Term paper for Anthropology 577: Language as social actions

‘Lazy pronunciation’ and the ideologies of Cantonese standardization

1. Introduction

Many Hong Kong Cantonese speakers have heard of the term ‘lazy pronunciation’ either from schools or from public discourse with reference to the ways in which certain words are pronounced in a colloquial way instead of in accordance with Cantonese dictionary prescription. For example, the second person pronoun ‘you’, when pronounced as [lei2][1] instead of the dictionary form [nei2], is considered ‘lazy’, and thus the speaker who uses this form is said of being lazy as well. Some Cantonese speakers may be able to identify and demonstrate a few specific words of the ‘lazy’ category, but there are many who do not perceive a difference between a ‘lazy’ variant and a dictionary form. It is a phenomenon exists among Cantonese speakers for at least 120 years (Ball 1883, reprinted 1924: LXIII) although many Cantonese scholars (Zhan 1990, Li 1995, Ho 1989, etc.) believe that it only occurs very recently. Prescriptivists claim that using the lazy variants hinder communication, because in some cases the lazy variant becomes a homophone of another word with a different lexical/referential meaning. In actual usage, however, miscommunication seldom happens when these variants are used in context.

In other parts of the world, it is common that certain speech forms or dialects are labeled ‘bad’, ‘slovenly’ or ‘lazy’, as opposed to other forms which are labeled ‘good’. Andersson and Trudgill (1990: 129) comment on *h*-dropping in British English noting that many complainers claim that dropping the initial *h* sound is ‘slovenly’, ‘careless’, ‘lazy’, and ‘wrong’. They counter this accusation by noting the example of ‘knee’ and ‘know’: ‘No one would want to claim that it is “lazy” to drop the *k* in *knee* and *know*. You have to drop the *k* in modern English - you would be thought very funny if you didn’t - although until about 400 years ago it was pronounced by all speakers. And if *k*-dropping is not “lazy”, then *h*-dropping cannot be lazy either’ (ibid.: 131). Aitchison (1996: 19) comments on reactions to her series of Reith lectures on language that were

[1] In this paper Cantonese pronunciation is transcribed in IPA. Tones are marked by a numeral (1-6), the numeral is in accordance with the tone-marking system suggested by the Linguistic Society of Hong Kong.

broadcast by the BBC in Britain. She quotes a response she received by letter: 'The speech patterns you endorse are the direct result of downright bone idleness in the speech of the cockneys'. In response, Aitchison uses basic phonetics to point out that 'the most noticeable cockney speech feature, the glottal stop, requires considerable muscular tension, and could not be due to laziness' (ibid.: 19).

The case of Received Pronunciation (RP) vs. Cockney has economic and social-class underpinnings. RP is considered a prestige form as it is the variety that has the highest value in the standard linguistic market in Britain. The use of marked RP features or Cockney features, then, become indexical to the speakers and their respective social and economic status. The indexicality of the prestigious form is further associated with other culturally defined values such as aesthetics and excellency. A comparable but different case in the US about language standard and standardization is discussed by Silverstein (1996), in which political economy is linked with folk ideas about language which has a consequence on how personhood and nation are constituted in America. The two places, Britain and America, have a few commonalities. First, both societies have a respective single variety of English that is more preferred than other regional and social dialects of English. Second, in both societies English is more preferred than other languages.

The Hong Kong case is different because of a different societal preference for language use. To understand that it is first necessary to understand the language situation in Hong Kong. Each of the three major languages: Cantonese, English and Putonghua, carries different political, economic, social and cultural values locally. Cantonese is spoken by 96% of the 6.7 million population in Hong Kong (2001 census). It is the usual language used by 89% of the population and a carrier for cultural and social identification to Hong Kongness. Speaking the Hong Kong variety of Cantonese, i.e. Cantonese with a Hong Kong accent and a Hong Kong lexicon, signifies one's status as a local person in contrast to new comers to the city who either do not speak Cantonese or do not speak with a local accent and lexicon. English is spoken by 43% of the population, but only 3% of the population use it as their usual language. The ability to use English is economically and socially valued in Hong Kong, it is a key for education and career advancement. But it is socially undesirable to use English inappropriately outside of its economically pragmatic contexts. A similar case happens to Putonghua which is spoken by 34% of the population but less than 1% use it as their usual language. Because of its association with China, Putonghua has a economically pragmatic function (for people who have a business connection with China) and serves as a sign for cultural affiliation with China. There is a general

societal preference for trilingualism in Hong Kong. An ideal Hong Kong trilingual is a person who speaks Cantonese with a local accent and inserts only an appropriate amount of English in his/her Cantonese. He/she knows English and Putonghua but speaks them only in occasions where necessary, such as for school and work purposes. This is different from the 'monoglot' conception of the standard in the US (and similarly in UK, too).

Research on phonological variation in the west is interpreted in terms of socio-economic class distinction (e.g. Labov's New York studies on /r/ and /th) while there is no indication that the phonological variation in Hong Kong has to do with socio-economic class at all. Sociolinguistic studies on phonological variation in Hong Kong (Yeung 1980, Bauer 1982, Pan 1982, Bourgerie 1990) found a similar trend as Labov's New York studies in which a high percentage of the dictionary forms are found in careful speech and wordlist, settings in which the speakers pay more attention to speech. They found no significant correlation between the linguistic variables and socio-economic class. Only gender and age show a significance in the correlations: males and the younger generation tend to use more of the 'lazy' variants than the females and the old (in all studies), the latter also tend to hypercorrect more when asked to read a word list (Pan 1982). To understand the Hong Kong case, however, there are more to be done than finding correlations between pre-dichotomized linguistic and social variables. Since correlations 'are not explanation and do not identify causes' (Irvine, 2001: 22). One of the keys for identifying the causes and processes by which these linguistic features acquire social values is by examining the discursive practice and actions done by various language 'authorities' such as academic scholars, education officials and media broadcasters which I will discuss in Section 4.

'Lazy pronunciation' which works with a set of finite initial and final consonants is one of many linguistic variations that are exhibited in Hong Kong language use. It functions differently from other variations such as those of vowel quality, tone, lexicon and syntax in Cantonese, and the extend to which English is used along with Cantonese in a conversation. These other variations define whether one is a local Hong Kong person or not, but the variation of 'lazy' vs. 'non-lazy' pronunciation do not have such indication. For example, speakers who use different vowel, tone and lexicon systems from Hong Kong Cantonese are typically perceived as mainland Chinese immigrants to Hong Kong and their speech is socially stigmatized. Speakers who use more English than socially acceptable are associated with people who once migrated to English-speaking countries. Both of the groups are at the social margins and not of the mainstream or the prototypical group. Those linguistic variants are much more salient in the social categorization in

Hong Kong, while 'lazy pronunciation' variation not. Much of the discussion about 'lazy pronunciation' have a target audience of those who are considered Hong Kong people. If 'lazy pronunciation' is not salient for differentiating a Hong Kong person from an outsider or new comer, then what is the significance of the social debate surrounding it?

The debate about 'lazy pronunciation' can be understood as a process of standardization of Cantonese. In particular, of setting up a uniform way of pronouncing Cantonese for Hong Kong people by attributing the perceived deviants to social values such as 'laziness' and 'incorrectness'. These values are closely related to culturally defined aesthetics and excellency in language. Standardization of a language usually goes hand-in-hand with nationalism in other parts of the world. Yet the political status of Hong Kong as an ex-colony and now a city of China restrict the development of Cantonese to become a language. I am interested to explore the following questions. When nationhood is not feasible, what sort of community wide identity is to be constituted to make Hong Kong differentiated from other places in China and in Asia? And how do ideologies about language play a role? More specifically, what do folk beliefs about language and about Cantonese in particular mean to Hong Kong people from which/whose perspectives? When political economy is the main underpinning of the standard linguistic markets in western countries, what are the linguistic markets like in Hong Kong?

The study of 'lazy pronunciation' in Cantonese might shed lights on issues of language use and language attitudes in Hong Kong which has a bearing to how language ideologies play a role in the local context. This paper addresses discursive practice and actions associated with correct Cantonese pronunciation and Cantonese standardization in general. In the next section I will examine the features that characterize 'lazy pronunciation' and another type of variation that is frequently mentioned in local discourse but was ignored in previous sociolinguistic studies, the 'incorrect reading pronunciation'. Because some native speakers of Cantonese do not perceive a difference in the variants, I am also interested in exploring aspects of native awareness on 'lazy pronunciation' by thinking of Silverstein's (1981) model on limits of native awareness in Section 3. In section 4, I will describe the actions done by various language 'authorities' and associated public debates on 'lazy pronunciation' and 'incorrect reading pronunciation' which can be understood as processes for standardizing Cantonese.

2. The phonological variation

In the public discussion I found in newspapers, television, radio, academic and educational publications about complains on Cantonese pronunciation there are two types of 'wrong pronunciation' involved. The 'lazy pronunciation' and the 'incorrect reading pronunciation'. They are two distinct types in terms of the phonological features involved and in terms of how Cantonese speakers describe them. The first type of variation is restricted to eight pairs of consonant sounds. Speakers can usually site examples of 'words having the same sound', indicating their awareness that this type of variation is of a segment of a syllable but not the entire 'word'. The second type only refers to pronunciation of individual Chinese characters and there is no phonological pattern that can be generalized from the variants. In both cases, the 'correct' variants refer to dictionary prescription, while the 'lazy' or 'incorrect reading' variants are colloquial forms. Not all Cantonese dictionaries and syllabaries suggest the same pronunciation for the same lexical item. But in general dictionary suggestions are very consistent for the first type of variation, however, there are some cases in which different dictionaries prescribe different pronunciations for the second type of variation.

As I mentioned earlier, these two types of variation are not features Hong Kong people use for distinguishing a Hong Kong person from a non-Hong Kong person. As far as I am aware, speakers who are being criticized of using 'lazy pronunciation' or 'incorrect reading pronunciation' are local Hong Kong people. What usually Hong Kong people perceive as non-Hong Kong Cantonese are characterized by a difference in vowel quality and/or tones. In the case of Guangzhou Cantonese which is phonologically almost identical to Hong Kong Cantonese, the difference can still be told by a different lexicon.

2.1 The first type of variation – 'lazy' vs. 'non-lazy'

The first type is a patterned variation of which the non-dictionary variant, or the colloquial form, is typically referred to as 'lazy pronunciation'. It is restricted to eight pairs of syllable-initial and final consonants and does not involve variation of tones and vowels. Some of the variation is more commonly found among Hong Kong speakers than others, for example, the [l-] variant in the [n-/l-] pair is very common to an extend that it is less stigmatised as 'lazy' when compare to other variants such as using [□] in the [□-/□-] pair. An individual speaker who is said of using 'lazy pronunciation' does not necessary use all of the 'lazy' variants of all eight pairs, and it is not

uncommon to find speakers using a 'lazy' variant of a pair only some of the time. The following table shows a summary of the eight pairs of variation discussed by Ho (1991), a local prescriptivist working against 'lazy pronunciation' and 'incorrect reading pronunciation'. The first pair, [□-] and [□-] (or zero initial) occurs in complementary distribution in traditional dictionary. [□-]occurs only with words in low tones (tones 4-6) while [□-] occurs in high tones (tones 1-3). The rest of the variation pairs from 2 to 8 occurs in overlapping distribution and are phonetically unconditioned.

Table 1 . 'Dictionary pronunciation'vs. 'lazy pronunciation'

Consonant variants	Chinese characters and their meanings	Dictionary pronunciation	'lazy pronunciation' (and possible homophone derived)
Syllable-initial consonants			
1. □- and □-/∅-	teeth	□a:4	□a:4
	love	□□i3	□□i3
2. n- and l-	male	na:m4	la:m4 (blue)
3. k^{w}- and k-	country	k^{w}□k□3	k□k□3 (a horn)
4. k^{wh}- and k^{h}-	to expand	k^{wh}□k□3	k^{h}□k□3 (be certain)
5. k^{h}- and h-	he/she/it	k^{h}□i5	h□i5
6. □ and m	surname Ng	□4	m4 (no/not)
Syllable-final consonants			
7. -□ and –n	friend	p^{h}a□4	p^{h}an4 (poor)
8. -k□ and -t□	a horn	k□k□3	k□t□3 (to cut)

2.2 The second type of variation – 'incorrect' vs. 'correct' reading pronunciation

The second type of variation has no particular phonological pattern, the variants of a single character could be a difference of tones, of any part of the syllable, or simply two or more totally different pronunciations with a combination of segmental sounds and tones. Whether or not a speaker use the dictionary variant or the colloquial variant has nothing to do with the phonological system of an individual speaker but rather of how the pronunciation of a particular character is learned. For example, the two variants of the character for 'alcoholic' are [jy:4] and [h□i3], two completely different pronunciations that do not resemble each other. Unlike the first type of variation in which there are only two variants for each variable, in the second type of variation sometimes a single character can have two or more different pronunciations. For instance, the pronunciation variants of the character 'rapids' are [t□syn2], [t^{h}yn1] and [t^{h}□n1]. Unlike the first type of variation in which almost all Cantonese dictionary has a uniform

prescription, some of the characters involved in the second type of variation do not have a single 'correct' pronunciation in all dictionaries. In academic journals and in the newspapers sometimes there are scholars or readers debating with each other which pronunciation is *the* 'correct' one for a specific character, and usually no consensus were reached in these debates because different people have different ideas about 'correct reading pronunciation'.

3. Native awareness to the phonological variation

Discursive practice about 'correctness' of Cantonese pronunciation indicates a native awareness of the pragmatic dimension of language use. Silverstein suggests that native awareness 'is universally bounded by certain characteristics of the form and contextually-dependent function of the pragmatic markers in speech' (1981: 2). He discusses five dimensions of forms and functions in speech which are significant for understanding 'the properties of ideologies and ethnotheories that seem to guide participants in social systems' (ibid: 21). Silverstein's model focus on the nature of forms and functions of a language, while in the Hong Kong case when there are differences in terms of individual native speakers' use and perception of the forms, the situation becomes more complex. 'Continuous segmentability' is of particular relevance here in assessing native Cantonese speaker's susceptibility to conscious comment about language.

'Continuous segmentability' in Silverstein's term refers to 'the property of those pragmatic signals that can be identified as continuous stretches of actual speech, segmentable as overt meaningful units of the utterances in which they occur' (1981: 6). Cantonese is a logographic and non-syllabic language. Native speaker perceive a character (a word) as the smallest meaningful unit that cannot be further segmented. They are therefore less susceptible to think about Cantonese characters in terms of its composite phoneme segments in a CVC structure. It is habitually less common for a Cantonese speaker who has no contact with syllabic and alphabetic languages to be aware that characters can be organized in terms of which phonemes they share in which syllabic position. Even for Cantonese speakers who also speak English, an alphabetic language, it is still uncommon for them to transfer their linguistic knowledge of a second language to their first language unless they are given specific training. The awareness of the first type of Cantonese phonological variation, i.e. 'lazy pronunciation', requires an awareness against one's native habitual conception of language as the speaker has to think in terms of the internal structure of a character (i.e. a CVC syllable structure). Because of this, the first type of variation is less susceptible to native awareness than the second type which works on a word (character)

level instead of a phonemic level. Many Cantonese speakers heard of the term 'lazy pronunciation' and can cite one or two characters to illustrate it, but few people can describe the variants systematically and in phonemic terms unless they were specifically taught.

Silverstein's paper focuses on aspects and elements of language which are subject to different degree of native awareness. The Hong Kong case provide a site to further explore variation among individuals in a linguistic community. Not all Cantonese speakers use 'lazy pronunciation' though in my experience very few people can totally avoid using 'lazy' variants. Cantonese has a total of 19 consonant phonemes and the frequency of encountering the eight pairs of consonants are very high. This is very different from the second type of variation in which the variation only pertains to individual characters instead of a phoneme. Because of that, the second type of variation is subject to higher native awareness than the first type.

Among speakers who use the 'lazy' variants, however, some do not perceive a phonetic and phonemic difference between variants of a single pair, even when presented with a minimal pair. Some of the 'lazy' variants become homophones to other words (as shown in the last column of Table 1), so for a speaker who cannot perceive a difference between the variants, those consonant pairs are not phonemically distinct in this person's phonological system. If this person's speech production is consistently of using the 'lazy' variants, it is reasonable to further assume that the two variants of each consonant pair is merged in this speaker's sound system. For instance, if a speaker cannot perceive the difference between the pair [n-] and [l-], these two sounds are not phonemically distinct in his/her phonology. And if this speaker consistently uses [l-] only, it is assumed that the [n-] and [l-] sounds which are distinct phonemes for other speakers, is perceived as one phoneme in this particular speaker's phonology as the two are merged into [l-]. These individuals who do not perceive a phonetic difference between two variants of a pair are subject to lower awareness to metapragmatic comments about 'lazy pronunciation' unless they are told and trained otherwise.

According to Silverstein, native awareness of a particular aspect of language depends greatly on the nature of the linguistic features, such as whether the linguistic feature is segmentable, having an unavoidable referentiality, being metapragmatic transparent, etc. In a linguistic community like Hong Kong where some speakers have a higher native awareness to the linguistic features in question while some do not, it is interesting to see how metapragmatic comments, or folk beliefs about these features spread in the community, and to what extend these comments/beliefs have an

effect on how individuals use language. Previous studies on this topic showed that native Cantonese speakers, who use both the lazy variants and the non-lazy ones, are aware of the social stigmatism associated with 'lazy pronunciation' and therefore have a lower percentage of using the stigmatized form in careful speech. For speakers who cannot perceive the distinction between a 'lazy' and a 'non-lazy' variants and therefore subject to a low level of native awareness, however, it is difficult or perhaps impossible for them to consciously modify their speech.

The metapragmatic comments about 'lazy pronunciation' is about a social preference for one way of speaking over another. It is about how prescriptivists or language authorities/experts justified their preferences by ideologies about language they believe in. For sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists, it is important to examine what these ideologies do in the community, how they are spread, and what consequences they bring about in the community and to individual speakers of the language. The existence and spread of prescriptive ideologies about language is an action that could bring about a change in native speakers' awareness level that has a consequence on speakers' use and discussion of language. The next section will further explore the prescriptive beliefs about correct Cantonese pronunciation that are wide-spread in the community. I am interested in finding out who/what are the language authorities/experts generally perceived in the community? What do these authorities believe in? What have they done to spread their believes and what are the consequences in the community?

4. Cantonese language 'authorities' and standardization

Discussion about correct Cantonese pronunciation occurs in newspapers, radio, television and online discussion from time to time. In between 1994 and 1996, a media campaign was launched to teach 'correct Cantonese pronunciation' to the Hong Kong public. The campaign initiator is Richard Ho, a university professor of classical Chinese literature, a Justice of Peace and an occasional television broadcaster. Ho's campaign was the first of its kind as it was the first time Cantonese pronunciation was systematically taught on the public media. Apart from Ho who participated in the media, academic and educational debates about correct Cantonese pronunciation, there are other language authorities doing different things and advocating different ideas about Cantonese pronunciation in Hong Kong. In this section I will discuss what language prescriptions are given by various language authorities and how those prescriptions and the ideologies behind can be explained by exploring the positions and perspectives of these authorities. In general there are three sectors where I can locate sources for language prescription:

the education sector, the academic sector and the media sector. Apart form Ho's media campaign, there are also prescriptive works on Cantonese pronunciation done by the Education Department of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Institute of Education, an academic organization: the Committee for Standardizing Cantonese Pronunciation, and various academic and educational publications by different scholars and educators. Some of these authorities, like Ho, took a pro-ancient lobby on issues of correct pronunciation for social and cultural reasons; some took a pro-modern lobby in which colloquial pronunciation, which is said to be the modern social conversation, is more preferred than dictionary prescriptions; there are also some who want to 'lead' Cantonese pronunciation towards Putonghua for a political reason. As Ho's advocation, of restoring the standard pronunciation of the Tang dynasty (1000 A.D.), has a long scholarly tradition and a local bearing on the development of a local language perspective in Hong Kong, I will discuss his campaign and ideas at the latter part of this section. I will first start from two institutional authorities of Cantonese, the Education authorities of the Hong Kong government, and the half-academic, half-official body of *the Committee for Standardizing Cantonese Pronunciation*.

4.1 The Education authorities

The Education Department of Hong Kong published three syllabi for teaching Chinese language in Hong Kong schools in 1978, 1990 and 1995 respectively. The first two syllabi have clear instruction for teaching Cantonese pronunciation. In the 1978 Chinese syllabus for secondary schools, the Curriculum Development Committee[2] suggests two principles for schoolteachers to follow in the case of variation in reading pronunciation (the Curriculum Development Committee: 1978). First, when there is variation between ancient and modern pronunciations, the committee suggests not using the ancient ones and states that the so called ancient pronunciation is scholarly speculation but not 'facts' (ibid.: 67). Second, when there is more than one pronunciation of the same character, the committee suggests adopting the one which is endorsed by the social convention and appears in dictionaries/syllabaries (ibid.: 68). As for the problem of 'lazy pronunciation', the committee lists four pairs of variations ([n] and [l], [□] and zero, [k^w] and [k], [k^{hw}] and [k^h]), and suggested schoolteachers to follow dictionary prescription instead of

[2] The Curriculum Development Committee members included school masters, schoolteachers, university lectures, teacher training school lectures, inspectors of the Education Department and other relevant officials (1978 syllabus: preface). The committee was grouped under the Curriculum Development Council, which was appointed by the governor to advise the government on curriculum matters, when the 1990 syllabus was published (Hong Kong 1995: 153).

the colloquial forms (ibid: Appendix III). The 1990 syllabus has a summary of the 1978 prescription, but the 1995 syllabus does not address issue of pronunciation in a specific way.

Another educational authority is the Hong Kong Institute of Language in Education[3] (HKILE), a teacher-training institution that provides instructions and training for Cantonese pronunciation teaching at schools. In April 1987, the HKILE conducted 'an inquiry into the Cantonese pronunciation of commonly used Chinese characters' by consulting seven commonly used Cantonese dictionaries and syllabaries in Hong Kong. In 1990 the HKILE published *A list of commonly used Chinese characters with standardized pronunciation in Cantonese*, the list includes 4761 characters with suggested pronunciation. This word list mainly deal with reading pronunciation but characters involved in the 'lazy pronunciation' variation are given a dictionary from suggestion instead of a colloquial one.

In short, both the Education Department and the HKILE provide some guidelines on reading pronunciation variation and in the 1978 and 1990 syllabi, there are clear prescriptions against 'lazy pronunciation'. All of the teacher-training institutes in Hong Kong provide Cantonese pronunciation training for potential or current Chinese Language teachers. And all school teachers of Chinese language were given the syllabi and the wordlist. However, whether correct Cantonese pronunciation is included in the teaching content, and which pronunciation the schoolteacher actually taught, depends on individual schoolteacher's discretion and decision.

The significance of these publications and instructions from the Education authorities is that these prescription in Cantonese pronunciation teaching, apart from being a form of codification, also reinforces a unique conception of 'Chinese language' in Hong Kong. The work done by these Education authorities come from a Hong Kong perspective and address a unique Hong Kong language situation. Cantonese is considered a dialect in China and thus prohibited from being used as a medium of instruction in mainland China. Even in Cantonese speaking Guangzhou (Canton), there are only guidelines and instructions for the teaching of Putonghua but not Cantonese at schools. The existence of these Hong Kong government-related publications and teacher-training courses give Cantonese a much higher status in Hong Kong than in China. It also encourages a space for the development of a Hong Kong style Chinese language, of using Standard Written Chinese with Cantonese pronunciation. This mismatch of the written and

[3] In 1994, the Institute of Language in Education was amalgamated with four teacher training institutes to form the Hong Kong Institute of Education (Government Printer, 1995: 167).

spoken versions of a conceptually one entity 'Chinese' is well accepted by the Hong Kong public. In 1997 when the Education Department enforced a new policy of 'mother tongue education' in which one fourth of the 400 public secondary schools in Hong Kong are allowed to English as a medium of instruction while the rest must use the 'mother tongue' Chinese, there were questions from the academic of what 'Chinese' the government refers to as there were speculations about whether the so-called 'mother-tongue' education policy is a stepping stone towards using Putonghua as the medium of instruction at schools. The Education Department later clarified their principles of training Hong Kong students to be trilingual in spoken Cantonese, English and Putonghua, and biliterate in written English and Standard Written Chinese, and that Cantonese will continue to be the main medium of instruction at school while Putonghua is taught as a subject.

4.2 The Committee for Standardizing Cantonese Pronunciation

The Committee for Standardizing Cantonese Pronunciation was set up in 1990 with the aim of producing *A standard Cantonese pronouncing dictionary*, which was published in 1999. Members of the committee include scholars from China, Hong Kong and Macau thought the Chinese members also include two government officials, the Assistant Head of the Guangdong Television Department and the Assistant Head of the Guangdong Education Department. The committee's work involves the study of thirty thousand Chinese characters. Of those thirty thousand, twenty-six thousand are characters taken from *Guangyun*, while others are characters for location names, family names, new terms brought by various reasons. (Wai, 1990: 9). The ideal of the committee is to generate a 'correct reading pronunciation by standardizing Cantonese' (Zhan, 1990: 9). The committee laid out a set of 'principles of standardization' which are used in deciding on 'correct pronunciation', the two major principles are (i) 'to take reference to the Principles of Modern Chinese Common Language Standardization and combine the reality of the patterns of sound development'; and (ii) 'to consider the principles of 'following the present pronunciation' and 'following the public' so as to decide a reasonable pronunciation' (Chang, 1993: 11). From the principles laid out it seems that the committee was attempting to please everyone, but just as the never-ending and never-concluding debates among scholars and in the public media about correct Cantonese pronunciation, the committee had a hard time coming up with a common consensus and took seven years longer than expected to publish a dictionary. One of the principles of the committee also brought about controversy among committee members as well as scholars outside of the committee because of its heavily political

underpinning to suggest to 'lead Cantonese towards the common language', i.e. Putonghua. The idea of leading Cantonese towards Putonghua may not be simply a political consideration, there is also a metaphor of 'motherland' and a drive for cultural unification involved as shown in the following quote in a book called *Incorrect reading, writing and using of Chinese* written by a Hong Kong secondary school teacher:

> [When deciding which pronunciation is correct, only] the social convention of the whole country is acceptable. Because once it was a convention of the whole country, it became the orthodox. The social convention of Hong Kong is not acceptable, because if Hong Kong people write and pronounce characters in a messy way, it would eventually develop into a special Hong Kong language, which departs from the mother language, and it would be a big crisis of Chinese culture (Yeung, 1984: preface, my translation).

Such idea about a unification of a single Chinese language and culture with reference to Cantonese in Hong Kong, as far as I am aware, occurs only after the 1980's. A time coincide with the negotiation and decision[4] of the return of Hong Kong sovereignty to China. It can be understood as one of the efforts people in China and Hong Kong did in the re-negotiation of the status of Hong Kong language, culture and identity in the political re-unification. The two decades before the Hand-over in 1997 see a sudden massive amount of publications and media attention on every aspects of Hong Kong in Hong Kong as well as in China. With reference to Cantonese language studies, it was also a time of a sudden increase in scholarly work and conferences on Cantonese in mainland China and Hong Kong. There were numerous publications of Cantonese dictionaries and syllabaries, books on etymologies of Cantonese words and related cultural history, Cantonese textbooks for teaching Mandarin speakers, and linguistic works under a western linguistic tradition.

The work of the committee came in the same politically sensitive period but it is confined to among academics. The published dictionary does not seem to circulate outside of a small group of Cantonese language scholars, and even among these scholars it was just one of many currently

[4] The negotiation process started when Sir Murray MacLehose, governor of Hong Kong, broached the subject of Hong Kong's future in he visit to Beijing in 1979. In 1982 the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher visited Beijing, the Chinese government made it clear it intended to regain sovereignty of Hong Kong. Then there came a two-year long official negotiation between the British government and the P.R.C. government, and with the publication of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984, it was announced that Hong Kong was definitely going to be 'handed over' to China in 1997.

available references on Cantonese. The committee is the first academy that draws upon scholars from three places: China, Hong Kong and Macau. Though among the active scholars who debated a lot about Cantonese pronunciation in education, academic and the public media, very few participated in the committee for various reasons. For example, Richard Ho, a key figure in the correct Cantonese debates in Hong Kong, debated strongly against the idea to follow Putonghua pronunciation when setting up a standard pronunciation for Cantonese. He considers Putonghua and Cantonese as two separate languages and therefore should be treated separately. Ho was not a member of the committee and instead published his own Cantonese dictionary in 1999 which follows closely a *Guangyun* tradition, a rhyme book tradition I will discuss in 4.3.

4.3 Ho's media campaign and his pro-ancient advocation

Richard Ho is a key figure in the development of the teaching of Correct Cantonese in Hong Kong and many of his beliefs are shared by other educators, scholars and academics. Therefore it is worth noting his works and advocation about Cantonese in more details. The media campaign that Ho launched in between 1994 and 1996 included two television and radio series. The first television series, 'Celebrities unite to promote correct pronunciation' include 20 five-minute episodes. In this series Ho, who was addressed as 'Dr. Ho', a scientist dressed in white coat and worked in his laboratory of 'correct pronunciation', invited celebrities to play a little drama in each episode and then to test their Cantonese pronunciation in Ho's laboratory. At the end of each episode Ho presented a badge to the guest celebrity who past the pronunciation test, and announced that he/she was then a missioner of 'correct Cantonese pronunciation'. The second television series, 'Marvelous detective of correct reading pronunciation', consists of five 30-minute episodes. Ho played a university professor who got frustrated by the 'lazy pronunciation' of his students and changed to be a detective under the encouragement of an old friend. He had two assistants who were very bad at Cantonese pronunciation at the beginning of the series, and Ho was determined to train them to be both good detectives and speakers of correct Cantonese. Each of the episode is a detective story mixed with cues and practices for correct reading pronunciation and an introduction to fanqie (a system I will discuss two paragraphs from here). Both of the television series were produced by Radio Television Hong Kong, a government owned broadcasting corporation which has exclusive use of some prime time slots in two local commercial television stations, TVB (Television Broadcasting Ltd.) and ATV (Asia Television Ltd.). The two series were broadcast at prime time weekdays and re-broadcast at prime time weekends. The average viewer number for the first series when broadcast the first time on TVB

in 1994 was between 9.4 to 11.2, i.e. about 500, 000 to 600, 000 viewers (Ho, 1995: 125), which was almost one tenth of the population in Hong Kong. Two radio series were also broadcast at the same time as the television series. The first one 'Correct Cantonese pronunciation' include 20 one-minute episodes and the second one 'The test of correct reading pronunciation of Cantonese' include 20 three-minute episodes. Both series were broadcast three times a day from Monday to Friday in RTHK channel 1, channel 2 and channel 5.

Apart from the media campaign, Ho had been actively involved in various ways for promoting correct Cantonese pronunciation: he published five books (1987, 1989a, 1989b, 1995, 1996), one dictionary (1999) and numerous academic and newspaper articles describing and debating for correct pronunciation. He conducted teacher-training workshops and broadcaster-training workshops, taught undergraduate courses in the Chinese Departments at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the University of Hong Kong on correct Cantonese pronunciation. In April 1995 he organized an academic conference for educators including education officials, schoolteachers and school principals, directors and professors at teacher-training institutes to discuss the teaching of correct Cantonese pronunciation under the new school syllabus. Ho has a significant influence on the development of Cantonese pronunciation teaching and awareness in education, academic and the media. Though his advocation, of restoring the pronunciation standard of a syllabary tradition of 600 A.D., was not totally supported by other educators, academics and media broadcasters.

Through his media programs, publications and other activities, Ho puts forward a number of arguments for correct Cantonese pronunciation. One of his major arguments is his belief of the perfect pronunciation of the past. Ho is not the first one to put forward such argument, there is a long tradition of Chinese scholarship on the phonological and cultural connection between Middle Chinese and modern Cantonese, but he is the first one who promoted it to the public. Ho considers *Guangyun*, a rhyme book published in 1008 A.D. in Sung dynasty, which has an earlier editions *Tangyun* 732 A.D. in Tang Dynasty and *Qieyun* 601 A.D. in Sui Dynasty, as *the* 'correct' model of Cantonese pronunciation. Ho describes *Guangyun* as an 'ancient timepiece' which represents the pronunciation of Middle Chinese. Ho believes that *Guangyun* represents the 'real social convention recognized officially' (Ho and Bou, 1989: 3), and 'Cantonese pronunciation is descended from *Guangyun*' (ibid.: 4). Ho said in his television program that it is 'the collapse of the system', presumably the perfect system of the past, that caused many young people not knowing how to pronounce Cantonese correctly. He mentioned that Cantonese is in a state of

'collapse' (Ho, 1991 vol.2: 18) and 'confusion' (ibid. vol.1: preface), indicating that Cantonese pronunciation had declined from a former state of perfection.

Apart from whether it is possible and reasonable at all to restore an ancient pronunciation, there are two inherent problems of Ho's *Guangyun* argument. First, *Guangyun* is a schematic representation of a standardized speech of 1008 A.D., and has no indication of being a record of speech sounds of the general public at that time. Second, *Guangyun* uses *fanqie*, a system of indicating the pronunciation of one character by means of another two characters[5], the two characters used for sound indication are from a finite sets of characters. Through time the characters used for indicating pronunciation also underwent sound change. So when they are used to indicate pronunciation of another character in modern Cantonese, in many occasions it is difficult to trace the actual pronunciation of the ancient time. However, because the phonological change from Middle Chinese to modern Cantonese is more related than from Middle Chinese to Modern Mandarin. For example, modern Mandarin lost all [p], [t], [k] syllable finals, and it maintains four tones while Cantonese kept six to seven tones (depends on which variety of Cantonese) from Middle Chinese. Many poems written in the Tang and Sung dynasties, particularly 'modern-style poetry' (modern in comparison to older classics before Tang dynasty), a kind of poetry that emerged in the Tang dynasty (618-907 A.D.) which has a very strict system of metre for tones and pronunciation, rhyme when recited in Cantonese but not in Mandarin. The historical reason for this Middle Chinese-Cantonese connection is that during the period between Sui to Tang dynasties (around 600 to 1000 A.D.) there were massive migrations of ethnic Han Chinese from Northern part of China near the Yellow River area, the origin of ethnic Han Chinese, to South of Zhangjiang River. The conquest and integration of the South marks the beginning of a Southern Chinese culture and identity. When the North underwent drastic language and social changes because of political instabilities, of frequent change of regimes and constant invasions from North of China, the South with more fertile land and natural resources

[5] A typical layout of *fanqie* is by means of two characters followed by the word *qie* (in Mandarin pinyin), or tsit (in Cantonese), such as dak1 hung4 tsit3. The method of using *fanqie*, according to Ho (1995) can be summarised in a poem-like saying'Take the initial of the first character, and the rhyme of the second character; the first character decides upper and lower level tone, the second character decides even and oblique tones' (Tone 1 and 4 are even, the rest are oblique). In the example dak1 hung4 tsit3, the initial of the first character dak1 is *d*, the rhyme of the second character hung4 is *ung*, so the combination of first and second character is *dung*. The first character is at an upper level tone, the second character is in even tone, so the combination is an upper even tone (i.e. tone 1), so the pronunciation indicated is *dung1*, which can be written with the character 'East'.

was given a long period of time for economic, social and cultural development. Cantonese, the language developed from Middle Chinese, has been a symbol for Southern Chinese culture.

The idea that Cantonese preserves features of Middle Chinese is also related to the aesthetics of language use. Cantonese is said to be melodic because of a larger inventory of tones, and the preservation of [p], [t], [k] unreleased final consonants provides a good source for tempo control in poem recite. The strict stylistic constraints of ancient poetry can only be fully realized in Cantonese. 'Lazy pronunciation', which deviates from the orthodox of Middle Chinese phonology, is therefore considered ugly and uncomfortable to listen to. Ho comments 'a lot of adults in their thirties and forties still pronounce *k□i5* as *h□i5*, they sound like babies who just begin to learn the language and it is extremely uncomfortable to listen to' (Ho, 1991 vol. 2: 51). He further said in his first television series that 'the main reason [of incorrect pronunciation of finals] is that people speak too quickly without tempo', i.e. a violation of the beauty of tempo control granted in Cantonese phonology.

4.4 The background to a unique Hong Kong perspective to language

The argument and belief that Cantonese preserves more features of older Chinese than Mandarin necessarily elevate the status of Cantonese above the national language. This rhetoric is much stronger in Hong Kong than in China because of a different historical development of Cantonese in Hong Kong. The national language policy in China since 1949 establish Putonghua as the national language, Cantonese only has a status of a dialect in China and is forbidden to be used as a medium of instruction at schools. I have observed that mainland Chinese scholars who work on Cantonese constantly have to make disclaimer for their work, stating in book prefaces or at the beginning of their conference presentations that their research on Cantonese would not go against the national language policy (4th International conference on the Yue dialect held in Guangzhou, China in 1995). Cantonese in China is very much restricted in its functions and status because of the national language policy after 1949.

However, Cantonese flourishes in Hong Kong and has gained a status much higher than in China. Along with English, it is a major medium of instruction in local schools, it is the preferred language among friends and it signifies one's identity as a Hong Kong person. There is a historical reason for such development of Cantonese in Hong Kong. Hong Kong being a British colony at the boarder of China has always been closely influenced by changes in China. During

late 19th century and early 20th century, Hong Kong was a popular destination for intellectuals and reformers who wanted to flee from political persecutions of the late Qing government, along with these intellectuals also came with new ideas of the modern language reform which later developed into the May Forth Language movement in the 1920's after the downfall of the Qing government in 1911. One of the key ideas of this language movement was to standardize a colloquial form of Mandarin. The Beijing variety was selected to be developed into a standard, replacing classical Chinese which was a former written standard with no spoken form. On the other hand, Many intellectuals from Southern China who failed in the imperial exams also found their way to set up schools in Hong Kong. Early schools in Hong Kong at the turn of the century were instructed in Cantonese, and the school texts for teaching Chinese language contain a mixture of Standard Written Chinese, Classical Chinese and Cantonese. Traditional ways of teaching involve a lot of reciting after the teacher and correct Cantonese pronunciation was a heavy emphasis. An elder radio broadcaster, Mr. Chung, told me that when he studied in a reputable traditional school in the 1930's in Hong Kong, the school teacher made sure that the students pronounced each character in a text correctly. Students learned to look up dictionaries for correct pronunciation and those who pronounced a character wrong repeatedly would be physically punished.

When Standard Written Chinese was further developed in China, the Hong Kong intellectuals followed the trend by avoiding the use of Cantonese in written texts at schools and in published media. School texts for teaching Chinese language came from a selection of Classical Chinese texts and texts written in modern Standard Written Chinese before 1949. Cantonese is maintained as the medium of instruction for teaching Chinese language. After 1949, when China promoted the new national language policy for using Putonghua and later the using of simplified characters in writing, Hong Kong did not follow. One speculation is that it is a result of a deliberate non-intervention policy of the Colonial government to keep a distance between China (as well as Taiwan which also uses Putonghua) and the colony. This historical development established a unique Hong Kong definition for 'Chinese language' as taught in local schools and understood in the public discourse. When Hong Kong people refer to 'Chinese language', they are referring to a 'language' consists of Cantonese phonology but the lexicon and grammar of Mandarin/Standard Written Chinese. It is a 'language' in contrast to English, and yet different from Mandarin Chinese. The written form of this 'language', i.e. Standard Written Chinese, has a sense of the modern-ness of the 1920's language movement in the new China of the past (in contrast to the older Qing dynasty China before 1911), but not the backwardness and communist of China after

1949. The spoken form of it, i.e. spoken Cantonese, carries a cultural heritage of Southern Chineseness that is distinctive from Northern culture and language. Cantonese in Hong Kong has almost the same accent as Cantonese in Guangzhou, China. The major difference between the two varieties is that some speakers of Guangzhou Cantonese still maintain seven tones while most Hong Kong Cantonese speakers have the high-level and high-falling tones merged. The tempo and intonation might be different, too. But in recent years these differences may not be salient and observable anymore as the younger generation in Guangzhou and Hong Kong sound more alike each other both in terms of their phonological system but also because Guangzhou youth consider using Hong Kong lexical items as a trendy style. The attention paid to Cantonese pronunciation is a Hong Kong tradition brought in by teachers and intellectuals from Southern China. For linguists, such an entity which consists of two different linguistic systems is hard to be imagined as one language, but for Hong Kong people who grew up studying it at school as one entity, and using it as one entity in the public discourse, such structural mismatch is below the level of conscious awareness. When Hong Kong people refer to Cantonese, it is natural for them to consider it as only a spoken vernacular but not a linguistic system with both written and spoken form. Folk linguistic beliefs often claim that Cantonese has no grammar, it's colloquial form vulgar and not good enough to be written. Written Cantonese, therefore, is strictly prohibited to be used and taught at schools although almost all school children learn it from their peers and from popular comic books, magazines and newspapers.

5. Understanding the 'lazy pronunciation' debate in the Hong Kong context

Cantonese is undergoing a process of standardization though most of the standardization processes focus on spoken but not written Cantonese because of the convention and conception of 'Chinese language' in Hong Kong. Haugen (1966) describes standardization as a process which involves the selection, codification, acceptance and elaboration of a linguistic norm. The socially selected and accepted linguistic norm as a standard in Hong Kong is 'Chinese language', Cantonese is only half of it. The standardization process of Cantonese is domed to be partial because of this single conception of language which consists of two separate linguistic systems (Cantonese and Standard Written Chinese). Most of the work done on codifying Cantonese have been on pronunciation, very few has been done on other aspect of Cantonese except descriptive linguistic work which confined to a small group of western-trained linguists. It is 'Chinese language', not Cantonese, that is being used in law court, legislative and executive councils and education. Hong Kong people speak Cantonese but they write Chinese, not Cantonese, except in

colloquial cultural settings such as in comic books, popular magazines and newspapers, and online discussions. This unique Hong Kong perspective to Cantonese and 'Chinese language' is seldom challenged. The making of two grammatical systems into one conception seems very natural to most Hong Kong people and the linguistic difference is usually explained as a difference between spoken and written form of a language but not two linguistic systems.

Standard Written Chinese is a standard established outside of Hong Kong. It was first standardized by intellectuals in China during 1920's, and later by the P.R.C. government after 1949. It is accepted as a shared linguistic norm, and its use elaborated among literate Chinese in China and other Chinese communities in the world. The part in which Hong Kong people can participate in standardizing the linguistic norm they selected is only on the spoken part, i.e. Cantonese pronunciation. While Cantonese has an inferior status in China, its historical heritage and cultural linkage with Southern China was picked up and incorporated in the development of a Hong Kong linguistic norm. Because the involvement of Cantonese in the Hong Kong defined 'Chinese language' is only on pronunciation while the syntax and lexicon of the norm are of Mandarin's. It necessarily avoids the negative association about Cantonese as a vulgar and grammarless code. Irvine's (2001) model of linguistic differentiation is perhaps relevant here. Together with Susan Gal, they found that 'ideologies of linguistic differentiation interpret the sociolinguistic phenomena within their view via three semiotic processes': iconization, recursivity and erasure (ibid: 33). I believe at least two of the processes, iconization and erasure, are at work in the Hong Kong case.

Irvine explains the process of erasure is 'a crucial reason why a language ideology, whether discovered in informants' explicit statements and explanations or other wise deduced, is not identical with an outside observer's analysis' (ibid: 39). The process of erasure is seemingly at work in the Hong Kong ideology of 'Chinese language' as the linguistic mis-match and inconsistency is explained away or simply 'erased'. The unique definition of 'Chinese language' in Hong Kong invites interpretation that this is a way to differentiate Hong Kong from other Chinese communities, especially from the Chinese in mainland China since the language reforms and its associated nationalism after 1949. One of the main concerns Hong Kong people have about the 1997 Hand-over is Hong Kong's political autonomy under one-country-two-systems promised by China. When nationalism is not feasible in the Hong Kong case, maintaining a 'Chinese language' that is different from China seems to be a last front to maintain Hong Kong's distinctiveness, i.e. Hong Kong's linguistic autonomy, from mainland China.

Given this background about the development of 'Chinese language' in Hong Kong, it is then possible to further explore what the 'lazy pronunciation' debate is about. It seems to have nothing to do with differentiating a Hong Kong person from a new comer or a visitor to Hong Kong as this is done by other linguistic variation in stead of by this specific type of phonological variation, but in another sense it is. Because it acts as an internal unifying force of the Cantonese linguistic community which defines Hong Kongness. It is a process of uniforming a selective aspect of Cantonese, its pronunciation, among the Hong Kong people. This uniformity of pronunciation, whether as a conception or as a state achieved in ancient China, has a historical connection with Southern Chinese culture from the Tang dynasty (1000 A.D.) and the history of 'Chinese language' development in Hong Kong since the turn of the 20th century.

It is difficult to trace why and since when one variant of pronunciation is labeled 'lazy' in Cantonese, but at least we can observe that the linkage between a linguistic phenomenon (restricted phonological variation) and a value-laden judgment or social image ('laziness') is an iconic one. Irvine (2001) defines iconization as 'a semiotic process that transforms the sign relationship between linguistic features and the social images to which they are linked' (ibid: 33). Once the social image become considered as inherent to the speaker, i.e. that speakers who uses the 'lazy' variants are lazy people, the linguistic variation obtains an indexical function. The connection between the linguistic feature and the social image 'appears to be necessary, perhaps even "natural"'(ibid:33). A lot of the metalinguistic comments associated with the phonological variation, such as that the variant is 'lazy', 'incorrect', 'ugly to hear', become naturalized and it's easy to find people trying to find an explanation to the relationship between a social image and a linguistic feature. It also seems that the iconization in the Hong Kong case involve not just one relationship, but layers of relationships: the relationship between the linguistic feature (phonological variant) to quality of the linguistic feature (that it is a 'lazy pronunciation'); the relationship between 'lazy pronunciation' to the speaker as being 'lazy'; the relationship between the linguistic feature and culturally defined aesthetic quality such that 'lazy pronunciation' is said to be 'ugly to hear'; the relationship between 'lazy pronunciation' is caused by laziness or incompetence of the speaker; the relationship between people using 'lazy pronunciation' and the threat to the culture and language integrity of Cantonese. For example, the following quotes are metalinguistic comments intended to set up the relationship between the phonological variant and the inherent 'lazy' and 'energy-less' quality of the speaker (original in Chinese, my translation):

1. Yu (1989: 46) 'Some people drop the difficult part of the pronunciation when they learn a language, especially those sounds involving nasal elements in their pronunciation such as *n* and *ng* initials'.

2. Ho (1991 vol. 2: 33) 'The pronunciation of *l* initials requires less energy, therefore children they naturally pronounce all *n* initials as *l*'.

3. Ho (1991 vol.2: 41) 'Many people cannot manage complicated pronunciation, therefore when they pronounce *gwok*, they are busy pronouncing the vowel but forget to round their lips [so *gwok* become *gok*]'.

4. Yip (a lecturer at HKILE, spoken in a Cantonese pronunciation conference in 1995, published in Ho 1996) 'Lazy pronunciation' are sounds that are difficult to pronounce, for example, the pronunciation of *n* initial is more difficult than *l* initial.'

5. Ho (1996: 23) 'The incorrect pronunciation of Cantonese finals is caused by speaking too fast and with no rhythm'.

6. A kindergarten teacher (personal interview in 1996) 'Lazy pronunciation was used by those who had physical problems with pronunciation such that the tongue of those people was not able to be raised to a normal extent.'

This connection between a social image 'laziness' and the phonological variants is then further taken up to be connected with the entire culture or social system of the linguistic community (original in Chinese, my translation):

7. Yeung (1984: preface) 'It [the use of lazy pronunciation in Hong Kong] would be a big crisis to Chinese culture'.

8. Ho (1994 television series) 'It [the use of lazy pronunciation] is caused by the collapse of the system'.

9. Ho and Bou (1989: 6) 'We are destroying the Chinese culture' [by using lazy pronunciation].

The social preference for one form of pronunciation over the other, despite of the fact that the connection is a historical, conventional one, invite interpretation and expression of preference in terms of aesthetic qualities as in the following examples (original in Chinese, my translation):

10. A television news manager (personal interview in 1996) '[Lazy and incorrect pronunciation is] unbearable to listen to'.

11. Ho (1991 vol. 2: preface) 'The incorrect reading pronunciation and spoken pronunciation [i.e. lazy pronunciation] spread from the television and radio everyday are annoying to hear'.

12. Ho (1991 vol. 2: 51) 'A lot of adults in their thirties and forties still pronounce k as h, they sound like babies who just begin to learn the language and it is extremely uncomfortable to listen to.'

Despite the constant societal judgment and actions against 'lazy pronunciation', it is still generally a prevailing phenomena in Hong Kong. Some scholars take a pro-modern lobby in the debate and believe that when most people use a particular variant instead of another, it should be considered a social convention and standardization should follow such trend but not traditional dictionaries. These scholars include Rao (1980), Cheung (1982), Sin (1988), Wong (1995). In 1996 when I interviewed 28 school teachers and broadcasters about the debate of 'lazy pronunciation', quite many of them considered the modern ('lazy') variants are acceptable. A school teacher commented that Richard Ho has 'overdone' and it's departing from ordinary people's language use. Another school teacher said that 'lazy pronunciation' is a kind of popular culture. A radio broadcaster said 'lazy pronunciation' is 'comfortable to listen to, stylish and trendy'. As I mentioned at the beginning of this paper that such linguistic variation was first reported in 1883 and the debate seem to never end. But it is the constant debate about correctness in pronunciation that give sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists a window to look at language use, language ideologies and their relationship to the society.

6. Conclusion

In this paper I have explained the linguistic features that identified what Hong Kong people called 'lazy pronunciation' in Cantonese. I discussed speaker's awareness to these phonological variation and how awareness is related to metalinguistic comments on language. I identified a number of language authorities in Hong Kong who/which participated in the language debate, what social actions they have done. For example, the setting up of an academy-like committee to standardize Cantonese, the launching of a media campaign to educate the public, and the publication of teaching instructions to school teachers. I also discuss how these work of the authorities or the debate of 'lazy pronunciation' can be understood in the Hong Kong context with reference to historical and cultural background to the development of a unique Hong Kong 'Chinese language'. And how Irvine's model of semiotic process, in this particular case, iconization and erasure can help explain the Hong Kong case.

The 'lazy pronunciation' debate in Hong Kong is different from linguistic variation debates in the west in that there seems to be little socio-economic underpinnings involved in the Hong Kong setting. Using 'lazy pronunciation' may invoke negative metalinguistic comments from others but unlike the western case, the social life and career perspective of a speaker is in general unaffected. And yet the historical and cultural underpinnings of the language debate tells a story

of how Hong Kong Cantonese and 'Chinese language' work differently from Bourdieu's conception of a standard linguistic market under strong political economy. A second point about the Hong Kong case is that it is a site to observe how metalinguistic awareness play a role in changing people's language attitudes and behavior, especially from a raise of their language awareness to their actual language perception and usage. In this sense, metalinguistic comments should not be considered as merely 'above language' but rather it is itself a social act/practice which has a social significance in language actions.

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