HONG KONG CHILDREN'S RIGHTS TO A CULTURALLY COMPATIBLE ENGLISH EDUCATION

Abstract

In this paper I discuss why the right of access to the socioeconomically dominant symbolic resource, English, is a fundamental language right of Hong Kong children. I also discuss why current English curricular design and practices do not provide such access and how they can be changed in order to provide Hong Kong children with access to an English education that is compatible with their native culture (Jordan, 1985). In a culturally compatible curriculum, emphasis is placed on affirming and capitalizing on what children bring to the classroom: their indigenous linguistic, discourse, and cultural resources. It aims at building on and expanding the child's existing resources to bridge the gap between her/his native resources and the socioeconomically important language of the society. I also propose some directions for future research and curricular development that researchers, teachers, and teacher-educators can take in the context of Hong Kong in order to develop a culturally compatible English curriculum that will deny neither the Cantonese child's rightful linguistic and cultural identities and resources nor her/his right to have access to English.

Acknowledgements

1 The Right of Access to Dominant Symbolic Resources by Disadvantaged Groups

Language rights are fundamental rights as they mediate access to social and economic benefits in a society (Benson, this volume). The right of access to the socioeconomically dominant language (or `symbolic resource' [Bourdieu, 1991]) through public-funded education by members of a linguistic or social group who does not speak it, whether as a first or second language, should be seen as a basic human right. The grounds of this right lie in the moral belief that all children, irrespective of linguistic/cultural/social class origins and identities, should be allowed equal socioeconomic opportunities in a society. Education should facilitate the social mobility of socioeconomically disadvantaged groups and contribute to the development of a more meritocratic society. However, in reality, the schooling system in many societies serves primarily as a mechanism for reproducing social stratification and uneven distribution of social and economic benefits by systematically perpetuating uneven distribution of the dominant symbolic resource among different social/linguistic groups (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

Notwithstanding Hong Kong's geographic proximity to Mainland China, the socioeconomic importance/dominance of English in Hong Kong has been well-established and well-legitimized both in its historical colonial context and the global economic context (for a historical analysis, see Lin, 1996a). The role English plays in the new global forms of cultural, economic, and technological domination (Pennycook, 1994; Martin-Jones & Heller, 1996) makes it unrealistic to expect that the socioeconomic importance/dominance of English in Hong Kong will diminish to any significant extent in post-colonial Hong Kong. For instance, in post-July-1997 Hong Kong, English remains the prestigious and dominant medium in higher education, the professions, and the job market. In the Chief-Executive's Policy Address on October 8, 1997, the importance of developing English language skills among students is stressed for the role English skills are held to play in maintaining Hong Kong's status as an international trading and financial centre.

There has been some debate on whether Hong Kong is an ESL (English as a second language) or EFL (English as a foreign language) situation. Luke and Richards (1982), for instance, argued that English was somewhere

between a second and a foreign language in Hong Kong and called it an auxiliary language. It seems that on a continuum from ESL to EFL, Hong Kong is relatively closer to ESL than countries like Japan or Korea, but relatively closer to EFL when compared to the non-English-speaking immigrant's situation, say, in the States. Lin (1996a), on the other hand, calls English a socioeconomically dominant language in Hong Kong and points out that it is closer to ESL for bilingual, middle class people and closer to EFL for monolingual, working class people.

In the Hong Kong context, it is, therefore, important for language rights scholars and advocates to address the question of whether there are equal opportunities of access to English for children of the disadvantaged monolingual social groups who have little English linguistic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991) to start with, compared with children of the bilingual middle and professional classes, who have more English capital (e.g., with parents who are fluent in English, who read and tune in to English media, and who have the linguistic resources to support the English language learning of their children both inside and outside of school).

The uneven distribution of English capital among the different social groups has important implications for social equity and linguistic rights issues related to differential access to English and consequently the uneven distribution of higher, professional education and socioeconomic opportunities among children of different social groups. Providing the *same* kind or amount of English language instruction at school to children from different groups is tantamount to disadvantaging children from groups with little English capital in the family and the community to start with. A schooling and education funding system founded on the principle of ignoring the children's differential amounts of initial linguistic and cultural capital contributes to the reproduction of existing social stratification and the lack of social mobility of children from disadvantaged groups.

In this regard, it is important for language rights scholars to look into the kind and amount of provision of opportunities for learning English at school for children from different social groups. However, little work has been done in this area and research and academic debates on language education in Hong Kong have

traditionally not paid much attention to issues of social equity and the right of access to the socioeconomically important/dominant language for children of disadvantaged groups. These issues are usually buried in an array of public and academic discourses constructed by appropriating the different *Discourses* of decolonization, global trade, and immersion pedagogy. In the next section, we shall examine how the appropriation of these different *Discourses* contributes to the legitimization of language education policies that do little to support both the right to mother-tongue education and the right of access to the socioeconomically dominant language. An alternative vision is proposed to enable discussions to go beyond the limiting perspectives foregrounded in current public discourses.

2 Re-visioning the Right to Mother-Tongue Education in Hong Kong: How can the right to mother-tongue education be compatible with the right of access to the dominant symbolic resource?

Public debates have revolved around the government's dichotomatic dual-stream secondary school medium of instruction policy, under which the majority (estimated to be approximately 80 percent) of secondary schools will be unable to prove their English ability to use English medium on the part of their teachers and students and forced to switch to Chinese medium starting from September 1998 (Benson, this volume). However, little public attention has been paid to the paradox of the post-1997 government's allowing a largely English-medium higher and professional education system to continue to exist while pushing for a largely Chinese-medium secondary education system.

Arguments of decolonization and the right to mother-tongue education have been appropriated to lend legitimacy to the government's so-called `mother-tongue education' policy, which under close examination, will, however, prove itself to be contradictory to the principles underlying the right to mother tongue education. Benson (this volume) points out that the new MOI policy can be charged of denying the right to mother-tongue education of those children in the English stream in secondary schools. The same can be said about students in higher and professional education since the new MOI policy does nothing to redress the English-dominant

higher education system, which is allowed to stay mostly English-medium in post-1997 Hong Kong (with the exception of Chinese University, but even there, professional education such as medicine and dentistry is conducted in English). In this context, a legitimate question for language rights scholars and advocates to raise will be whether the right to mother-tongue education should only apply to primary and secondary education but not to higher and professional education. Why is the right to receive higher and professional education in one's mother tongue *not* a fundamental right, when higher/professional education mediates access to social and economic benefits? Why must professional status be attained through the medium of English in a society where the majority of people share a non-English mother tongue? Language rights scholars and advocates cannot afford to leave these important questions unaddressed and buried in current public discourses on the MOI issue in Hong Kong.

The real, anti-mother-tongue, nature of the government's MOI policy is, however, hidden from public consciousness with the appropriation of the Global Trade Discourse and the Immersion Pedagogy Discourse. The policy of leaving the medium of instruction in higher and professional education unchanged (i.e., remaining English in most higher institutes) is supported by the Global Trade Discourse, which permeates the Chief-Executive's 1997 October Policy Address. The economic argument (i.e., the need to maintain Hong Kong's economic status as an international trading and financial centre) lends legitimacy to the stress on the importance of English language skills in Hong Kong. As for the technical question of how best to cultivate these language skills, the Immersion Pedagogy Discourse is appropriated to give legitimacy to the use of English as the medium of instruction for higher education and for an elite minority of secondary school students who have the linguistic and cultural capital to benefit from total English immersion. As for answering the charge of not providing the opportunity to learn English in an immersion way for the majority of secondary school students, who are predictably from a non-middle/professional-class background with little English capital, the Decolonization/Right-to-Mother-Tongue Discourse and the Immersion Pedagogy Discourse are in turn appropriated to stress the importance of mother-tongue education on the one hand and the lack of English ability on the part of the students to benefit from English immersion on the other.

While the Decolonizing/Right-to-Mother-Tongue-Education, Global Trade, and Immersion Pedagogy Discourses all contain elements of truth, they have been appropriated in a complex and subtle way in the Hong Kong context to lend legitimacy to a language education policy that can otherwise be seen as at best inconsistent and paradoxical and at worst elitist and socially divisive. Such a policy, when under close examination, can be shown to deny both the right to mother-tongue education and the right of equal access to the dominant symbolic resource. In specific terms, the right to mother-tongue higer/professional education is denied and so is the right to equal access to English for children from social groups with little initial English capital.

The limiting visions imposed by the particular way the different Discourses are appropriated in public discourses on the MOI issue in Hong Kong prevent discussions from going beyond the rigid, dichotomatic, dual-stream policy model stipulated by the government. If the right to mother-tongue education is respected in post-colonial Hong Kong, then at least an important proportion, if not all, of the subjects in higher/professional education as well as secondary school education should be taught in the mother tongue[1] (i.e., an example of partial immersion in bilingual education). If the role played by English in global trade is deemed unavoidable, then the right of equal access to English of disadvantaged children, who have little initial English capital to benefit from total English immersion, should be respected: they should be provided with culturally compatible English programmes (which will be the focus of the rest of this paper) to enable them to acquire the linguistic capital required for gradually switching to English to study a certain proportion of the curriculum so that they will be in a better position to compete with their middle/professional class counterparts for higher and professional education, which is still largely in the English medium.

A bilingual higher and secondary education is a means to increase students' opportunities to cultivate bilingual (and not just monolingual English) academic and professional skills if the Immersion Pedagogy Discourse is

---

[1]. The mother tongue in Hong Kong is generally understood and practised as spoken Cantonese and written Modern Standard Chinese; see Bension, this volume.

properly represented. For instance, the oft-quoted successful examples of Canadian French immersion (Baker, 1993/96) and European Schools models (Beardsmore, 1995) neither prioritize late total immersion nor exclude gradual partial immersion. In fact, French immersion does not take place at the university level and European schools always uphold a maintenance principle, i.e., always with a proportion of subjects taught in the students' mother tongue for both cultural continuity and the continuous development of high-level academic and intellectual skills in L1, without which English total immersion university graduates will have difficulties in discussing high-level academic and intellectual topics with their Mainland Chinese counterparts. A total English immersion higher education will, therefore, not be able to produce the kind of graduates who can serve as cultural and technological bridges between China and the West, though this seems to be the goal often stressed by political leaders in Hong Kong (e.g., the Chief-Executive's Policy Address on October 8, 1997). Late total English immersion, curiously, has always been the single model rigidly prescribed in the Hong Kong government's MOI policy (for a historical analysis of the development of the MOI policy in Hong Kong, see Lin, 1997). Models of bilingual education other than late total immersion have not been seriously explored by the government as pragmatic ways to balance the right to mother-tongue education on the one hand and the right of access to the socioeconomically dominant language in the global trade context on the other. While the medium of instruction issue is not the focus of discussion in the paper (but see Benson, this volume), the above discussion nevertheless serves as a preamble to a discussion of the importance of valuing the development of L1 linguistic and cultural resources, as embodied in the right to mother-tongue education, and capitalizing on these L1 resources for the development of proficiency in the socioeconomically dominant L2, which Hong Kong children equally have a right to. It is to this that we shall turn in the next section.

3 L1 as a Resource for Developing L2

The language proficiency of Hong Kong children is constantly lamented in public discourses in both official educational policy documents and the mass media. Hong Kong Cantonese-speaking school children are often described as `semilingual', good in neither Chinese nor English. For instance, there is the frequent accusation that school children are generally not able to address academic topics purely in English or purely in Chinese but

have to use the mixed code, and that school graduates' English and Chinese language proficiencies are not up to the standard demanded by employers in the job market.

A hidden assumption and assertion in these discourses is that Cantonese vernacular verbal and discourse skills do not count as language skills at all. As Martin-Jones and Romaine (1986) point out, the theoretical assumptions underlying the notion of `semilingualism' are problematic. The notion assumes a universal, non-culture/schooling-specific type of `cognitive academic language proficiency' (CALP) that is supposed to be found in all children with `normal' language development. It strongly suggests a deficit model of the child who has a type of language proficiency that is different from the school type of language proficiency or from that valued in school. Such a notion represents a narrow conception of what counts as language competence and has the effect of perpetuating and justifying people's prejudices regarding other people's abilities.

We can see a similar kind of prejudice being hidden and perpetuated in the notion of semilingualism in Hong Kong. For instance, the mother tongue of the majority of children in Hong Kong, Cantonese, is often stripped of the status of a legitimate language in official and public discourses. It is often described as `wild growing weeds' crowding out the `proper language exposure' that the child should receive (for a critical analysis, see Lin, 1998). The indigenous linguistic and cultural identities and resources of the child are neither recognized nor valued.

As mentioned in Section 1 above, the role English plays in the new global forms of cultural, economic, and technological domination (Pennycook, 1994; Martin-Jones & Heller, 1996) makes it unrealistic to expect that the socioeconomic domination of English to diminish to any significant extent in post-1997 Hong Kong. There is a need to continue to critique the reproduction of social inequalities, stratification, and grave educational consequences perpetuated by the socioeconomic domination of English both locally and globally (e.g., Yau, 1988; Lin, 1996a). There is, however, also an urgent need to pay attention to the right of access to English by children of disadvantaged groups (e.g., children whose parents speak little English and who live in communities where there is little access to English). Curricular reforms are needed to help these disadvantaged

children to acquire the dominant English capital while affirming and building on their indigenous linguistic and sociocultural identities and resources (Delpit, 1988).

In the rest of this paper, I shall briefly critique the goals of schooling assumed public discourses in Hong Kong in the context of a broader discussion of the goals of education. I shall argue for Cantonese children's rights to a culturally compatible English education and propose an alternative to total immersion theories and methodologies which underlie the pure medium policy--the notion of a culturally compatible English curriculum that aims at helping disadvantaged Cantonese-speaking children to gain access to English linguistic and cultural resources while affirming their indigenous identities and practices.

4 What Should be the Goals of Education?

What should be the model of education? What educational objectives and curricular goals should be set? Here I shall outline two different value orientations:

(i) Education as labour-production: Schools as training grounds for the labour market:

Under this value system, the needs of the business communities form the first priority. The schooling system has as its most important goal the production of graduates who suit the specific needs of the labour market. Education serves to mould children into acceptable products with the skills and knowledge defined and prescribed by the job market. Current public discourses in Hong Kong strongly reflect this orientation. To get a flavour of the public discourse, let us look at an example from the Asian Wall Street Journal Weekly:

> Hong Kong--The falling standard of English in Hong Kong is starting to pinch corporate pocketbooks.

As the territory's burgeoning service businesses boost demand for English speakers, there are signs that the English proficiency of university and secondary-school graduates entering the work force is dropping, forcing local companies to fork out large sums on remedial language training.

The growth of English-language training in the office reflects the failure of Hong Kong's education system to train students for work in the service industries that increasingly dominate the colony's economy...

"I've lived here for five years, and the problem is getting worse," says Thomas Axmacher, general manager at the Regent Hotel and chairman of the Hong Kong Hotels Association. Many of his hotels' job applicants know few English phrases other than "Yes," "No" and "I don't know," Mr. Axmacher complains. Yet high turnover among junior staff means he has few choices in choosing new hires.

(Lotte Chow, `Drop in English standard hurts Hong Kong business', Asian Wall Street Journal Weekly, June 12, 1995, p. 1)

This is an example of media discourses which assert the complaints of Hong Kong employers or business interests about the `declining language standards' of Hong Kong students. They also assert that this decline in standards is hurting business corporations by causing them to spend more money on in-house, on-the-job language training of their employees. Interestingly, their implicit message is that the education system should be doing this job so that they can be provided with a ready-made labor force with little need on their part to invest in staff development.

(ii) Education as dialogue: humanizing the school world

Under this value system, the business communities' need for a suitable labour force is a secondary goal that must be subordinated to the more important goal of fostering the human potential and creativity, and enhancing the linguistic and cultural development, of the child. Education should equip children with the necessary linguistic and cultural resources to contribute to, as well as to survive and succeed in, the society, not merely as

a labour force, but also as independent, critical, creative individuals who can contribute to the enrichment and development of our culture, knowledge, and technology.

In this model of education, it is by affirming their indigenous linguistic and sociocultural identities, and expanding their repertoire of linguistic and sociocultural resources that children will become adaptable, creative, confident, and independent individuals who can actualize their potential, enjoy life, and meet the challenge of the ever-changing needs of the modern world.

It seems that the first value orientation (i.e., education as labour-production) misses some important aspects of how a child learns or can be motivated to learn. The resistance model (Hall & Jefferson, 1976; Willis, 1977; Eckert, 1989), the humanist existentialist model (Buber, 1947, 1958), and the sociocultural model (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Bakhtin, 1986) of learning all point to a picture of the child who cannot be coerced into learning by institutions and practices that impose on her/him the labour demands of business communities. When their indigenous linguistic and sociocultural identities and practices are devalued and marginalized in the school system, children are likely to engage in oppositional practices, or to slip into classroom discourses their own creative, non-lesson-task-related play (for detailed examples, see Lin, 1996b). Unless the educator wants to run a school like a concentration camp by force and coercion, the indigenous linguistic and sociocultural identities and resources of the child must be affirmed and valued, whether or not they are those valued by the labour market, and built upon as a way to expand the child's repertoire of resources. There should be a dialogue between the L1 culture and the L2 culture in the classroom, and the L1 culture must not be devalued or marginalized in the curriculum. A culturally compatible language curriculum needs to be developed that will both affirm and build on the indigenous resources of the child and help her/him to acquire the dominant L2 linguistic and cultural resources to succeed in school and in the society. But before we elaborate more on this in Section 6, let us examine the total immersion model that has dominated thinking on English teaching in Hong Kong in recent years.

5 The Total Immersion Model

The domination of cognitive psychology in literacy education (for a critical analysis, see Luke, 1991) is reflected in the cognitive model of the learner underlying many current second language acquisition (SLA) theories and ESL/EFL methodologies (or L2 methodologies as a general category). Under this model, the language learner is seen as essentially a cognitive computer or sophisticated information-processor. An environment offering/requiring maximum comprehensible L2 `input'/`output' is the most important determinant in the language learning process (Krashen, 1982; Swain, 1985).

With their underlying input-output, cognitive computing model of the language learner, many L2 methodologies prescribe the maximum exposure principle, the monolingual principle (i.e., using only the L2 in the classroom) and the total immersion approach (Swain, 1986) as essential elements of the most effective method to teach and learn an L2. These prescriptions assume a model of L2 learning as a one-way assimilation/immersion of students into/in the target language and culture and authorize the virtual exclusion of the student's indigenous linguistic, discourse, or cultural resources from the L2 classroom.[2]

The cognitive, information-processing model of the learner is assumed in many of the government and academic discourses in Hong Kong. For instance, the single most frequently cited cause of Hong Kong students' poor standards in English (and also Chinese) is their lack of exposure or lack of quality input in English (and in `proper Chinese') (e.g., Report of the Working Group on Language Proficiency, 1994; Johnson, 1993/1994, 1994).  Under this model of language learning, a Hong Kong child assumed to be exposed to far too much Cantonese, which is often considered a `vulgar dialect' rather than a language in its own right, and far too

---

[2]. For an alternative model, see Kramsch (1993, 1995), who argues for L2 education as a meeting and interaction of the L1 and L2 cultures; and Peirce (1993, 1995) and Cummins (1997), who argue that transformation of social/power relations and sociocultural identities is a central issue in L2 learning.

little Standard Chinese and English. Given so little `proper language input', it is natural that the child's `language output' is poor, so the argument goes.

These public discourses have simplified the Hong Kong child's English learning problem to one simple factor: lack of quality exposure. However, lack of exposure is only a superficial representation of the issue, the core of which has seldom been touched upon in these exposure arguments. For instance, the model is relatively silent about what motivates students to learn and use a second/foreign language. It seems to assume that when immersed in a second/foreign language environment, students cannot help but learn and use the language. In this sense, the cognitivism which underlies this model is a form of environmental determinism: by engineering the classroom environment, humans will be led to learn a language.[3] These arguments assume that to help children to learn English, the principal task is to improve the input environment of the children, and to minimize the inappropriate kind of input (i.e., the child's native tongue, Cantonese). These arguments constitute the principal grounds for the advocacy of the monolingual or pure medium principle in English teaching in Hong Kong. This kind of input/output model treats the human child as essentially an information processing machine with little regard to human agency or linguistic choices and rights (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1995, 1996), and ignores the indigenous identity, motives for resistance, and the sociocultural, historical, and motivational context of the child.

6 Proposing an Alternative: A Culturally Compatible English Curriculum for Hong Kong Children

In this section, I shall propose an alternative model of language learning that emphasizes affirming and capitalizing on what children bring to the classroom: their indigenous linguistic, discourse, and cultural

---

[3]. Krashen (1982, 1985) also talks about the affective filter of the learner which can filter out the input. Other second language acquisition (SLA) researchers have also theorized and researched on the nature of SLA motivation, e.g., Schumann, 1976. The public discourses in Hong Kong, however, tend to focus primarily on one aspect of second language learning--exposure.

resources. I shall also propose research and curricular development directions that researchers, teachers and educators can take in the context of Hong Kong in order to develop a culturally compatible English curriculum that will not deny the Cantonese child's rightful linguistic and cultural identities and resources, but will both build on them and expand them to bridge the gap between the child's native language and the socio-economically dominant language of the society, English, to which the child has the right.

A curriculum is constituted not just by a syllabus, or a set of textbooks, but by a network of inter-related practices, materials, and institutions which constrain or facilitate one another. A reform of the language curriculum will therefore involve initiating compatible changes in an inter-related network of at least the following:

> . curricular materials and resources,
> . teaching syllabus/schedules,
> . school assessment materials and practices,
> . classroom practices,
> . teacher's workload pattern,
> . class size,
> . teacher's opportunities for professional development,
>> . the development of a teacher-researcher identity and a teaching-researching culture in the school, and
>> . teacher participation and autonomy in curricular development.

Recommendations for curricular changes cannot just focus on one or two aspects of the curriculum. For example, from classroom discourse analysis (see Lin, 1996b for detailed examples), we may conclude that some discourse practices and activity structures seem to be useful (e.g., reciprocal questioning). However, we must also realize that without corresponding changes in the other aspects of the curriculum, there will be constraints on or inadequate resources for the successful adoption of such discourse practices or activity structures in the classroom (e.g., a controlling examination syllabus that focuses on structural drills, or inadequate lesson preparation time due to heavy teaching loads).

In the following paragraphs, I shall outline what changes need to be initiated in each area in order to develop and realize a culturally compatible English curriculum for children in Hong Kong schools.

(i) Developing culturally compatible curricular materials

The English teachers surveyed by Richards, Tung, & Ng (1991) expressed that they would like to have more resources and facilities. The text-book dependent, inflexible ways of teaching witnessed in many Hong Kong classrooms are often a result of the lack of lesson preparation time on the part of overworked teachers. It is therefore important to provide teachers with ample useful curricular resources.

However, currently, the Curriculum Development Institute of the Education Department issues only syllabuses and guidelines on textbook/curricular materials development. The actual task of developing the English curricular materials is left entirely to commercial publishers. Most English language textbooks are the products of these commercial publishers. Their main interest is in fulfilling the syllabus requirements of the Education Department (e.g., covering all the functional and structural topics listed in the syllabus). They tend to be reduced in both language and content, and to prescribe exercises and tasks that are operations-oriented, often requiring the parroting of L2 structural items in mechanical ways (e.g., pronunciation drills of isolated lexical items, prescribed dialogue drills, decontextualized grammatical exercises, unimaginative/uninteresting reading passages, and superficial, factual, uncritical reading comprehension exercises).

These textbooks can bias teachers towards engaging in discourse practices and activity organization that are geared towards linguistic drills, and not meaning sharing or communication. To get a sense of what such classroom practices and activities look like, let us look at a Form 2 English lesson excerpt documented in Lin (1996b). The teacher is getting the students to parrot a textbook dialogue; the textbook exercise encourages students to substitute given items (e.g., sweater, camera) into the set dialogue in a `role-play' task (the words underlined are words read out from the textbook):

Excerpt 2.4:

108.8 T: Well, here, here're three pictures. Mrs Wu is complaining to... the assistant, she's complaining about the.. sweater. Okay, let's practice saying the.. dialogue, and then... I'll explain again. Are you ready? Are you ready?

112.8 Boy 1: Yeh!

113 T: When we want to say something, want to make a complaint, what do we say first?

113.8 Boy 2: (eh.. ? ?)

114 T: Excuse me, yes, good. Would you please say after me, let's practise saying this. Excuse me,

115.5 Ss: Excuse me, {The boy in the back corner next to me said this in a playful exaggerated tone, but this was picked up only by my camcorder and not the walkman-recorder the teacher was carrying, so, it was probably unavailable to the teacher.}

116.5 T: I would like to make a complaint.

117 Ss: I would like to (make a complaint). {some students not finishing the last part of the sentence, and different students speaking at different rhythms and paces}

118 T: Please say after me. Excuse me, I would like to make a complaint.

118.8 Ss: Excuse me, I would like to make a complaint. {different students speaking at different rhythms and paces, finishing at different times}

119.5 T: Okay, good. Yes, Madam?

120 Ss: Yes, Madam?

120.2 T: I bought this sweater last week.

120.8 Ss: I bought this sweater last week. {different students speaking at different rhythms and paces, finishing at different times}

121.5 T: What's wrong with it?

121.8 Ss: What's wrong with it?

122 T: I'm afraid it's shrunk.

122.5 Ss: I'm afraid it's shrunk.

123 T: I only washed it once.

123.5 Ss: I only washed it once.

124 T: and look at it.

124.5 Ss: and look at it.

124.8 T: A child of five couldn't wear it- a-

125 Ss: A child of five couldn't wear it.

126 T: Okay, good, say it again, a child of five couldn't wear it.

126.5 Ss: A child of five couldn't wear it.

127.5 T: Have you got the receipt madam?

128 Ss: Have you got the receipt madam?

128.8 T: Yes, here it is.

129 Ss: <u>Yes, here it is</u>.

129.8 T: <u>If you wait a moment madam, I'll call the supervisor</u>.

130.2 Ss: <u>If you wait a moment madam, I'll call the supervisor</u>.

131.5 T: Okay, very good. Any problem?

132 Ss: No prob=

132.2 =T: No let's say once again, and then you practice. ... If you can.. do, try not to look at your book. Okay, let's try again. <u>Excuse me</u>,

134 Ss: <u>Excuse me</u>,

The above example is not an isolated one. Similar operations-oriented classroom practices are pervasive in other classrooms (for further examples and analysis, see Lin, 1996b). The reader is, however, urged to withhold judgement of the teacher her/himself. The unimaginative text-book, heavy teaching load as well as the lack of professional development opportunities for teachers in Hong Kong must also be considered when we try to understand the origin of operations-oriented, meaning-reduced classroom practices. A culturally compatible curriculum, however, must be able to arouse the interest of the limited-English-proficiency students in English. Giving them content-reduced materials and highly mechanical tasks to work with will only reinforce their lack of interest in, and resistance to, English. Below, I shall outline some suggestions for future work in this direction.

<u>(a) Affirming and capitalizing on students' indigenous linguistic and cultural resources</u>

Analysis of teachers' and students' classroom practices shows that the students' artful story co-construction practice can be a potential resource in the English lesson if the teacher knows how to harness and build on it. To get a flavour of what this practice of the students' looks like, let us look at a story-reading lesson excerpt documented in Lin (in press):

In the following example, we find the creativity of the children bursting out in a niche that they exploit and capitalize on in an otherwise uninteresting IRF discourse. The teacher has been asking factual reading comprehension questions about the Heaven-Queen story that they have just read:

Lesson Excerpt:

870 T: Yauh mat-yeh faat-sang aa <What happened>? .. Leih-Lohn-Mihng (2) dong heui- daap heui maa-mih <when she answered her mum> (1) heui maa-mih aai heui meng ne heui daap heui go sih-houh yauh mat-yeh faat-sang aa <her mum called her name, and when she answered her mum, what happened>?

*872 Leih: Heui louh-dauh dik-jo lohk (deih) <Her old-man fell off to the (ground)>. {chuckling towards the end of his sentence}=

872.5 Ss: =Haha! haha! haha! hahahaha! {other Ss laughing hilariously}

872.8 T: Me aa?! (2) daaih-seng di <louder>! {against a background of Ss' laughter}

*873.2 Chan: Heui louh-dauh dik-jo lohk gaai woh <Her old-man fell off to the street>! {chuckling} =

873.5 S1: =Hihihihik!!= {laughing}

873.8 S2: =(Go douh) yauh gaai gaa me <(Is there) a street>?

*874 T: Go douh yauh gaai me <Is there a street>? {T in an amused tone; some students laugh}

*874.5 L: Dik-jo lohk // hoi <fell into the sea>=

*874.8 //T: =Dik-jo lohk bin-douh aa:: <Where did he fall into>? {quite amusingly}

875 L: Hoi aa <Sea that is>.

875.2 T: Haahk.. dik-jo lohk hoi <Yes.. fell into the sea>.

875.5 S1: Dik-jo lohk gaai hahaha <fell off to the street>

875.8 S2: Heui louh-dauh dik-jo lohk gaai aa <Her old-man fell off to the street>.

876 T: // Right? (1) Her father dropped into the SEA!==

876 //S3: Hekhek! {laughing}

876.5 ==T: Right? (2) gum-yeung sei-jo laak <in that manner died>. .. SHH! (1) hou-laak <okay> .. jeui-hauh laak <finally> .. SHH! number ten ...

18

The need to base one's answer (or to "find the answer") in the text has been a recurrent concern of the teacher voiced in his recurrent prompts and follow-up questions such as "Where can you find it?", "Does the book really say so?", "Look at paragraph ___, line ___" found in other parts of the transcript. However, there are times when a bookish answer is boring. The factual nature of the set of questions has left little room for imagination for these lively thirteen-year-olds. In the above lesson excerpt we see how a student has exploited the Response slot to do something playful, to illegitimately put forward a contribution that will turn the whole story into a comic-strip type of story, which they enjoy reading outside the classroom. In their most favourite comic strips, which have been translated into Cantonese-style-Chinese from Japanese, the characters usually do funny, impossible things and amusement and enjoyment come from the superimposing of impossible and unpredictable fantasy with the familiar, predictable, and boring mundane world. It seems that the boy who provides this funny answer (turns [872], [873.2]) is a skillful story-teller with a ready audience, and this is reflected in the hilarious laughter of his fellow students.

While one might simply dismiss the students' discourse practice exemplified above as an instance of student unco-operative behaviour, one might also take a more constructive approach to it: there is the possibility of capitalizing on this kind of popular story-telling resource of the students in a writing programme, for instance, by allowing students a chance to co-construct/retell/rewrite the story that they have read in the textbook. More research and curricular development are needed in this direction for if we see L2 education not as the total immersion or one-way assimilation of L1 students into an L2 language and curriculum, but rather as a dialogue between the L1 and L2 cultures (Kramsch, 1993, 1995), such that the L2 curriculum both affirms and builds on the students' L1 linguistic and cultural resources to lead them into a critical interaction with the L2. We also need to do more research on students' indigenous language practices to develop a better understanding of the popular cultural and discourse resources of Cantonese children in Hong Kong in order to yield more useful insights on how such an L1-L2 interactive curriculum can be developed. On this, we can consult similar studies conducted elsewhere for insights and methodology (e.g., Spina, 1995; Levin et al., 1993; Patthey-Chavez & Gergen, 1992; Michaels & Collins, 1984; Jordan, 1985; Tharp & Gallimore, 1982; Tharp et al., 1983). The Kamehameha Early Education Programme (KEEP) in Hawaii, for example, has yielded

important curricular development insights on how to capitalize on Hawaiian minority children's L1 narrative resources (e.g., participation structures, story-telling narratives) in the English reading classroom (e.g., Au, 1980, 1981; Au & Scheu, 1989; Au & Kawakami, 1991). We therefore see that we are not alone in this work. These numerous previous curricular studies have shown that affirming and capitalizing on children's L1 linguistic and cultural resources can help these disadvantaged children (usually limited-English-speaking) acquire L2 linguistic and cultural resources without negating or excluding their L1 linguistic and sociocultural identities and resources from the classroom.

(b) Changing the teaching syllabus/schedule and the way of assessment

Corresponding changes in the teaching syllabus/schedule and school assessment practices must also be made for a culturally compatible L2 curriculum to come into existence in schools. Currently, the syllabuses/schedules and assessment methods are organized around textbook structural topics and exercises/tasks formats. More research work needs to be done to develop syllabus and assessment organized around more meaningful units (e.g., thematically related cultural topics) that can also have an implicitly built-in linguistic focus (e.g., the genre and linguistic features of the lyrics of types of songs, or stories).

(c) Developing and experimenting with different discourse practices and activity structures

My classroom discourse analyses (Lin, 1996b) show that discourse formats can be used in different ways to serve different task functions. There are also different ways of organizing classroom activities with different educational consequences. We need to continue research on and experimentation with alternative forms of discourse practices and activity organization to discover the different educational functions that these classroom practices can serve. For example, how to use the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) discourse format (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975; Mehan, 1979; Heap, 1985) in a way that can allow for more student-initiative and participation, what different types of questions the teacher can initiate that will lead to

more opportunities for students to share and communicate their personal meanings, and how to use discourse formats to interlock discussion with grammar-teaching, or to interlock story-telling with a language focus.

(ii) Allowing teachers to become self-reflective teacher-researchers

In order to develop and implement a culturally compatible English curriculum in the schools, English teachers themselves must be among the central contributors to curricular change. No educational researchers or teacher-educators can replace the teachers' role, for after all, it is the teachers who will in the end decide what works for their classes and what needs to be changed or adapted to meet the local needs of their situation. By enabling teachers to become researchers of their own curricular practices, and collaborators of educational researchers and teacher-educators, the first-hand classroom experiences of teachers can be tapped.

(a) Reducing teachers' heavy workload:

I start with this recommendation because in my observations and analyses (Lin, 1996b), I have found that the teacher is an important agent of change. Even under unfavourable situations, the teacher who is reflective on her/his own classroom practices can effect some change. However, with the current heavy workload (e.g., with four or five different kinds of lessons to prepare for) and with the current large class size (40 students in a packed classroom), teachers simply do not have the time and energy to care about anything other than managing the next upcoming lesson. The English teachers surveyed in Richards et al.'s study (1991) also expressed that they wanted to have a reduced workload and a reduced class size. It seems that this is a rather urgent need for the majority of English teachers in Hong Kong.

(b) Providing teachers with professional development opportunities:

In my study of English teaching in Hong Kong schools (Lin, 1996b), the two teachers who showed some understanding of the researcher's role and task were also the two who had been selected by their schools to

attend teacher professional development courses and had themselves been engaged in teacher-research projects to improve their own teaching. The professional development courses also seemed to have provided them with opportunities to expand their sociocultural world so that English became not just a language they taught in school, but also a language they were critically engaged with for their own cultural enrichment.

Another teacher in my study was a fresh university graduate. However, she had been engaged in a graduation research project in which she designed and taught an English summer course in a community centre. She had also worked as a research assistant in her professors' language-education research projects. These experiences seemed to have made her receptive to the role and task of a researcher and familiar with research practices (e.g., she did not mind having her lessons videotaped for research purposes). This seems to be evidence of how teacher professional development opportunities can help to build the research culture of teachers.

<u>(c) Fostering a research culture in schools:</u>

In my experience as a school researcher, my request for getting access to classrooms to conduct research met with a great deal of resistance and suspicion initially. The role and task of a school researcher is unfamiliar to many teachers and school principals in Hong Kong. They often mistake the researcher for an evaluator or an inspector. There is a need to develop a teacher-researcher collaboration culture, in which teachers and researchers are not the evaluated and the evaluators, but equal partners in educational research geared towards the improvement of curricular practices and materials for the benefit of the students.

Even more important is the development of a teacher-researcher culture in the school. If more teachers could have the opportunity to participate in professional development programmes, they could be initiated into teacher-research practices in these programmes. If teachers can be given the opportunity, time, and resources to conduct research on their own teaching, this will enhance their confidence, professional esteem, and expertise. Besides, if different teachers can be given a channel (e.g., via e-mail discussion forums) to share their research findings with one another, this will enhance their professional insights and resources .

(iii) Liberalizing the school: Greater teacher autonomy and participation in school curricular development

The English teachers surveyed in Richards et al.'s study (1991) expressed that they would like to have a more flexible curriculum. Currently schools vary considerably in terms of how much autonomy and participation the English teacher can have in curricular development. Some schools are more liberal (e.g., the power is decentralized to the subject committees which consist of all the teachers teaching that subject); some schools function in a more hierarchical manner (e.g., the principal and then the subject panel chairperson have the largest say). If we need to initiate a curricular reform, it must not be imposed in a top-down manner by the principal and subject panel chairperson on the teachers. We must allow teachers to take up the role of central contributor to curricular development and reform. It is ultimately the teacher who will decide what she/he feels

comfortable working with and practising in her/his classroom, not the school principal, subject panel chairperson, teacher-educator, or Education Department inspector. Long-lasting and locally appropriate reforms and changes cannot be brought about without the teachers' own active contribution.

(iv) Eliciting contribution from the students: Understanding their culture

We must also capitalize on the contribution of students, for after all, it is they who can tell us what kinds of topics and materials best engage their interest. We are adults inhabiting a very different culture from that of children. We need to have more ethnographic and cultural studies to gain a better understanding of children's culture and young adolescents' culture, if we are going to be able to develop curricular materials that can capture their interest. We also need to be familiar with their popular cultural practices and resources (e.g., their verbal play, their comics narrative style) in order to be able to capitalize on them to develop a culturally compatible L2 curriculum.

7 Coda

In the beginning of this paper, I discussed why the right of access to the socioeconomically dominant symbolic resource, English, is a fundamental language right of children from disadvantaged social groups. I also discussed how the provision of a bilingual secondary and higher education can balance the right to mother-tongue education and the right of access to English. In the rest of the paper, I critiqued the labour-market-driven model and the cognitive model of education and language learning. I have found a convergence in orientation among Buber (1947)'s model of education as dialogue, the sociocultural model of dialogic interaction between teachers and students (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Bakhtin, 1986), and Kramsch's (1993, 1995) model of L2 education as a meeting and interaction of the L1 and L2 cultures. I have also quoted from my classroom discourse study (Lin, 1996b) which shows that children are artful and creative in their L1 linguistic and cultural practices. All these have led me to the proposal that we need to develop an alternative to total immersion methodologies: a culturally compatible English curriculum for

Cantonese-speaking children in Hong Kong, especially for those who live in a sociocultural world where there is little access to English (e.g., schools in non-middle class residential areas and communities). The aim of such a culturally compatible curriculum is both to affirm and build on the children's indigenous linguistic and cultural resources and to help them to acquire the necessary English resources to survive and succeed in school and in the society. The rights of children to an L2 education that expands and builds on rather than negates or marginalizes their L1 identities and resources must be affirmed from a linguistic rights perspective (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1995, 1996). As things currently stand, we are a long way from reaching this objective. However, it is my hope that this paper might arouse some discussion that can lead to future efforts in this direction. It is with this modest aim that this paper has been written.

References

Au, K. H. (1980). Participation structures in a reading lesson with Hawaiian children: Analysis of a culturally appropriate instructional event. Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 11, 91-115.

Au, K. H. (1981). Social organizational factors in learning to read: The balance of rights hypothesis. Reading Research Quarterly, 17(1), 115-152.

Au, K. H., & Kawakami, A. J. (1991). Culture and ownership: Schooling of minority students. Childhood Education, 67(5), 280-284.

Au, K. H., & Scheu, J. A. (1989). Guiding students to interpret a novel. The Reading Teacher, 43(2), 104-110.

Baker, C. (1993/96). Foundations of bilingual education and bilingualism. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1986). Speech genres and other late essays (V. W. McGee, Trans.). Austin: University of Texas Press.

Beardsmore, H. B. (1995). The European School experience in multilingual education. In T. Skutnabb-Kangas (Ed.), Multilingualism for all (pp. 21-68). Lisse, The Netherlands: Swets & Zeitlinger B.V.

Bourdieu, P. (1991). Language and symbolic power (G. Raymond & M. Adamson, Trans.). Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1982)

Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J.-C. (1977). Reproduction in education, society and culture (R. Nice, Trans.). London: Sage.

Brown, J. S., Collins, A., & Duguid, P. (1989). Situated cognition and the culture of learning. Educational Researcher, 18(1), 32-42.

Buber, M. (1947). Between man and man. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.

Buber, M. (1958). I and Thou. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Chow, L. (1995). Drop in English standard hurts Hong Kong business. Asian Wall Street Journal Weekly, June 12, 1995, p. 1.

Cummins, J. (1997). Negotiating identities: Education for empowerment in a diverse society. Ontario, Calif.: NABE (National Association for Bilingual Education).

Delpit, L. D. (1988). The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people's children. Harvard Educational Review, 58(3), 280-298.

Eckert, P. (1989). Jocks and burnouts: Social categories and identity in the high school. New York: Teachers College Press.

Hall, S., & Jefferson, T. (Eds.). (1976). Resistance through rituals: Youth subcultures in post-war Britain . London: Hutchinson.

Heap, J. L. (1985). Discourse in the production of classroom knowledge: Reading lessons. Curriculum Inquiry, 15(3), 245-279.

Hong Kong Education Commission. (1994). Report of the working group on language proficiency (Research Report). Hong Kong Education Commission.

Johnson, R. K. (1993/1994). Language policy and planning in Hong Kong. Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 14, 177-199.

Johnson, R. K. (1994). Critical review of literature on language in education in Hong Kong. Report prepared for the Hong Kong Education Commission Working Group on Language Proficiency.

Jordan, C. (1985). Translating culture: From ethnographic information to educational program. Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 16(2), 105-123.

Kramsch, C. (1993). Context and culture in language teaching. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kramsch, C. (1995). The cultural component of language teaching. Language, Culture and Curriculum, 8(2), 83-92.

Krashen, S. (1982). Principles and practice in second language acquisition. Oxford: Pergamon.

Krashen, S. (1985). The input hypothesis: Issues and Implications. New York: Longman.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Levin, P. F., Brenner, M. E., & McClellan, J. M. (1993). The social context of early literacy in Hawaiian homes. In R. N. Roberts (Ed.), Coming home to preschool: The sociocultural context of early education (vol. 7, pp. 195-219). Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Lin, A. M. Y. (1996a). Bilingualism or linguistic segregation? Symbolic domination, resistance, and code-switching in Hong Kong schools. Linguistics and Education, 8(1), 49-84.

Lin, A. M. Y. (1996b). Doing-English-lessons in secondary schools in Hong Kong: A sociocultural and discourse-analytic study. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, Canada.

Lin, A. M. Y. (1997). Bilingual education in Hong Kong. In Cummins, J. (Ed.), The Encyclopedia of Language and Education (Vol. 5). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Lin, A. M. Y. (1998). Analysing the `language problem' discourses in Hong Kong: How official, academic and media discourses construct and perpetuate dominant models of language, learning and education. Journal of Pragmatics, 28.

Lin, A. M. Y. (in press). How some Cantonese working class school children negotiate their own stories in English reading lessons in Hong Kong. To appear in, Comber, B., & Simpson, A. (Eds.), Negotiating critical literacy in classrooms. London: Taylor & Francis.

Luke, A. (1991). The political economy of reading instruction. In C. D. Baker, & A. Luke (Eds.), Towards a critical sociology of reading pedagogy (pp. 3-26). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Luke, K. K., & Richards, J. C. (1982). English in Hong Kong: Functions and status. English World-Wide, 3(1), 47-64.

Martin-Jones, M., & Heller, M. (1996). Education in multilingual settings: Discourse, identities and power. Linguistics and Education, 8(1), 3-16.

Martin-Jones, M., & Romaine, S. (1986). "Semilingualism": A half-baked theory of communicative competence. Applied Linguistics, 7, 26-38.

Mehan, H. (1979). Learning lessons: Social organization in the classroom. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Michaels, S., & Collins, J. (1984). Oral discourse styles: Classroom interaction and the acquisition of literacy. In D. Tannen (Ed.), Coherence in spoken and written discourse (pp. 219-244). Norwood, N.J.: Ablex.

Newman, D., Griffin, P., & Cole, M. (1989). The construction zone: Working for cognitive change in school. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Patthey-Chavez, G. G., & Gergen, C. (1992). Culture as an instructional resource in the multiethnic composition classroom. Journal of Basic Writing, 11(1), 75-96.

Peirce, B. N. (1993). Language learning, social identity, and immigrant women. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, Canada.

Peirce, B. N. (1995). Social identity, investment, and language learning. TESOL Quarterly, 29(1), 9-31.

Pennycook, A. (1994). The cultural politics of English as an international language. London: Longman.

Phillipson, R., & Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (1995). Linguistic rights and wrongs. Applied Linguistics, 16(4), 483-504.

Phillipson, R., & Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (1996). English only worldwide or language ecology. TESOL Quarterly, 30(3), 429-452.

Richards, J. C., Tung, P., & Ng, P. (1991). The culture of the English language teacher: A Hong Kong example (Research Report No. 6). Department of English, City Polytechnic of Hong Kong.

Sinclair, J. M., & Coulthard, R. M. (1975). Towards an analysis of discourse: The English used by teachers and pupils. London: Oxford University Press.

Spina, S. U. (1995). Worlds together...words apart: Bridging cognition and communication for second language learners through an authentic arts-based curriculum. Language, Culture and Curriculum, 8(3), 231-247.

Swain, M. (1985). Communicative competence: Some roles of comprehensive input and comprehensive output in its development. In S. Gass, & C. Madden (Eds.), Input in second language acquisition (pp. 235-253). Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House.

Swain, M. (1986). Two ingredients to the successful use of a second language as a medium of instruction in Hong Kong. Educational Research Journal, 1, 1-6.

Tharp, R. G., & Gallimore, R. (1982). Inquiry process in program development. Journal of Community Psychology, 10, 103-118.

Tharp, R. G., Jordan, C., Speidel, G. E., Au, K. H., Klein, T. W., Calkins, R. P., Sloat, K. C. M., & Gallimore, R. (1983). Product and process in applied developmental research: Education and the children of a minority. In M. E. Lamb, A. L. Brown, & B. Rogoff (Eds.), Advances in developmental psychology (vol. III, pp. 91-141). Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Willis, P. E. (1977). Learning to labour: How working class kids get working class jobs. Hampshire: Gower.

Yau, M. S. (1988). Bilingual education and social class: Some speculative observations in the Hong Kong context. Comparative Education, 24(2), 217-228.