared native tongue, the teacher in Excerpt 1 is doing a number of things: he is suspending the English pedagogic frame, highlighting a shift of concerns, and starting to talk to the students as “cultural member to cultural member”, invoking and reaffirming native cultural norms and values. What is happening here is therefore both a forceful admonition of unacceptable student behaviour and attitudes and the reaffirmation and reproduction of the native cultural norms and values regarding the responsibilities and obligations inherent in the role of a student. These cannot have been accomplished without the switch to Cantonese.

2. *A teacher can intentionally use L1 to highlight to students that what she/he is saying is of such grave or urgent importance (e.g., for disciplining) that the usual rule to use L2 has been suspended.*

Exemplifying Classroom Excerpt 2:

Switches to Cantonese do not necessarily always involve an appeal to or reaffirmation of native cultural values. Sometimes, they are used mainly for their effect in highlighting frame-shifts and changes in the teacher's concerns. The lesson excerpt below is an example. The teacher begins his lesson in English and then breaks off and switches to Cantonese to deal with late-comers. Once they are settled, he switches back to English to continue with the lesson work ("Example 1" in Johnson, 1985, p. 47):

- 008 Close all your text book and class work book.
 012 Yauh di tuhng-hohk meih-faan-laih. Faai-di!
 (There are some classmates not back yet. Be quick!)
 017 Now, any problem about the classwork?

Johnson analyses the Cantonese utterance as an example of an informal aside done in Cantonese. While agreeing partially with this analysis, we however note that if it is to mark out a mere topical digression, the teacher can well have done this by means other than code-switches, e.g., intonational changes, hand-claps or pauses to bracket the aside (see examples of these in Lin, 1990, pp. 32-36). The use of these contextualization cues (Gumperz, 1984) does not involve a violation of the institutional "use-English-only" constraint which teachers in Anglo-Chinese secondary schools are well aware of. We therefore argue that what is being signalled here is not only a topical aside, but also a radical break in the English pedagogic frame and an urgent change in the teacher's concerns. By the switch from English to Cantonese the teacher seems to be relaying to his students this implicit message, "Now I'm so annoyed by these late-comers that I have to put aside *all* kinds of teaching, including that of English teaching, and concentrate on one single task: that of getting you to settle down quickly! And you'd better take my command seriously as I'm single-minded in enforcing it!". This break in the English pedagogic frame to highlight a different, urgent set of concerns cannot have been achieved without the teacher's switch from English to Cantonese.

3. *A teacher can deliberately use L1 if she/he wishes to arouse student interest, establish a warmer and friendlier atmosphere, or build rapport with her/his students.*

The key to understanding the implicit meanings signalled by code-switches lies in a recognition of the sociolinguistic fact that whenever Hong Kong Cantonese have something urgent and earnest to relay to one another, they do so in their shared native language; whenever Hong Kong Cantonese speak to one another in English despite their having a common native language, it is usually because of some institutionally given reasons; e.g., to teach and learn the English language. When teachers want to establish a less distanced and non-institutionally defined relationship with their students, they will also find it necessary to switch to their shared native language, Cantonese, as in the excerpt below. This time the teacher is commending the students' work. Johnson mentions that throughout the first part of this lesson the teacher is returning and commenting favourably in Cantonese upon the students' Science projects and the following excerpt begins with a

transcription of the last part of this section (“Example 5” in Johnson, 1985, pp. 48-49):

Exemplifying Classroom Excerpt 3:

- 094 Jauh chin-keih mh-hou jeung keuih yat tek jough tek jough lohk go jih-ji-lo douh, saai-jo di sam-gei.
(but don’t kick it into the waste paper basket, a waste of your effort.)
- 095 waahk-je neih ho-yih jeung tiuh sin cheun-hei keuih diu-hai neih go fong douh; hou leng ge. Mh-hou saai-jo keuih; ho-yih jih-gei lo faan laak.
(or you can put a thread through it and hang it up in your room; very beautiful. Don’t waste it; you can get it back yourself.)
- 096 Now you take out your note book, we come back to Mathematics. Turn to Exercise Eleven C. We look at the problems.

Johnson points out that the transition to the main business of the lesson is marked by the switch to English, which then predominates throughout the remainder of the lesson. He describes this lesson as “an extended example of the informal/formal continuum between Cantonese and English”. We however find that the terms “formal” and “informal” do not provide the best description of what is happening. English is a language of power and social distance in the wider society and any Cantonese person, no matter how fluent in English, has to switch to Cantonese if she/he is serious about establishing a genuine and friendly relationship with another Cantonese person in Hong Kong. The teacher could have done his praising of the students’ work in English, but the effect would have been different. He would still be seen by the students as distancing himself from them even when praising them if the praise was done in English; the students would still be seeing him as a Cantonese hiding behind the mask of an English-speaking teacher who remained socially distanced from them. A Cantonese teacher therefore has to switch to Cantonese to talk to her/his students if she/he wants to establish a warm and friendly atmosphere. On the other hand, she/he can always switch back to English to resume a more distanced stance, for instance, to facilitate a pedagogic task at hand. In other words, code-switching adds to the teacher’s repertoire of communicative resources in the classroom. With the creative use of these communicative resources, the teacher can effectively negotiate for different role-relationships with the students; e.g., a teacher, a friend, a discipline-enforcer, a cultural advisor, etc., whenever the need arises (for further examples of these, see Lin, 1990).

4. *Teachers can give a quick L1 translation for L2 vocabulary or terms. Providing an L1 translation can promote bilingual academic knowledge and help students understand the subjects in both L1 as well as L2. Giving the Chinese meaning can also help students form richer multiple conceptual connections as the Chinese counterparts of English terms are often made up*

of common Chinese words that can sometimes enable students to infer, recognize and understand the meaning of the term better.

Exemplifying Classroom Excerpt 4:

In the excerpt below, a geography teacher uses an “English Key Term-Chinese Key Term” discourse format to establish bilingual knowledge of a geographic term:

- 045 So that means breaking up the land and then carrying away the small pieces of sand into the sea; then we call it erosion
 047 cham-sihk jok-yuhng.
 (erosion)
 047 O.K. Now besides a cliff.....

The apposition of the English and Chinese academic terms has the effect of establishing academic bilingualism. Moreover, there are cognitive advantages in introducing the Chinese equivalents of English terms as well. For instance, the Chinese term, “cham-sihk jok-yuhng”, is rather transparent in its meaning; it is made up of words that mean “invade-erode-effect”. As Johnson remarks (1985, p. 56), the term is not in common Cantonese usage; however, he fails to recognize that the components that make up the term are common Cantonese words and a Cantonese speaker can easily infer from them the meaning of the specialized term. In fact, this is a characteristic of many Chinese counterparts of English specialized terms. By knowing both the English and Chinese terms, students can not only understand scientific texts in both languages, but also form richer multiple conceptual connections (Gagni, 1993) which facilitate their understanding and learning of the underlying scientific concepts.

5. *Teachers can deliberately use L1 to provide annotations or examples that help relate an unfamiliar L2 academic topic to the students’ familiar L1 daily lives. This can help make school less alienating and more meaningful and relevant*

Exemplifying Classroom Excerpt 5 (“Example 46” in Johnson, 1985, p. 71):

In the excerpt below, the history teacher has been teaching about Napoleon and his final campaign at Waterloo and he switches from English to Cantonese to make a pun:

- 451 Waterloo. Ngoh-deih wan-dou Wo-Da-Louh Douh... da louh-dauh.
 (We find Waterloo Road... hit father)

The teacher capitalizes on the similarity of the historical place name, “Waterloo”, and a road’s name in Hong Kong as well as the similar sounds of the road’s name

and a Cantonese phrase meaning “hit father”. In Johnson’s analysis, this is an example of a teacher who enjoys making puns. However, it seems to me that the effect created may be more than that of just an enjoyable pun; it may also have the psychological effect of making things that belong to the distant L2 academic world appear as close as those that exist in the students’ immediate L1 lifeworld.

6. *Teachers can purposefully use L1 to encourage class participation and discussion and to help elicit the knowledge and experiences that students bring into the classroom and help them transform that contribution into L2. For example, students can be permitted to discuss or work on a group task in Chinese initially and with the teacher’s help produce an English version at the end.*
7. *If a student asks a question in L1, the teacher should help her/him rephrase it into L2.*
8. *Teachers should avoid pre-teaching the subject content extensively in L1 and subsequently repeating the teaching in L2, as that kind of practice will implicitly train students to pay attention to only the L1 teaching.*

Government officials and school administrators who are impatient with the task of grasping the subtleties of the strategies of L1 use would prescribe a simple, straightforward “either-or” policy (i.e., monolingual reductionism, see So, this volume). However, if the educational benefits of the students are to be given the first priority, we should not throw away the baby with the bath water and dismiss L1 use altogether. Teachers should be encouraged to engage in critical reflection on their classroom language use as part of their continuous professional development (e.g., by peer observation, or recording samples of one’s own lessons to critically analyse the various ways L1 has been used to see if they serve sound educational purposes). In the traditional ethos of Hong Kong schools, teachers are often not treated and trained as professionals capable of making highly complex judicious moment-to-moment pedagogical decisions in the classroom, and school administrators seem eager to legislate on teachers’ classroom practices, albeit often quite futilely. To significantly improve the quality of teaching in Hong Kong schools, it seems that there is no magical short-cut (e.g., monolingual reductionism) but the long-term professional training and development of teachers who can engage in continuous self-critical reflection and improvement of their own classroom practices including their bilingual switching strategies (see also So, this volume, for his proposal of a teacher-based MOI selection in schools).

There is, however, another set of bilingual coping strategies (see classroom examples in Excerpts 6-9 in Lin, 1996), which teachers and students use as their local, pragmatic solutions to the learning problems created by the system-induced self-imposition³ of an unfamiliar language as the medium of instruction despite their having a common native language (Luke, 1992). Some of these bilingual strategies are used mainly to alleviate the painful dilemmas brought about by the symbolic domination of English in the society (see analysis in Lin, 1996). For instance, they help students to comprehend the English terms and concepts of their

English textbooks by the use of Cantonese annotations. The bilingual strategies alone, however, cannot solve all the problems created by that domination when the gap between the students' English proficiency and the English linguistic demands of the content subject is too big to bridge. For instance, these students still have to cope with all the written work and assessment in English. Due to their limited English proficiency, they have to resort to rote-memorization strategies. The bilingual oral teaching strategies observed cannot shorten the wide gap between the students' expressive competence in English and the expressive competence required by their English assignments and examinations. The problem, however, is not caused by the use of "mixed code", as is often asserted by government officials. Rather, these bilingual strategies serve as local, pragmatic, short-term solutions to the long-term problems created by a system in which English is the medium of instruction of most higher and professional education while at the same time the majority of students are not provided with adequate English resources in their basic education to prepare them to cope with an EMI secondary education (e.g., the lack of professional development opportunities and curriculum resources to improve the quality of English language teaching and learning in many primary schools; for detailed analyses of the medium of instruction problems and alternative policy options, see Lin, 1997a; Lin & Man, 1999).

This section has focused on the inadequacy of the notion of mixed code to capture the diversity of bilingual classroom strategies as well as the wide range of roles played by different kinds of bilingual strategies. Although we have only discussed the potential roles of L1 use in L2 classrooms, it is equally important to explore and research on the potential roles of L2 use in L1 classrooms; for instance, to develop in students some academic bilingual competency by including the teaching of the English terms of scientific and technical concepts even in mother tongue content classrooms so as to facilitate the students' future transition from a mother tongue secondary education to a largely EMI university education in Hong Kong. Subscribing to a language ideology of purism, as embodied in the officials' use of the term "mixed code", will considerably limit the range of classroom communicative resources available for the facilitation of learning and teaching.

In the next section, we shall continue to deconstruct the official notion of mixed code by further discussing the diverse range of bi-/multilingual social interactive actions witnessed in the society that cannot be simply reified, homogenized and denigrated as debased language.

4. DECONSTRUCTING "MIXED CODE": A DIVERSE RANGE OF SOCIAL ACTIONS MEDIATED BY MULTIPLE LINGUISTIC RESOURCES

In an anti-drug-abuse short video clip aired on television in Hong Kong some time ago, a catchy slogan was used to ask young people to take life seriously because life offers no second chances: "Sahng-mihng mouh take 2!" (literally meaning: life has no "take two"). This slogan was, however, soon publicly criticized by

Education Commission Chairman Anthony Leung as an example of poor language use – “mixed code”. This high-profile educational policy-maker’s public condemnation illustrates how “mixed code” is used as an umbrella term for “debased language” through both asserting and appealing to the language ideology of linguistic purism. However, anybody familiar with popular youth culture in Hong Kong knows that to effectively reach these young people, one has to speak their language, and Hong Kong youths live in a lifeworld where “mouh take 2” (meaning: offers no second chances) is a vivid, familiar saying that can immediately strike a chord in their hearts. Using such a slogan is then not an example of “poor language use” but a powerful social, communicative action mediated by the bilingual resources available to the community, and such a social action cannot be captured by the official’s disparaging use of the term “mixed code”.

Instead of subscribing to the simplifying, homogenizing, monolithic notion of mixed code, various researchers have contributed to our understanding of bi/multilingual practices by documenting the diverse range of social interactive actions mediated by multiple linguistic and semiotic resources. For instance, Lee (this volume) analyses the exciting bi/multilingual texts and images in popular magazines in Hong Kong, not in terms of mixed code, but in terms of “voice-quoting”, or ventriloquating (i.e., speaking through others’ voices; see Bakhtin, 1935/1981), as ways of negotiating and signaling one’s membership in different discourse communities and thus her/his multiple, hybrid identities. Kwan (this volume), describing the interplay of L1 and L2 use in the English language classroom, analyses the impish but artful verbal play of some Hong Kong secondary school boys (see also Lin, 2000a). Li (2000), on the other hand, documents the many interesting instances of bilingual language use in the media which seem to serve a variety of well-defined communicative purposes (e.g., euphemism, specificity, bilingual punning). Li (forthcoming) also shows the linguistic and semantic motivations for the widespread bilingual practices witnessed in the community. These studies all seem to point to the various cultural and linguistic hybridizing practices which are increasingly constituting ways of life, ways of speaking, and senses of identity unique to the Hong Kong society. In an international city where the younger generations are increasingly having a much more global outlook than their previous counterparts (see Boyle, this volume), it seems to be a stark anachronism for the Hong Kong government officials and policy-makers to continue to subscribe to the ideology of linguistic purism implicitly asserted and normalized in the officially constructed monolithic notion of mixed code. As both students and teachers belong to the bilingual discourse communities outside the classroom, forcing both parties to become “linguistically pure” once they enter the classroom is both unrealistic and educationally ineffective. Rather, the bilingual indigenous resources of both students and teachers should be capitalized on for the development of culturally compatible curriculums for Hong Kong students (see Lin, 1997b, 1999, 2000b). Unless the term “mixed code” is problematized and deconstructed, and the wide range of bilingual communicative and social actions understood in their diverse contexts, government officials and educational policy-makers will be (although,

perhaps, unintentionally) leading the public in circles and circles, missing the really important issues in education.

NOTES

- ¹ Although the policy makers might not have actually planned to use mixed code as an attention-distractor and might themselves genuinely believe in mixed code as the main cause of language and educational problems, their discourses do have the effect of constructing mixed code as the main cause of the problems and distracting the public's attention from other important issues.
- ² It is unclear from the transcription provided by Johnson whether the "Oh" is an English "Oh" or Cantonese "Oh", which sound different but happen to have the same alphabetic representations; so, the onset of the switch may coincide with the exclamation or may be immediately after it.
- ³ It appears to be a "self-imposition" because many parents yearn for an EMI education for their children and this self-imposition is in fact "system-induced" because tertiary and professional education is largely EMI and graduates with an EMI secondary education will have an advantage.

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