



The Perception of Pre- Service English Teachers on the Use of Cantonese in ESL Classrooms in Hong Kong

ENG4900 Honours Project

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The debate on whether first language should be allowed, or even play a more active role, in second language classrooms has started since the twentieth century. Despite the fact that English is a compulsory subject in Hong Kong, English teachers seemed to naturally accept Cantonese exclusion in English classrooms. This paper reports a research set on the purpose to find out the perception of pre-service English teachers held towards using Cantonese to assist English teaching. It explores the perceived benefits and concerns of such pedagogical decision. Data were collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with 53 pre-service English teachers studying at tertiary institutions in Hong Kong who were also native speakers of Cantonese. SPSS were used to analyse the quantitative data. Interviews were transcribed and coded under different categories. It was found that pre-service English teachers were, though generally positive towards the notion; recognised it as the last resort. Perceived benefits and concerns were also discussed. This research has important implications to English teachers and schools, as well as to the education policymakers.

Starting from the late twentieth century, there have been heated discussions among scholars on whether the first language of learners should be allowed, or even perform a more active role, in a second language classroom (Auerbach, 1993; Chiou, 2014; Cook, 2001; Huerta-Macias, & Kephart, 2009; Schweers Jr, 1999; Tang, 2002; Widdowson, 2003; Yough, & Fang, 2010). Before the discussion, it was merely normal to language teachers the exclusion of first language (L1) in second language (L2) classrooms to ensure the exposure to the target language (TL) of the classroom (Baron, 1990; Crawford, 1991; Daniels, 1990), as cited by Auerbach (1993).

The aims of the project are to find out, first, the perception held by pre-service teachers towards using Cantonese in ESL classrooms in Hong Kong and second, the potential benefits and concerns that they perceive when making the decision of whether to use Cantonese in ESL classrooms in Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, Cantonese is most students' mother tongue. Teachers' attitudes towards the role of Cantonese in ESL classrooms are important in the way that they are those who are actually making pedagogical decisions in classrooms. It depends on them to decide whether to allow the use of Cantonese in their classrooms to assist English (L2) acquisition. Therefore, based on the above aims, the research question set to guide the direction of the research and the data collection and analysis is:

Do pre- service English teachers hold a positive or negative perception towards the use of Cantonese in ESL classrooms in Hong Kong?

Literature Review

The taken- for-granted conventions in language teaching

There were a number of conventions in second language teaching and learning which were taken for granted, instead of openly discussed, according to Cook (2001). One of them was the taboo of using L1 in L2 classrooms. She stated this phenomenon could be scaled with one end of total abandonment of L1 and the other maximization of L2. Both ends promote one idea: prevention of the use of L1 in L2 classrooms. However, as suggested by Harmer (2007), ignoring the fact that the learners and teachers can communicate in another language was completely irrational. Denial to the L1 of the learners was also denial to another potentially conducive resource to L2 teaching and learning. Though explained by Auerbach (1993), it was out of the fear that translation would halt the thinking path of L2 learners in L2.

The reasons for exclusion of L1 in L2 learning

There were discussions on the reasons for L1's exceptionally low status in L2 learning. According to Cook (2001), the general assumption of monolingual environment for L2 learning was actually from the same idea of such in L1 acquisition. In other words, the success of L1 acquisition created a paradox that L2 should be learnt the same way in order to ensure the same proficiency. However, these people in support of this view were mostly mistaken. Human brains do not work the same way as computers do. As pointed out by Huerta-Macias, & Kephart

(2009, p. 38), “both languages learnt are always present.” They co-exist. One cannot acquire another language (L2) completely ignoring the previous one learnt (L1).

L1 and TL are, conceived by some, negatively- related in the same classroom, as stated by Huerta-Macias, & Kephart (2009). They thought that the use of L1 limits the learners’ exposure to TL that one could not exist without limiting the other. Therefore, they thought that abolishment of LI directly leads to maximization of TL in L2 classroom, which is one over-simplistic point of view by them.

The advantages of using L1 in L2 learning as perceived by scholars

Instead of viewing the use of L1 as almost an evil in L2 classrooms, the more modern view of the scholars is to view it as a tool (Chiou, 2014; Chin, & Wigglesworth, 2007); a cognitive tool (Yough & Fang, 2010); a facilitator (Schweers Jr, 1999); a resource (Vaish, 2008) for L2 teaching and learning. In fact, according to Faltis & Hudelson (1994), if L1 is allowed and respected in L2 classroom, L2 learners may hold a more positive view towards the learning of L2, the new language, which is conducive to the success of L2 acquisition.

As suggested by Harmer (2007), it is just inevitable and natural that learners, especially beginners, to translate the TL back to L1 for comprehension. They were not substituting one with another but making relations between the two. They were, in their way, creating comprehensible input to make sense of the new language. He has suggested a few positive adaptations of using L1 in assistance of learning of L2 such as checking students’

understanding of instructions in L2 by asking them to repeat those instructions in L1 and contrasting sound systems of L1 and L2 orally to allow understanding and easier remembrance of both.

“Research gap” in the previous researches and the reasons for the choice of the topic

In the previous researches, the researchers tended to adopt learner-based observation and/ or surveys and interviews in explanation for the phenomenon of avoidance of L1 in L2 learning and the potential benefits that could be brought about by introducing L1 to assist L2 acquisition. The focus of the researches was mainly from the perspective of L2 learners. Instructors of the L2, the teachers, to be specific, were assigned a less active role in the previous researches. However, teachers were the ones in classrooms making pedagogical decisions for the teaching and learning in the lesson. Their attitudes on using L1 in L2 classrooms most directly affect the practice of it. The second reason for the choice of the topic was that the idea of abolishing Cantonese (L1 of most students in the local classroom settings in Hong Kong) seemed to be naturally taken by teachers when they were still fresh graduates with an education degree or diploma in education. Few people really questioned about such an unwritten rule. It was not sure whether they were aware of the potential advantages and disadvantages of L1 introduced in L2 classrooms at all. Thus, the idea of conducting a thorough research on the topic to pre-service English teachers was developed to find out how they view the notion of using Cantonese to assist English teaching.

The Study

Participants

The fifty-three participants who were invited to fill in the questionnaires fulfilled the following requirements:

1. He/ She is a pre-service English teacher studying at any tertiary institution in Hong Kong in preparation to become a teacher.
2. He/ She is a native speaker of Cantonese.

The first requirement is directly related to the research question of which pre-service English teachers are targeted. The mutual language backgrounds (under the assumption that most of the Hong Kong students are also native Cantonese speakers) of both teachers and students required by the second allow pedagogical choices on whether to use Cantonese in teaching. Unless the teacher himself / herself knows Cantonese well, it is less likely that he/ she can use Cantonese to facilitate English teaching and learning in class.

Research Method

To answer the research question, mixed models of data collection were adopted. The research consisted of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. According to Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989), cited in Caracelli & Greene(1993); Driscoll, Appiah-Yeboah, Salib & Rupert (2007) and Sandelowski (2000), mixed data collection methods “widen the scope and deepen the insights of the study”. The choice of both quantitative and qualitative approaches

compensated for each other's disadvantages. The data collection process was therefore divided into two phases.

Phase I:

It was the quantitative phase in which questionnaires in the form of Likert scale were given to the target participants. Likert scale was adopted as it is suitable for measurement of attitudes (Jamieson, 2004). Participants indicated their level of agreement (from 1 being strongly disagree to 4 being strongly agree) to the descriptors on their experiences and attitudes on the use of Cantonese in ESL classrooms. There were also statements which require participants to indicate the level of agreement to the descriptors on how the use of Cantonese could assist in each area of English, i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking, giving instructions for different tasks and homework and vocabulary building. By the end of this phase, fifty-three responses were collected for later analysis to sort out the pattern- whether pre-service teachers surveyed perceive positively or negatively towards using Cantonese in English lessons.

Phase II:

It was the quantitative phase. After the analysis of the data collected in Phase I, three participants were invited to a semi-structured individual interview in which they gave more details to explain their answers and thus the trend shown by the result of the questionnaires collected from the previous phase. According to Merriam (2009), the major advantage of

conducting semi- structured interviews, instead of the structured or the unstructured ones, is that they allow uniqueness and new thoughts of the interviewees on the topic, yet still answer to the current situation.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed for further data analysis. The transcripts were later sent for interviewees' reference. Phase II was to collect deeper insights than Phase I, to further explain their stance on the referred notion with elaborations of how they developed their perception and how they made the referred pedagogical decision in their teaching practices.

Data analysis

The quantitative data obtained from the fifty- three responses in Phase I was processed with SPSS. It was used to calculate the frequencies and percentages of each number chosen (1-4) on the scale, indicating the degree of agreement of the participants to each descriptor. Based on the calculation, the general view of the participants to each statement was then analysed.

The interviews in Phase II were transcribed and coded. Open coding, was adopted at first to be “expansive to every segment of data” (Merriam, 2009, p. 178). Notations were made. Then, these codes were grouped, as classified by Merriam, analytical coding. The coded interviews were compared against each other to compare and contrast the views of the interviewees.

Ethical issues

For confidentiality assurance, all the participants were kept anonymous. Their names and identities would not be disclosed in any form in this research to ensure the privacy of the participants. Informed consents were obtained before for the interviewees' permission to audio- record the interviews for transcription and coding. The participants were also notified that all the questionnaires and audio recordings would be destroyed upon grade release.

Results

A. Findings from questionnaires (Phase I)

Attitude of Participants towards Using Cantonese in English teaching

| Statements | strongly disagree (%) | disagree (%) | agree (%) | strongly agree (%) |
|---|-----------------------|--------------|-----------|--------------------|
| 1. I am willing to use Cantonese to assist my teaching in English lessons. | 11.3 | 9.4 | 62.3 | 17.0 |
| 9. I believe a good English teacher should not use Cantonese to assist teaching in lessons. | 11.3 | 62.3 | 17.0 | 9.4 |
| 10. I will only use Cantonese in English lessons only when it is absolutely necessary. | 1.9 | 5.7 | 41.5 | 50.9 |
| 19. I think Cantonese can be a resource when teaching English. | 3.8 | 17.0 | 67.9 | 11.3 |
| 21. I will not use Cantonese in English lessons when I have a visitor in class. | 1.9 | 22.6 | 37.7 | 37.7 |

TABLE 1 the Results on Statements on the Attitude of Participants towards Using Cantonese in English teaching Shown in Percentages

The attitude of participants towards using Cantonese in English teaching is set out in table 1. Nearly 80% of them reflected that they were willing to use Cantonese to assist teaching. The same percentage of participants also agreed that Cantonese could be a resource in English teaching. About 70% did not hold the belief that good English teachers should not use Cantonese. On the participants' own pedagogical decision of whether to use Cantonese, over 90% responded that they would only use it when it was absolutely necessary. However, 75% would not use Cantonese if they had a visitor in class.

In general, participants thought positively towards using Cantonese to assist English teaching and agreed that Cantonese could be a resource. However, they would only use Cantonese as the last resort and they were aware of whether this pedagogical behaviour was witnessed by others.

Potential Uses of Cantonese in Different Areas of English Teaching

| Statements | strongly disagree (%) | disagree (%) | agree (%) | strongly agree (%) |
|--|-----------------------|--------------|-----------|--------------------|
| 2. I will use Cantonese to assist my teaching on grammar. | 5.7 | 30.2 | 47.2 | 17.0 |
| 3. I will use English to assist my teaching on new vocabulary items. | 7.5 | 15.1 | 49.1 | 28.3 |
| 4. I will use Cantonese to assist my teaching on English reading. | 11.3 | 50.9 | 37.7 | 0 |
| 5. I will use Cantonese to assist my teaching on English writing. | 13.2 | 43.4 | 41.5 | 1.9 |
| 6. I will use Cantonese to assist my teaching on English listening. | 20.8 | 69.8 | 9.4 | 0 |
| 7. I will use Cantonese to assist my teaching on English speaking. | 20.8 | 60.4 | 17.0 | 1.9 |
| 8. I will use Cantonese to give instructions for different tasks. | 7.5 | 58.5 | 28.3 | 5.7 |
| 18. I think it is helpful to compare pronunciation of Cantonese and English, when teaching new vocabulary. | 20.8 | 50.9 | 24.5 | 3.8 |

TABLE 2 the Results on Potential Uses of Cantonese in Different Areas of English Teaching Shown in Percentages

Table 2 demonstrates the potential uses of Cantonese in different areas of English teaching.

Almost 80% of the respondents would use Cantonese to assist teaching on new vocabulary items. About 60% of them would use it on English grammar teaching. Over half of the participants would not use Cantonese on teaching of the four language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) as well as giving instructions on different tasks. Among this, high percentages of over 90% and 80% of the participants were found that they would not use Cantonese to assist the teaching of English listening and speaking. An approximate of 70% of

the participants did not think that the comparison of pronunciation of Cantonese and English would be helpful to vocabulary teaching.

The above analysis suggests that the participants would use Cantonese to assist English vocabulary and grammar teaching.

They would use Cantonese to assist teaching mostly of new vocabulary items and grammar.

Use of Cantonese in other areas of English did not appear to be in favour.

Potential Benefits and Concerns of Using Cantonese in English Teaching

| Statements | strongly disagree (%) | disagree (%) | agree (%) | strongly agree (%) |
|--|-----------------------|--------------|-----------|--------------------|
| 11. I believe using Cantonese in English lessons helps students learn better. | 1.9 | 43.4 | 43.4 | 11.3 |
| 12. I believe using Cantonese in English lessons makes teaching more effective than only English. | 3.8 | 45.3 | 41.5 | 9.4 |
| 13. I think most of my students will like it if I use Cantonese in English lessons. | 3.8 | 30.2 | 56.6 | 9.4 |
| 14. If I use Cantonese to assist my teaching in English lessons, I will limit students' exposure to English. | 3.8 | 34.0 | 43.4 | 18.9 |
| 15. If I let my students use any Cantonese in English lessons, I will limit their exposure to English. | 0 | 37.7 | 41.5 | 20.8 |
| 16. By abandoning the use of Cantonese, I can maximize my students' exposure to English. | 0 | 37.7 | 50.9 | 11.3 |
| 17. If my students use Cantonese in English lessons, they will have misunderstanding of the system of language of English. | 1.9 | 66.0 | 30.2 | 1.9 |
| 20. I think using Cantonese to assist my teaching in English lessons will motivate most of my students towards learning. | 3.8 | 50.9 | 35.8 | 9.4 |

TABLE 3 the Results on Potential Benefits and Concerns of Using Cantonese in English Teaching Shown in Percentages

Table 3 shows the potential benefits and concerns perceived by the participants on the use of Cantonese in English teaching. Just over half of the participants thought that students could learn better with the use of Cantonese, although over 60% thought that students would like them to use Cantonese.

Over 60% of the participants agreed that students' exposure to English would be limited if they or their students used Cantonese. However, over 60% of them also did not agree that the exclusion of Cantonese could maximize the exposure to English. A seeming contradiction of the results appeared here. Yet, attention should be drawn to the absence of participants strongly disagreeing to statement 15 and 16. The former could imply that it might limit students' English exposure, however small in degree, if they allowed students to use Cantonese. The latter could indicate that the exposure to English might somehow be increased, however small in scale, if Cantonese was not allowed in English lessons.

Slightly over half of the participants thought that the use of the Cantonese could make teaching more effective than the exclusion of it, while the rest thought otherwise. Just over half of them disagreed that the use of Cantonese could motivate students towards learning, while the other half did not. Nearly 70% did not think that students would misunderstand the language system of English if students used Cantonese in class.

Generally, there were two perceived benefits of using Cantonese in English lessons. First, participants believed that students would like them to use Cantonese and students would learn

better if they did. Second, they thought that using Cantonese would make teaching more effective. There was also a major concern on the pedagogical decision: however small the extent is, the use of Cantonese by either the teachers or the students in English lessons was perceived to limit the exposure to English of students.

B. Findings from interviews (Phase II)

Three participants of the questionnaire were invited to a short individual interview. Two of them (interviewee A and B) were positive towards using Cantonese to assist English teaching while the one left (interviewee C) was negative.

| Perception on using Cantonese in English Teaching | Interviewee |
|---|-------------|
| Positive | A, B |
| Negative | C |

TABLE 4 Perception on Using Cantonese in English Teaching by the Three Interviewees

Past experience of being taught English with assistance of Cantonese

All three of the interviewees had experience of being taught English with the assistance of Cantonese. They were all from EMI secondary schools and primary schools. Interviewee A did not think her own education background had influenced her view on the issue while the other two did. Interviewee B, despite her positive view on the issue, believed that Cantonese should be kept to the minimal in her own classroom (Extract 1).

Extract 1

“In my own classroom, I guess I will try to minimize my use of Cantonese because of my past learning experience.”

Interviewee C reflected that the emergence of native English teachers (Extract 2) and the traditional practice of Cantonese exclusion also affected her view.

Extract 2

“So I think the only reason [for people thinking native teachers are better] is that the students know native teachers do not know how to speak in Cantonese, so they can only use English to communicate with the teacher... so that’s another reason for me not preferring to use Cantonese to assist in my lessons.”

Factors affecting the decision of whether to use Cantonese to assist English teaching

| Factors affecting the referred pedagogical decision | Suggested by interviewee |
|---|--------------------------|
| Students’ English Proficiency | A, B, C |
| School Principal’s Preference | A |
| Parents’ Preference | C |

TABLE 5 Factors Affecting the Decision of Whether to Use Cantonese to Assist English Teaching Suggested by the Three Interviewees

All three interviewees said they would take students' English proficiency into consideration when making the pedagogical decision. They would consider using Cantonese if their students are less-achieving (Extract 3).

Extract 3

“Yes, I think students who are less able... if their English proficiency is not really good... I think Cantonese can really help them to improve their English proficiency.”

They suggested two ways to examine the proficiency: students' homework and the interactions with them in class. Interviewee A also mentioned her reference to the school principal's preference (Extract 4).

Extract 4

“It's first the students' ability and [then] also the school. How does the principal think about using Cantonese in English classrooms?”

Interviewee B said parents' preference would also be considered (Extract 5).

Extract 5

“But for parents... if their parents think that their children have difficulty in learning English during English lessons... I think I may translate [the] English....”

Perceived potential benefits of using Cantonese to assist English teaching

| Perceived Potential Benefits | Suggested by Interviewee |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| More Effective Teaching | A, B, C |
| More Motivated Students | A, B, C |

TABLE 6 Perceived Potential Benefits of Using Cantonese in English Teaching Suggested by the Three Interviewees

All of the interviewees agreed that using Cantonese to assist English teaching could make teaching English more effective and motivate students in different ways.

Interviewee C thought that there was a possibility that students would need the explanation of the vocabulary which was a part of the definition of the target vocabulary item. It could take extra time and efforts to explain a certain idea if only English was used (Extract 6).

Extract 6

“Yes, I think it saves time because when the teacher explain[s] the vocabulary, she need[s] to use another English sentence to explain the vocabulary. So the definition of the vocabulary... some students may not know the word of the definition of the vocabulary. For example, an orange... the teacher may say it’s a fruit... it is an orange... but the student would not know what is a fruit...so it might be more complicated for students if we use English to explain the vocabulary.”

Interviewee A recalled her own experience in her teaching practicum that she had one lesson using Cantonese to explain the use to present perfect tense which the students had been

learning for three weeks. During the Cantonese- assisted lesson, her students became actively- involved in class and some of them even raised questions (Extract 7).

Extract 7

“I decided to use Cantonese for the whole lesson [to teach present perfect tense]. And those weaker students... I can see that they tend[ed] to be more attentive in class and some of them even raise[d] their hands and ask[ed] questions.”

Perceived potential concerns of using Cantonese to assist English teaching

| Perceived Potential Concerns | Suggested by Interviewee |
|--|--------------------------|
| Limit Exposure To English | A, B, C |
| Students' Reliance on Cantonese | A, B, C |
| Set Up a Bad Example for Students | A |
| Pressure from Parents | B |
| Suspicion to Professionalism as an English Teacher | B, C |
| Students' Habitual Translation of English to Cantonese | C |

TABLE 6 Perceived Potential Concerns of Using Cantonese in English Teaching Suggested by the Three Interviewees

The concerns cited by all three of the interviewees were that using Cantonese to assist English teaching would limit students' exposure to English and students might develop reliance on the assistance of Cantonese.

Extract 8

“I'm worried that the students will rely on my Cantonese... if they realize that I have a pattern of using Cantonese whenever they seem to not understand my speech... I'm worried that they will think [you] will finally translate your

speech and they will wait for the translation but not trying [their] best to understand my English.” (Interviewee B)

Interviewee A mentioned that her concern that teachers might be setting up a bad example for students to not use English in class (Extract 9).

Extract 9

“...the teacher themselves don’t use English, the students will think that they can use Cantonese as well in English lessons so it might affect the atmosphere of speaking English.”

Interviewee B talked about the possible opposition of parents (Extract 10).

Extract 10

“If too much Cantonese is used in classroom, I am afraid that the parents will think that the purpose of having English lessons... will diminish.”

Interviewee B and C expressed their worry for similar suspicion from outsiders and colleagues on their professionalism.

Extract 11

“I think, other teachers or visitors may think that I’m not that profession[al]. Because I’ m an English teacher, I’m supposed to use English to teach the students. If I use Cantonese to translate those instructions or use Cantonese to assist my lesson, I think other teachers might think that “are your instruction too difficult for your students to understand or why you need to use Cantonese to assist?”” (Interviewee C)

She also suggested the possibility of students habitually translating English to Cantonese, leading to confusion of the two language systems (Extract 12).

Extract 12

“the grammar and sentence structure [of the two languages] are different... students may [be] use[d] to translate Chinese to English when they are having the English lesson. Because for example, for the sentence structure. English and Cantonese sometimes, their sentence structure[s] are reversed... if students have their Cantonese in their mind and they translate to English, their sentence structure would be totally wrong...”

Discussion

This research has examined the perception of pre- service English teachers towards using Cantonese in ESL classrooms in Hong Kong, with both the quantitative and qualitative data collected and analysed. It was shown that they were generally positive towards the referred notion. They thought that Cantonese could be a potential resource in English teaching, particularly in the teaching of grammar and vocabulary items. They reflected that they would mainly consider students' English proficiency for decision making. The lower the students' English proficiency was, the more likely it would be for them to use Cantonese, vice versa. Surprisingly, the positive attitude contradicted with their willingness to use Cantonese in their own English lessons. That they would only use Cantonese only when it was absolutely necessary suggested that they would only use Cantonese as the last resort. It highlighted the discrepancy between their attitude and pedagogical behaviour on the use of Cantonese.

The result, to a large extent, confirms the scholars' views and predictions on the use of L1 to assist L2 teaching. The participants of the study were astoundingly positive towards the notion,

contrast to the convention of prohibition of L1 in L2 classrooms, as pointed out by Cook (2001) and Huerta-Macias & Kephart (2009). The fact that they considered Cantonese as a possible tool had also justified the similar theory by Harmer (2007) that is to regard L1 a potential conducive resource to L2 acquisition. Among all the different areas of English teaching, the pre-service English teachers would use Cantonese to teach English grammar and vocabulary though they disagreed with the suggestion of comparing sound systems of the two languages by Harmer. The inconsistency between the attitude and the actual practice on using Cantonese to assist English teaching did not appear to be foreseen by the scholars in the previous related researches. The deviation may be explained by the psychological study by Ajzen & Fishbein (1977) that participants were making little correlation between attitude and behaviour. To be more specific, they suggested that people may not actually act as they intended to as they were not always acting with cognitive reference to their perception. In this case, though the participants were positive on the use of Cantonese in ESL classrooms, it is possible that they might not be making linkages to their own classrooms.

The major potential benefits of using Cantonese in English lessons perceived by the pre-service English teachers were that it would lead to more effective L2 teaching and increased students' motivation. They generally agreed that teaching English with assistance of Cantonese was more effective than the exclusion. It was considered a time- saving strategy. The participants also determined that the pedagogical decision would be welcomed by their students and thus they would learn better. The interviewed participants also reflected that the students were more engaged in class when they used Cantonese to explain grammar rules.

The result was in alignment with Harmer's theory (2007) that L1 can be conducive to L2 teaching. By assistance of Cantonese, pre- service English teachers believed they would have a better control over time to make teaching more effective. The way Cantonese was used in ESL

classrooms to assist teaching also confirmed Faltis & Hudelson's view (1994) that students would become more positive towards learning TL when their mother tongue was allowed.

Despite the potential benefits, English teachers- to –be also had mainly three concerns over the referred pedagogical decision: limit exposure to English teaching, cause suspicion to professionalism as an English teacher and induce students' reliance on L1. They held a view that with assistance of Cantonese to teach English, to a certain extent, would limit the students' exposure to English. Moreover, they expressed their pressure that outsiders would question their professionalism as an English teacher with the assumption that English teachers are supposed to teach English in English only. Therefore, the participants were aware whether their pedagogic decision of using Cantonese was made known. They were also hesitant to make the decision lest the students became dependent on the Cantonese assistance.

Their concern on limiting English exposure by using Cantonese conformed to the scholars' prediction in the previous studies. Although the participants seemed to differ with the traditional understanding that absolute exclusion of L1 (Cantonese) unquestionably indicates maximization of TL (English) suggested by Cook (2001), they still suspected that, to some extent, Cantonese in English classrooms would reduce students' exposure to English. Their perception instead resembled the one proposed by Huerta- Macias & Kephart (2009) that L1 limits the exposure to TL. According to Li (2008), "mixed code is socially disapproved and banned in the classroom" in Hong Kong (p. 6). He pointed out the fact that the general public in Hong Kong were resistant to the idea of codeswitching in ESL classrooms, let alone using one language to explain another. Thus, it is of little wonder that the participants were reluctant to using Cantonese if they were visited in their lessons. This pedagogical decision would, indeed, seem dangerously prone to be challenged and be regarded as evidence against their professionalism in English teaching. In reality, as cited by Li (2008), the Education Bureau regarded Cantonese unfavourable in EMI lessons. It was then noted in the report on a

comprehensive review of a school. This exemplified the pressure of not only the teachers' but also the schools' practice of Cantonese removal in ESL classrooms. The prediction of developing students' reliance on Cantonese in English learning was a parallel to an inaccurate assumption identified by Cook (2001), Huerta-Macias & Kephart (2009) and Harmer (2007) that L1 was acquired in a monolingual context and the process could be replicated for L2. The fact was pointed by Auerbach (1993) that it was basically impracticable to learn L2 without translation to L1. Harmer, once again, regarded the reliance inevitably typical in 2007 and that it should be welcomed as students were making use of their knowledge of L1 to make sense of L2.

Implications of the Research

To Teachers and Schools

This research has important implications for classroom practice on using Cantonese to assist English teaching. Despite the stress faced by teachers and schools because of the social taboo of codeswitching in ESL classrooms, teachers and schools should give priority to students' interests. Teaching and learning should be learner-centred. Education practitioners should be open-minded and flexible on making any sort of pedagogical decisions to cater for learners' needs. They should view Cantonese as a ready resource for English teaching particularly when students are in need of extra support (Cantonese) to make meaning of English, especially on vocabulary and grammar.

To Education Policymakers

It appeared that the Education Bureau has been taking the convention of Cantonese exclusion in ESL classrooms for granted as the general public has. Education Commission (1990) stated that "the teaching of Chinese and English as subjects directly supported the use of Chinese or English as mediums of instruction" (p. 96) and that schools should minimise codeswitch of

Chinese and English. They subtly denied the opportunity of Cantonese as a tool in English teaching. Yet, the government's stance on the issue did not seem to have changed after almost two decades, judging by the fact that the examiners marked the use of Cantonese in ESL classrooms unfavourable on a report of a school's review in 2007 (Li, 2008).

It is obviously the time for Education Bureau to review and modify their current policy on codeswitch in ESL classrooms, based on the results of empirical studies similar to this one and the modern views of the experts in the field. Detailed guidelines on the issue, which can respond to the educational needs of the 21st century, should also be drawn and published officially as a reference material to in- service English teachers as well as pre- service ones, when they are making relevant pedagogical decisions.

Limitations of the Research and Suggestions for Future Research

This study found that pre-service English teachers were, in general, optimistic towards the notion of using Cantonese to assist English teaching and aware of the potential benefits and concerns over the pedagogical decision. However, it was inconsistent with their willingness to do so as they perceived Cantonese the last resort to English teaching and were reluctant to the idea of the relevant pedagogical decision made known to outsiders.

The limitation of the study was the small research size of only fifty-three participants for the questionnaires and three of them for the interviews. The main reason was the difficulty to identify suitable candidates for the questionnaires as there is currently a number of pre-service English teachers whose mother tongue is Mandarin, which could not fulfil the requirement set for the study. Therefore, the questionnaires were given to participants in hard copies instead of online copies, to ensure they fitted the requirement set. All the participants had orally confirmed their identity as a native speaker of Cantonese to be an eligible candidate in the study.

Apart from a larger research size, future researches may target on experienced teachers for more in- depth feedback on the topic with their actual experience in teaching in ESL classrooms in Hong Kong. Comparison of their perception with the actual pedagogical behaviours in English lessons could be drawn and analysed to provide insights into the topic. Their strategic uses of Cantonese to assist English teaching could also be noted in contribution to English teaching methodology specific to the Hong Kong context.

(5637 words)

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