



# Trilingual Code-switching in Hong Kong

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**Article citation:** Chan, K. L. R. (2019).  
Trilingual code-switching in Hong  
Kong, *Applied Linguistics Research  
Journal*, 3(4): 1–14.

**Received Date:** May 7, 2019  
**Accepted Date:** June 11, 2019  
**Online Date:** September 5, 2019

**Publisher:** Kare Publishing

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E-ISSN: 2651-2629

## ABSTRACT

The present study is a follow-up study on Chan (2018a) which examined a new code-switching form in Hong Kong called trilingual code-switching. Previous studies on the code-switching in Hong Kong focused mainly on bilingual code-switching between Cantonese and English, yet Chan's (2018a) ethnolinguistic study suggested that there was a new form of trilingual code-switching among Cantonese, English and Putonghua arisen in Hong Kong because of the increasing contact with mainland China as well as the introduction of Putonghua in the school curriculum. By analyzing the quantitative and qualitative data from sixty university students collected through an online survey, the present study revealed Hongkongers' view on three language uses, including the use of pure code, bilingual code-switching and trilingual code-switching. The result showed that trilingual code-switching exists in Hong Kong with a low acceptance in Hong Kong. Also, the research showed how bilingual code-switching is linked to a Hong Kong identity.

**Keywords:** Trilingual code-switching; Code-switching; Hong Kong English; Hong Kong identity.

## 1. Introduction

Code-switching has long been a popular research topic in Hong Kong because of the bilingual environment in Hong Kong. Since 1980s, researchers have been studying the code-switching behavior of Hongkongers. While most of these studies were about the code-switching between Cantonese and English, the two official languages in Hong Kong, Chan (2018a) noticed that, with the increasing frequent contact with Mainland China, Putonghua has gained a momentum within the Hongkonger community and therefore conducted a study to examine whether a code-switching among the three languages (Cantonese, English and Putonghua) exists in Hong Kong. The study was an ethnolinguistic study, which was roughly based on Li and Tse (2002) and Sung (2010), in which the researcher reported his first-person experience on using 'pure-codes' (the use of only one language at a time, without code-switching) in Hong Kong. The results showed that the use of 'pure-codes' was difficult as Hongkongers adapted a heavily code-switching manner in daily communication, both in formal

and informal occasions. More importantly, Chan (2018a) proposed that there was an existence of the trilingual code-switching among the three languages. Due to the fact that Chan (2018a) was a small-scale ethnolinguistic study which relied more on personal experience, there is a high need to obtain qualitative and quantitative data to support such claim. Therefore, the current study was conducted to act as a follow-up research to examine Chan's (2018a) result on pure-codes and moreover, to investigate whether there really exists such a code-switching behavior. The research questions of the present study can roughly be divided into two parts:

1. Does a trilingual code-switching among Cantonese, English and Putonghua exist in Hong Kong? If so, in what occasions would this occur?
2. How do Hongkongers view their use of pure-codes, bilingual code-switching, and trilingual code-switching?

## 2. Literature Review

The current study is a follow-up study of Chan (2018a) and therefore most of the settings, including the definitions, are the same as those listed in Chan (2018a). Here in this short literature review, the definition that is adapted and relevant background of code-switching in Hong Kong will be shown.

Code-switching has been examined and defined in different ways by scholars (Wang and Kirkpatrick (2019)); it is therefore important to make a clear definition for the kind of 'code-switching' that is used in the paper. The 'code-switching' in this paper goes mainly in coherence to most of the definitions by scholars who studied Cantonese-English code-switching in Hong Kong, which helps to maintain a coherence along all the code-switching research in the area. In this paper, Li's (1999) definition of code-switching is used, in his work, code-switching refers to:

1. Cantonese and English words are mixed within sentences (English words are always used as single word);
2. 'Code-switching' is used instead of 'code-mixing' because of the negative connotations of the latter term.

In Chan (2018a), code-switching is not only restricted to intra-sentential use, inter-sentential code-switching is also counted as an important form. Code-switching is important in Hong Kong as studies showed that it carries different social functions, especially it is used as an identity marker for Hongkongers (Chan, 2018a). Previous studies only focused on Cantonese-English code-switching (for example, Li & Tse, 2002; Sung, 2010). However, with the growth of Putonghua population in Hong Kong, together with the increasing contact with mainland China, Putonghua was first found to be used in code-switching among Hongkongers in an ethnolinguistic study (Chan, 2018a), in which the researcher attempted to use pure-code (one language at a time) for three days in Hong Kong. The results showed that it is impossible not to use code-switching in Hong Kong because code-switching has been deeply immersed in the everyday life. However, one of the most interesting findings of the result is the discovery of the trilingual code-switching among Cantonese, English and Putonghua, which has not been studied in any of the previous research. Due to the limitation of the ethnolinguistic studies, the findings of Chan (2018a) somewhat lack statistical data to support. Therefore, the present mixed method study is done in attempt to reveal the claim made by Chan (2018a).

## 3. The Data

The current study collected both quantitative and qualitative data via an online survey in two months.

As for the participants, 60 university students who were studying in a large public university in

Hong Kong, including both undergraduates and post-graduates of various majors (including Arts, Education, Law and Sciences), were included in the survey and they were all Hongkongers who have at least lived in Hong Kong for more than 15 years and use Cantonese as their first language. All the participants reported they could speak the three languages at least up to an intermediate level. The demographics of the participants are summarized as below (Table 1):

Table 1. Demographics of the Participants

<b>Participants (n=60)</b>	
Gender:	Male 36.7% : Female 63.3%
Form of Study:	Undergraduate 86.7% : Postgraduate 13.3%
Age Group:	18-25 90.0% : 26-30 8.3% : >31 1.7%

The survey was designed to collect both qualitative (written data) and quantitative (numerical data) data by using a 'Yes-No question plus comment box' framework. Most of the questions began with a Yes-No question to elicit a numerical data then a follow-up open ended question requiring participants to input the reasons to account for the 'yes' or 'no' they just gave. Since the current study concerns with the situation that the code-switching behaviors occur, some questions were also set to ask the participants to input explicitly the details of the occasions (for example, the audience, the venue and the words that usually use etc.). Simple statistical analysis was done to the numerical data and a thematic analysis was done to the qualitative data in order to generate different themes by using a selective-coding scheme (Patton, 2015) which allows new themes to emerge from the data. The combination of the emerging themes and the quantitative data also achieve a triangulation of data, which strengthen the validity of the research (Merriam, 2009).

#### 4. Findings

In this section, the data of pure code, bilingual code-switching and trilingual code-switching that was drawn from the survey are displayed accordingly following the 'Yes-No question and comment box' framework. The data will be compared here yet the themes that are generated will be presented in the next section (*Discussions*). Also, since the current paper is a follow-up paper, part of the data will be used to support the claims made in Chan (2018a).

##### 4.1 Pure Code

Since the use of pure code included the use of Cantonese-only, English-only and Putonghua-only speech, the participants were first asked to identify the variety of English that they use. It is used to justify how the general Hongkongers view their own variety. Among the sixty participants, 61.7% of them picked Hong Kong English, while only 15.0% chose British English, 16.7% selected American English and 6.7% said they used a mixture of all these varieties (Table 2).

Table 2. Variety of English that Participants Speak

Variety of English	Percentage (n=60)
Hong Kong English	61.7%
British English	15.0%
American English	16.7%
Other Englishes/ A Mixture of Englishes	6.7%

The high acknowledgement of Hong Kong English here is in line with the results of many of the previous studies. For instance, in Hansen Edwards (2015), 59% of the participants agreed that Hong Kong English is the legitimate variety of English that they used and in Chan (2018b), more than 90% of the participants reported that Hong Kong English is an existing variety. Moreover, compared with Chan (2016/2017), in which only 31% of participants claimed they used Hong Kong English

(and a mixture of it with other varieties), there is an obvious increase in the self-perception of using Hong Kong English here. It is also coherent with what Hansen Edwards (2016) reported that there has been an increase in the recognition of Hong Kong English among Hongkongers these years. Interestingly, while most of the previous research suggested that British English is more likely to be the preference of Hongkongers over American English due to the colonial background of Hong Kong (Chan, 2018a, 2018b), the result here suggested that American English did have an influence to Hongkongers, which is in accordance to Hansen Edwards' (2016b) discovery that American English is "emerging in the English spoken in traditionally British norm-oriented contexts such as Europe and ex-British colonial societies and...to Hong Kong" (p. 213).

For the general use of pure codes, the participants were asked whether they would use pure code (Cantonese-, English- or Putonghua-only speech) and 61.7% of them answered 'yes' and 38.3% for 'no'. Among those who answered 'yes', 72.3% of them stated that they would use pure code in formal occasions, while 2.1% for informal occasion and 25.5% for both formal and informal (Table 3).

Table 3. The Use of Pure Codes

The Use of Pure Code (n=60)		
Yes 61.7%		No 38.3%
The Occasion of Using Pure Code (n=47)		
Formal 72.3%	Informal 2.1%	Both Formal and Informal 25.5%

Most of the participants expressed that they used pure code in formal occasions and the types of formal occasions were revealed in the open-ended comment box section. When the participants were asked to type the 'situation, event, location and audience' that they used pure code, a list of answers were elicited and by using frequency count, three different situations were found out and the collocated words (which indicated the types of events and audiences) were also discovered. These are summarized in the Table 4.

Table 4. Situations for Using Pure Codes (n=47)

No.	Frequency	Situation	Collocation
1	24	Presentation	Academic presentations (at schools/ in classes); Job presentations (to clients/ bosses)
2	22	Communication with monolinguals	Use English as a lingua franca (to bosses, international students, lecturers and professors who are foreigners); Use Cantonese as a lingua franca (to grandparents, seniors in the community who only speak Cantonese); Use Putonghua as a lingua franca (to mainland clients, mainland students and mainland professors)
3	13	Interview	Job interviews; Academic interviews (for exchange programs, further studies and volunteer programs)

The open-ended answers confirmed several points that have been made about the use of pure code in Chan (2018a). Chan (2018a) suggested that the use of pure code is situational, that is, it depends hugely on the location that the speakers are located, for example, students tended to use pure-English and pure-Putonghua at university because of the higher chance of meeting a mainland student and an English-speaking professor. The result here is in accordance to previous research that English is a dominant language in major workplaces (Evan, 2011) and educational institutes (Coniam & Falvey, 2018) as the result suggested that job presentations, job interviews, academic interviews are all conducted in English only.

## 4.2 Bilingual Code-switching

For bilingual code-switching, all the sixty participants responded that they do code-switching.

Interestingly, none of them reported that they would do bilingual code-switching solely in a formal occasion whereas 73.3% of them said they would do it in informal occasion and 26.7% said they would do it in both formal and informal situations (Table 5).

Table 5. The Use of Bilingual Code-switching

The Use of Bilingual Code-switching (n=60)		
Yes 100%		No 0%
The Occasion of Using Bilingual Code-switching (n=60)		
Formal 0%	Informal 73.3%	Both Formal and Informal 26.7%

The result shared multiple similarities with the previous studies. First, the 100% of bilingual code-switching confirmed all the previous studies that bilingual code-switching is a wide-spread phenomenon among Hongkongers (Li & Tse 2002; Sung, 2010). Secondly, the high number of informal use of bilingual code-switching also confirmed that English is more preferred for formal settings in Hong Kong, especially in work places and schools. Thirdly, the bilingual code-switching is a part of the essential elements for local Hongkongers. These are confirmed by the open-ended answers. The participants were again asked to provide the 'situation, event, location and audience' when they perform bilingual code-switching and the results are as follows (Table 6).

Table 6. Situations for Using Bilingual Code-switching (n=60)

No.	Frequency	Situation	Collocation
1	47	Chat with Friends and Family	Friendly chats; Chats with peers; Family gathering with parents and relatives
2	19	Daily Communication in Hong Kong	Casual conversations (with everyone in Hong Kong); Casual talks; daily life conversation; Daily Interactions; Relaxing chats in Hong Kong
3	5	Showing Hong Kong Identity	Hongkongers' speech; Colloquial Hong Kong speech; Hong Kong bilinguals

The results shown in Table 6 confirmed the social functions of bilingual code-switching among Hongkongers. '*Chatting with friends and family*' was mentioned forty-seven times among sixty responses. Combined with '*daily communications in Hong Kong*' which was referred for nineteen times, these indicated that bilingual code-switching plays a critical role in the social lives of Hongkongers. It is in line with the result of most of the previous studies, like Sung (2010), he said in which bilingual code-switching helps maintain a proper and natural exchange of thoughts in the community. Also, it is in coherence with Cahyani et al. (2018) that code-switching is a "natural way of communicating among bilinguals (in any bilingual society)" (p. 465) which is essential to achieve better communication. More importantly, the five incidences of '*showing Hong Kong Identity*' showed that the use of bilingual code-switching possibly relates to a construction of Hong Kong identity. Cogo (2007) suggested that code-switching carries a function of being an identity marker for the speakers in the same bilingual community and the speakers have a stronger adherence to the community by having such identity marker. It is believed that such code-switching in Hong Kong helps Hongkongers to differentiate themselves from mainland China. The result here gave hints to show that a Hongkonger identity may be built by the bilingual code-switching (this will be further discussed in *Discussion*), which was claimed in Chan (2018a).

Besides, the forms of bilingual code-switching (how the codes were switched among Hongkongers) were also revealed in the survey. The participants were asked to provide the forms of code-switching that they do, to be specific, which languages they code-switch and how the words are code-switched (Intra-sentential, Inter-sentential or Inter-dialogue). The results are presented in the following (Table 7).

Table 7. Forms of Bilingual Code-switching

Languages that are used in bilingual code-switching (n=60)		
English-Cantonese 100%	Cantonese-Putonghua 22%	English-Putonghua 10%
Insertions of words in bilingual code-switching (n=60)		
Intra-sentential 85%	Inter-sentential 55%	Inter-dialogue 50%

The results showed that the most common types of code-switching is Cantonese-English, which was chosen by all of the sixty participants. It confirmed that the phenomenon is extremely common among Hongkongers, which was reported in studies like Chan (2003), Sung (2010) and Chan (2018a) without a statistical result. While previous research revealed that the code-switching in Hong Kong was performed either intra-sententially or inter-sententially (Chan, 2003; Li & Tse, 2002) and a number of examples of these incidences were recorded, it is seldom for them to report how frequent do Hongkongers code-switch intra-sententially, inter-sententially or even in between dialogues. Here the current result suggested that intra-sentential code-switching seems to be the dominant form of code-switching and inter-sentential code-switching comes the second with a similar frequency with inter-dialogue. It can serve as a numerical proof for the choice of code-switching in Hong Kong as most of the examples cited in previous research like Chan (2003), Setter et al. (2010) and Chan (2018a) were actually intra-sentential ones.

Moreover, participants were asked whether they like their bilingual code-switching behaviors and they typed their reasons in the comment box. More than 80% of the participants said 'yes' and they like this because of three reasons, namely, the efficiency/ accuracy, the Hong Kong Identity and the naturalness. Table 8 is a summary of the results.

Table 8. Reasons of Liking Bilingual Code-switching (n=60)

No.	Frequency	Reasons	Collocation
1	12	Efficiency/ Accuracy	The communication becomes more efficient; easier to express the idea; express myself more accurately; the message become more precise; express clearly
2	11	Hong Kong Identity	Hong Kong culture; Unique to Hongkongers; Characteristics of Hong Kong; Identity of being a Hongkong people; for people who have similar Hong Kong background
3	9	Naturalness	how I speak normally; more casual; my friends speak in this way; normal for bilinguals; comes natural to me; simply do it every-day

The '*Efficiency/ Accuracy*' and '*Naturalness*' confirmed how bilingual code-switching has been part of Hongkongers' daily lives as the code-switching manner actually enhances the efficiency of communication between bilinguals and it sounds more natural for bilinguals to code-switch rather than not to code-switch. These are in line with Sung (2010) that code-switching has already been a main part of Hong Kong among bilinguals. Furthermore, the eleven incidences of '*Hong Kong Identity*' echoed with what has just reported in Table 6 for the use of bilingual code-switching, which bilingual code-switching may be used as a means to show the Hong Kong Identity. These reasons could be found again when the participants were asked to pick the reasons for the bilingual code-switching from six choices which were all reported in previous studies. The results are presented as follows (Table 9):

Table 9. Reasons for Bilingual Code-switching (n=60)

Reasons	%
Lack of Cantonese equivalence (names/ brands/ locations etc.) in Hong Kong	93.3%
Speaking in only Cantonese or Putonghua is awkward in Hong Kong	13.3%
Speaking in only English is 'pretentious' in Hong Kong	16.7%
Code-switching is part of Hongkongers' daily lives	85.0%
It distinguishes Hongkongers from other people	13.3%
It sounds natural to code-switch/ It sounds unnatural not to code-switch	81.7%

Again, Hong Kong Identity and naturalness came in as the second and the third major reasons why Hongkongers code-switch. However, the top reason of doing code-switching here is the '*lack of Cantonese equivalence in Hong Kong*', which over 90% of the participants picked. It directly responds to Chan's (2018a) claim that "the names of shops, shopping malls and products are barriers to using pure codes" (p. 89). Due to the fact that Hong Kong has a long history as a British colony and many things in Hong Kong, for example, office chores and school jargons, are done without a Cantonese term (Sung 2010), it is unsurprising that the lack of Cantonese equivalence becomes the prime reason why Hongkongers code-switch between English and Cantonese – they basically just have no way not to use English in a sentence.

### 4.3 Trilingual Code-switching

For trilingual code-switching, among the sixty participants, twenty of them (33.3%) said they had trilingually code-switched. Although the number is the lowest compared with pure codes and bilingual code-switching, it serves as a positive evidence that this newly purposed trilingual code-switching does exist in Hong Kong. All of the participants said they only perform it in informal situations (Table 10). When they were asked the 'situation, event, location and audience' that they do trilingual code-switching, it was surprised to find that most of these incidents were found in a school context (Table 11).

Table 10. The Use of Trilingual Code-switching

The Use of Trilingual Code-switching (n=60)		
Yes 33.3%	No 67.7%	
The Occasion of Using Trilingual Code-switching (n=20)		
Formal 0%	Informal 100%	Both Formal and Informal 0%

Table 11. Situations for Using Trilingual Code-switching (n=20)

No.	Frequency	Situation	Collocation
1	5	Talking to schoolmates	Talking with schoolmates from Southeast Asia; maybe schools; especially classrooms

Even though the number of responses was limited, there were five incidences of school situation. Nearly all of them described that there were different kinds of people in the university, both English-speaking and Putonghua-speaking, therefore they would code-switch among the three languages. The followings are three excerpts from the open-ended responses showed the incidents when trilingual code-switching is used in a school context:

*Talking with classmates and friends from Southeast Asia. Trilingual code-switching (for myself) will sometimes happen between dialogues- where particular terms will be spoken in a third language. (For example) "Next time when you come to Hong Kong, wǒ dài nǐ qù*

*chī* (Putonghua: *I will bring you to have*) 菠蘿油 (Cantonese: *Pineapple Bun with Butter*)”.

Respondent #59

*With my classmates, especially when there are mainland students and I can't express my meaning clearly with Putonghua.*

Respondent #4

*Maybe at uni when there are all kinds of people in one room? There are many mainlanders here as well as foreigners.*

Respondent #2

From the excerpts, it is clear that because of the high number of mainlanders in school, Hongkongers may need to code-switch trilingually to make themselves clear. Also, the sentence that is provided in the first excerpt becomes the second record of trilingual code-switching in addition to the one that was cited in Chan (2018a), the two are listed below:

*Speakers: Next time when you come to Hong Kong, wǒ dài nǐ qù chī* (Putonghua: *I will bring you to have*) 菠蘿油 (Cantonese: *Pineapple Bun with Butter*)”.

*Researcher: Wǒ zhè gè xué qī bú yòng kǎo shì.*

*(I do not have any examinations for this semester.)*

*Friend G: Bú shì ba? 咁你咪high爆?*

*(No Way! You must be really excited, right?)*

(Cited from Chan, 2018a)

The excerpts here provide an example of trilingual code-switching as well as a confirmation to Chan (2018a) that the increasing number of Putonghua-speaking students in universities is a factor accounting for the existing of trilingual code-switching. This is also proved by the results of a follow-up question in which participants were asked to pick reasons for the birth of trilingual code-switching (Table 12).

Table 12. Reasons for the Birth of Trilingual Code-switching (n=20)

Reasons	%
The use of Putonghua to teach Chinese in primary schools	60.0%
The increasing contact with mainland China	75.0%
The increasing popularity of mainland songs and media	45.0%
Others	15.0%

While more than 75% of the participants picked *'the increasing contact with mainland China'* as the reason for having trilingual code-switching can partly be seen as the result of having more and more contacts with mainlanders (including mainland students in Hong Kong), the answers below in *'Others'* were more explicitly written:

*More and more Putonghua speakers from mainland now in school.*

Respondent #7

*Large influx of mainland students.*

Respondent #4

The participants in general expressed that the increase in the number of mainland students in university is the main reason for having trilingual code-switching. Interestingly, when the students were asked whether they like this trilingual code-switching, the Hongkongers showed a negative attitude towards it, 72% of the participants disliked this form of code-switching and they did explain their reasons for the dislikes in the open-ended questions, the reasons were mostly related to the complications that it brings and again, the Hong Kong Identity issue (Table 13).

Table 13. Reasons of Disliking Trilingual Code-switching (n=60)

No.	Frequency	Reasons	Collocation
1	17	Complications to communication	More complicated and difficult to understand; too cognitively-demanding; redundant in the communication; confusing and annoying during the conversation; it is unnecessary
3	9	Hong Kong Identity	Putonghua does not represent Hong Kong; Not truly represents Hong Kong; Not 'pure' Hong Kong; Not what Hongkongers do; exploitation of our Cantonese culture; Putonghua is not part of the lingo in Hong Kong

The prime reason why the participants do not like trilingual code-switching is that they think it may further complicate the communication and may make it harder to understand. Also, some of the participants found it would be 'cognitively-demanding' for speakers and listeners, which may actually be the case as Liu's (2018) study discovered that code-switching does bring heavier loads for the brain to process. Interesting enough, the participants also stressed on '*Hong Kong Identity*' here as they think Putonghua is not part of the 'lingo' in Hong Kong which fails represent a Hong Kong culture.

#### 4.4 Hong Kong Identity

At the last part of the survey, the participants were asked to comment on how using pure code, bilingual code-switching and trilingual code-switching reflect a Hong Kong Identity. The questions were asked again following the 'Yes-No question and comment box' framework and the result is listed below in Table 14.

Table 14. Do you think these reflect a Hong Kong Identity? (n=60)

	Yes	No
Pure Code	33.3%	66.7%
Bilingual Code-switching	90.0%	10.0%
Trilingual Code-switching	18.3%	81.7%

It is clear from the results that the participants tend more to see bilingual codeswitching as a Hong Kong Identity instead of pure code and trilingual code-switching. The reasons for the high acceptance of bilingual code-switching were reviewed in the open-ended questions (Table 15).

Table 15. Why bilingual code-switching reflects a Hong Kong Identity? (n=60)

No.	Frequency	Reasons	Collocation
1	31	Hongkongers' Characteristics	Hongkongers' speech; unique to Hong kongers; it's everywhere in Hong Kong; part of the Hong Kong culture; most Hongkongers do this
2	9	Background of Hong Kong	Hong Kong was a British colony; these are the two official languages in Hong Kong; Hong Kong is bilingual
3	6	Distinguishing from other areas	People from other areas do not do this; Hongkongers do it more frequently than mainland people

More than half of the participants stressed on the fact that bilingual code-switching is a characteristic of Hongkongers and that is why they like it. Moreover, they also referred to the background of Hong Kong, especially the bilingual nature of Hong Kong as the reason why they like bilingual code-switching. The most interesting point is that six of the participants emphasized that the bilingual code-switching behavior distinguish them from non-Hongkongers, for instance, people from mainland China. It responded directly to Chan (2018a) that the Hongkongers may use bilingual code-switching as an identity marker to assert a Hong Kong Identity which marks themselves from mainland people.

## 5. Discussions

Here in this part, the two research questions that were stated in *Part 1* will be answered using the data in findings.

### 5.1 The Use of Pure Code, Bilingual and Trilingual Code-switching

Although the data clearly showed that trilingual code-switching does exist in Hong Kong, which has already responded to Chan's (2018a) call for further research, the result does show that trilingual code-switching is still on a very early stage in Hong Kong. Compared with pure code and bilingual code-switching which were recognized to be used by 62% and 100% of the participants, only 33.3% of the participants said they do trilingual code-switching.

The occasion that they use trilingual code-switching seems to be different from pure code and bilingual code-switching. Although participants reported that they all mostly use bilingual code-switching (100%) in informal situations (like communication with friends and families) and pure code (72.3%) in formal situations (like meetings or presentations in workplaces or schools), a number of them (25.5% and 26.7%) still chose that they would use pure code and bilingual code-switching in both formal and informal situations. Participants' response on their use of pure codes is in accordance to Evans (2016) that pure codes are usually used in workplaces and academic institutes such as formal presentations and interviews (mostly English). However, none of the participants showed that they would use trilingual code-switching in formal situation, instead, all of them picked informal situations as the answer.

Seemingly, the use of trilingual code-switching is limited to the communication in schools (with students from mainland China and other international students). While the participants reported that they used pure code (Putonghua) as a lingua franca to communicate with mainland students in school, the participants reported that they may also use trilingual code-switching only if they cannot fully express themselves in Putonghua. It can be explained by the fact that Putonghua is still a second (or even third language) for many Hongkongers. According to Bacon-shone et al. (2015), Cantonese was the mother tongue for 89.1% of the population. Many of the kids in Hong Kong start to acquire English as a second language as early as in kindergarten at around three years old; however, it was not until 2009 that a pilot trilingual teaching scheme (which involves Putonghua) was implemented (Wang and Kirkpatrick, 2019).<sup>1</sup> Compared with Cantonese and English, the comparatively low proficiency in Putonghua of Hongkongers may therefore lead to the situation when students need to use Cantonese or English to supplement their Putonghua sentences in order to express themselves clearly.

Furthermore, the result of this study also provides several numerical data on how Hongkongers performed bilingual code-switching. As most of the previous studies focused more on the structures of code-switching (a more recent one would be Chen 2015, which is an analysis on structures and styles of code-switching in Hong Kong). The present study showed that Cantonese-English code-switching is still the prevalent form of code-switching in Hong Kong and intra-sentential code-switching is the most common way to code-switch. These results can account for the reason why the samples in many of the previous studies are intra-sentential code-switching in

<sup>1</sup> Before the implementation of the trilingual scheme, the teaching scheme in Hong Kong had been bilingual (Cantonese-English) since the colony period; at that time, Putonghua was taught as an optional subject while Cantonese and English were the compulsory subjects (Coniam & Falvey, 2018).

which Cantonese words and English words are used alternately to complement each other to form a full sentence (for example, Li & Tse, 2002). The reasons why Hongkongers code-switch were also revealed here, most of the participants agreed that they do code-switching because of the lack of Cantonese equivalence, the commonness of code-switching in Hong Kong and the naturalness to code-switching among Hongkongers. These are all in line with what Sung (2010) and Chan (2018a) suggested in their paper and the results here can serve as a proof to their claims on the use of bilingual code-switching in Hong Kong.

## 5.2 Hong Kong Identity and Attitudes towards the Codes

In general, the attitudes towards the three language uses are quite mixed. Bilingual code-switching is obviously the most recognized form of language use in Hong Kong among Hongkongers as all the participants said they used this form of language use. Even though they admitted that the use of it is mostly informal, it is a major tool to communicate with friends, families and people in the daily life. Most importantly, participants mostly associate bilingual code-switching with a Hong Kong Identity, which serves as a symbol of how Hongkongers speak and reflects the bilingual nature of Hong Kong (as well as Hongkongers). The positive attitudes towards bilingual code-switching can also be seen from the reasons that the participants input in the open-ended comments. Most of them, again, stressed on the uniqueness that bilingual code-switching brings to Hongkongers, which differentiates them from people from mainland China. Similarly, the positive attitudes to bilingual code-switching can also be seen from the negative comments that the participants showed to trilingual code-switching. The participants dislike trilingual code-switching because they think Putonghua cannot represent Hong Kong and the use of trilingual code-switching is an exploitation to Hong Kong culture. This result can be seen as an evidence of how Hongkongers view Putonghua in general. Even though Lai (2011) in her large-scale language attitude survey found that Hongkongers were positive towards the three languages, Putonghua still ranked as the least favorable language among the three. Instead, when the participants in Lai (2011) were asked to choose a language that they inclined towards in Hong Kong, Putonghua was the least chosen while the participants “demonstrates the strongest integrative inclination towards Cantonese and English” (p. 256).

As mentioned above, a *Hong Kong Identity* is linked to the use of bilingual code-switching. This is further confirmed by the result of the last part of the survey in which 90% of the participants agreed that bilingual code-switching can reflect a Hong Kong Identity whereas pure code and trilingual code-switching were only chosen by one-third and less than one-fifth of the participants for this question. The participants generally think that bilingual code-switching is a characteristic specific to Hongkongers' speech and the use of it represents the culture and the historical background of Hong Kong as an ex-British colony. Interestingly, participants showed a tendency to use bilingual code-switching as a means to distinguish themselves from mainland people. This result is highly coherent with what Kaeding (2017) mentioned that a notion of *'localism'* has been noticed in recent years in Hong Kong, which has potentially speeded up the construction of *'Hongkonger'* as an identity marker for teenagers. It also echoes what Hansen Edward (2019) mentioned that localism was strengthened by the language choice of the Hongkongers and in her research, the language choice was referred to the use of Hong Kong English. Here, surprisingly, the participants in the present study also showed a high acceptance rate to Hong Kong English as over 60% of the participants self-identified themselves as speakers of Hong Kong English. This ratio is higher than some of the previous studies, for example, 40% in Hansen Edwards (2015). As Chen (2015) described, Hongkongers “consistently consider local code-mixing (bilingual code-switching) as associated to ‘pure’, ‘common’ and ‘normal’ Hongkongers” (p.179), we can conclude that Hongkongers basically see the use of bilingual code-switching as an indicator for others to be ‘one of our kind’ or not. This result is best concluded with a quote from Polley et al. (2018), in which they described that one of the struggles that Hongkongers are facing now is the “current China-Hong Kong culture war, which includes the resistance to Mandarin (Putonghua) and ‘mainlandization’ that these students (the interviewees) experience daily” (p. 240). It explains why Hongkongers hold a negative attitude towards Putonghua and trilingual code-switching as these are very likely potential threats to the

Hong Kong Identity.

## **6. Conclusion**

The present study used the both qualitative and quantitative data from survey conducted by sixty university students to investigate the claim about trilingual code-switching made in a Chan (2018a). The result here showed that trilingual code-switching among Cantonese, English and Putonghua does exist in Hong Kong; yet, the acceptance on this new form of code-switching remained low. Bilingual code-switching was reported as the most common type of language use in Hong Kong and it is also associated to a 'Hong Kong Identity'. This report can be seen as a pilot attempt to investigate trilingual code-switching in Hong Kong and provide additional data on different forms of code-switching that is rarely discussed in the current literature. There are limitations to the current study, for example, the number of data is limited and there is a lack of real interviews and ethnographic data of trilingual code-switching. Further studies are needed, especially surveys, interviews and even ethnolinguistic studies on trilingual code-switching users, to examine how exactly it works in the Hong Kong context.

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