

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology: Division of Humanities/Center for Language Education

HUMA 1000: Cultures and Values: **Cover sheet for final essay**

Full name	
Student ID	
Writing workshop section number	
Writing workshop instructor	
Title of essay (please copy and paste from the document on Canvas)	What is your position in the following debate? Give detailed reasons to support your stance: Will the spread of English as a global language lead to the displacement of local language(s) and cultural identity(ies), or does it stimulate hybrid cultural forms and thus create cultural heterogeneity

Declaration: The attached essay represents my own work. I have read and understood the University's policies on academic honesty and I confirm that the attached work conforms to these policies.

Please type your name:

Response to feedback: note here the comments from your instructor you have responded to (you can copy these from your feedback sheet).

The thesis statement is not an argument and is unclear.

The topic sentences of body paragraph 2 is unclear.

As a wide-spreading global language, English is a dominant language in different fields, such as economic, academic and the Internet, and millions of foreign students are learning English for connecting with the globe. Once isolated with China during colonial period by the British, Hong Kong is greatly influenced by English as an international financial centre in Asia nowadays, and Hong Kong citizens are looking for English proficiency in order to be connected to the global economy, which might cause detrimental effects on the status of their local language, Cantonese. However, this essay will argue in opposition to the idea that English will lead to the displacement of local language and cultural identity in Hong Kong because of the predominant role of Cantonese, by reason of the historical background of Hong Kong and English's flexibility. This will be asserted by evaluating the social status of the two languages, and by demonstrating the mixed culture of Cantonese and English.

One argument is that the socio-historical background of Cantonese has led to its dominant status in Hong Kong, which shall not be upset by English. Despite the fact that people learnt English for higher social hierarchy as English was the only official language before 1974 during the colonial period, Simpson (2007) notes that Hong Kong citizens strongly disapproved the usage of English for intra-ethnic communication. One reason behind is that Cantonese was the Lingua franca for vastly majority of Hong Kong Citizens, local culture was created with Cantonese, and the isolation from China helped Hong Kong citizens to consolidate their local identity because the refugees from China started to identify Hong Kong as their permanent home. In 1974, Hong Kong people successfully lobbied the colonial government to declare Chinese as one of the official language, which demonstrated the importance of the local language to them. The status of Cantonese was further strengthened by media, songs like "Below the Lion Rock", and prominent movies like "A Better Tomorrow", which boosted the citizens' sense of belonging and community cohesion to Hong Kong. Nowadays, the dominance of Cantonese is still sustained by the mentioned elements, including historical factors, media and its everyday usage, such that the local language and identity will not be displaced by the spread of English.

Another argument is that hybrid cultural form is easily stimulated with the increasing influence and flexibility of English, with Cantonese-English mixed culture as an example, which

also illustrate the leading role of Cantonese. As Pennycook (2007) mentions, the fluidity and fixity of English as a translocal language allow it to be embedded in the local culture. Some elements of English can easily be assimilated into Cantonese for convenience of the users, and results in the Cantonese-English mixed culture in Hong Kong, which features loanwords and intra-sentential code-switching. The former one adopted foreign ideas from English to Cantonese by phonetic transcription partially, such as “小巴” (siu2 baa1, minibus), in which “小” means “small” in Chinese and “巴” pronounces similarly to “bus” in Cantonese. On the other hand, the latter one represents the ability of Hong Kong people to switch between Cantonese and English within a sentence. One example is “你暑假搵唔搵 part-time 啊?” (nei5 syu2 gaa3 wan2 ng4 wan2 ‘part-time’ haa2, ‘will you look for a part-time job during the summer holiday?’), which incorporates an English word in a Cantonese sentence without altering its sentence structure. Still, from the two examples, there is a noticeable dominance of Cantonese in this mixed culture. Therefore, development of hybrid cultural forms can be stimulated by English, without replacing local languages.

With English being valued by non-native speakers, some claimed that parent’s avid pursuit of English proficiency of their children for higher social hierarchy and the usage of English level as a judgement of a person would indicate the increasing status of English in Hong Kong and eventually surpass that of Cantonese. However, the pursuit of English proficiency does not mean that English will replace Cantonese as a usual language for intra-ethnic communication. Except the mentioned socio-historical factor, one reason is that the general English proficiency of Hong Kong people is not sufficient for daily uses. In 2005, Chinese University of Hong Kong, which valued Chinese, have attempted to adopt English-medium instruction controversially, in order to maintain its international competitiveness. Yet, as Li (2013) mentions, the university faced numbers of challenges, including the limited English proficiency of the students and professors in general. This implies that well-educated people in Hong Kong may not handle English as good as perceived, let alone the general public. Therefore, it is troublesome for them to switch from their mother tongue to English as a usual language. Moreover, with recent efforts by the government to promote Mandarin in Hong Kong

education, the attention of parents has shifted from English to Mandarin, such that the influence of English in Hong Kong is having nearly no sign to increase. Therefore, English will not easily displace local language and identity.

In conclusion, English might seem to spread widely as a global language, but its influences are not strong enough to displace local language and cultural identity in Hong Kong. The historical background of Hong Kong has consolidated the status of Cantonese and the local identity of Hong Kong, making it irreplaceable even with the invasion of English. Therefore, instead of invading local culture, English is assimilated into local culture with its fluidity and stimulated a formation of hybrid culture with Cantonese. With the sustainable vitality of Cantonese and its mixed variant preserved in different aspects, the local language and cultural identity are unlikely to be uprooted by English, and the current situation would remain valid until further be interfered by the government's policy.

References:

- Li, D. C. S. (2013). Linguistic hegemony or linguistic capital? Internationalization and English-medium instruction at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. In Doiz, A., Lasagabaster, D., & Sierra, J. M. (eds.), *English-Medium Instruction at Universities: Global Challenges*. Multilingual Matters. Chapter 4
- Pennycook, A.D. (2007). *Global Englishes and transcultural flows*. Routledge.
- Simpson, A. (2007). *Language and National Identity in Asia*. Chapter on Hong Kong by Andrew Simpson. Oxford: Oxford University Press.