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Language choice and code-switching among Hong Kong's Hakka speakers

香港客家人的語言選擇和語碼轉換

Abstract: This paper examines the language practices among speakers of Hakka in Hong Kong, a minority Chinese variety still found in the territory. These speakers were largely monolingual a few decades ago but are now primarily bilingual in Hakka and Cantonese as the community shifts towards the latter, the dominant societal language. To explore the process and dynamics of this language shift, the present study adopted an ethnographic approach for observing the actual bilingual behaviours of individuals and families in the community. The informant sample comprised 32 speakers aged between 9 and 82 from nine separate families across Hong Kong. Data was collected through a combination of participant observation, informal interviews and conversational exchanges in the informants' homes. Examination of their patterns of language choice and language use shows that most of the speakers use Cantonese-dominant patterns, and are 'shifters' rather than 'maintainers' of the Hakka language; the shift is clearly generation and age-related. The paper also illustrates how bilingual speakers make use of code-switching between Hakka and Cantonese to achieve various discourse purposes in their everyday conversations, suggesting that even among the 'language shifters', Hakka remains an important linguistic resource.

Keywords: Hakka, Hong Kong, language shift, code-switching, Cantonese

摘要: 這份文章旨在研究香港一個漢語方言少數族群——操客家話者的語用習慣。幾十年前的香港，大部分的客家人都只操單一語言，但隨著社會逐漸傾向廣東話主導，他們現在基本上已同時操客家和廣東話。本研究以民族誌研究方法為導向，透過探索這種語言轉變的過程和動態，深入觀察香港的客家話社區內確實的客廣雙語行為。參加這項研究的合共 32 人，年齡由 9 至 82 歲，來自 9 個家庭。數據來自研究者親身到他們的家庭進行語言交流、觀察和非正式訪問。分析他們的語言選擇和使用方式之後，顯示大部分操客家話者採用以廣東話為主導的模式溝通，屬於客家話的「轉移者」而非「維持者」，而這種變化與年齡和不同輩份有明顯關係。本文亦展示部分雙語者在日常生活中，為了

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滿足不同言談功能或目的，如何利用語碼轉換交替使用客家話和廣東話。這顯示對於即使是那些被視為「轉移者」的人，客家話仍然是重要的語言資源。

關鍵字: 客家, 香港, 語言轉移, 語碼轉換, 廣東話

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1 Introduction

Hakka is one of the few minority Chinese varieties still but scarcely heard in Hong Kong today, a multilingual society whose predominant community language is Cantonese. Figures from the most recent census in 2011 estimate a total of just over 62 thousand speakers who use Hakka as their home language in Hong Kong, representing less than 0.9 percent of the total population of seven plus million (Hong Kong Government 2011). This is a significant drop from the 15.1 per cent of the population who reported speaking Hakka as their main language exactly a century ago in 1911, when questions on language use were first included in the census (Bacon-Shone & Bolton 1998). While speakers of Hakka in Hong Kong were largely monolingual a few decades ago, the current population of speakers who now still speak Hakka are primarily bilingual in Hakka and Cantonese. This rapid decline in the size of the Hakka-speaking community in relation to the total population of Hong Kong, coupled with its changing patterns of language use, signals an ongoing process of language shift at the community level. With the very real danger of Hakka becoming completely displaced by Cantonese in the foreseeable future, there is a need to examine the way this minority Chinese variety is being used by its speakers. This paper describes a sociolinguistic study investigating the bilingual practices of members of the Hong Kong Hakka-speaking community as the community language shifts towards Cantonese, and provides a snapshot of their language choice and code-switching patterns.

2 The study in context

2.1 The Hakka people in Hong Kong

The exact origins and history of the Hakka people are difficult to accurately ascertain, and as such continue to be a matter of debate. However, following

Luo's (1933) influential research on Hakka clan genealogies, it is commonly believed that ancestors of the Hakka originated from the northern plains of China, and gradually migrated to southern regions in a series of waves of internal migration. Historical accounts reveal that Hakka settlement in Hong Kong dates back at least 300 years (Johnson 2000; Lau 2001a; Liu 1998; Yang 1997), and thus comprised part of Hong Kong's indigenous population (Constable 1996). Early Hakka settlers coming from the Chinese mainland mainly established their own, sometimes walled, villages with fellow clan members in the New Territories. Later Hakka migrants after the mid-nineteenth century settled in the Kowloon peninsula and Hong Kong Island.

Although the Hakka are now a minority group throughout Hong Kong, there was a time when they were the largest ethnic group in parts of the New Territories. Census figures from 1911 indicate that in the Northern District of the New Territories, the number of ethnic Hakka clearly exceeded the number of ethnic Cantonese (Bacon-Shone & Bolton 1998). Lau (2001a) points out that the majority of Hakka families at that time still lived as close-knit communities in the 400 or more traditional Hakka villages spread over the New Territories, and mainly depended on subsistence farming. Today however, few Hakka settlements are seen in Hong Kong. Rather, the Hakka are now mainly a dispersed community, with most people of Hakka descent being scattered in small pockets throughout the territory, but are more concentrated in the New Territories. Due to intermarriage and assimilation over time, it is likely that many ethnic Hakka are not even aware of their Hakka ancestry.

2.2 The Hakka variety in Hong Kong

Hakka is a distinct *fangyan*[1] of the Han Chinese language, but it has been described as sharing many characteristics with other Chinese varieties in terms of phonology, grammar and lexicon, in particular Min and Yue (Cantonese), southern Chinese varieties. Therefore, in spite of the widely accepted theory of the northern origins of Hakka ethnicity, linguistically, present-day Hakka is generally considered to belong to the Southern group of 'dialects' (Bradley

1 The Han Chinese language is normally described as consisting of seven distinct varieties or *fangyan* which are mutually unintelligible (see Norman 1988), namely: Hakka, Mandarin, Wu, Gan, Xiang, Yue (the *fangyan* to which Cantonese belongs) and Min. Some scholars prefer to further distinguish between Southern Min and Northern Min, thereby classifying Chinese into eight major groups (see e.g., DeFrancis 1990).

2005; Norman 1988; Ramsey 1987).[2,3] The Hakka *fangyan* itself consists of hundreds of sub-varieties, most of which are mutually intelligible in spite of discrepancies in tone, phonology and lexicon. In studies of Hakka speech, the variety spoken in Meixian, a northeastern town in the southern Chinese province of Guangdong, is usually considered the standard (Lau 2000).

The Hakka variety that is spoken in Hong Kong today is essentially homogeneous throughout the territory and is more or less identical with the Hakka that is spoken in neighbouring regions, including the border regions of Shenzhen and parts of Bao'an county in Guangdong. However, it is phonologically quite distinct from the standard variety spoken in Meixian (Lau 2000, 2005). It is mutually unintelligible with other varieties of Chinese found in Hong Kong, including Cantonese and other southern Chinese varieties. Comprehensive accounts of the phonological features of local Hakka speech, and of the settlement history of its speakers, can be found in studies by Lau (2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2004, 2005), who observed that the variety spoken by the indigenous Hakka in Hong Kong differs somewhat across generations. In particular, the Hakka speech of younger speakers is more obviously subject to varying degrees of Cantonese influence in terms of lexicon and phonology.

2.3 Language shift

According to census data, Hakka was at one time the most prevalent minority Chinese dialect spoken in Hong Kong (15.1 per cent of the population in 1911), and this likely remained so until around the middle of the last century. By 1961, Hakka was surpassed by Hoklo[4] as the most widely used minority Chinese dialect (spoken by 4.9 and 6.3 per cent of the population respectively) (Bacon-Shone & Bolton 1998). Three decades later in 1991, only 1.6 per cent of the

2 The problem of how to position and classify Hakka among the various Chinese *fangyan* however, remains a debated issue (see, e.g. Deng 1998; Lau 2001b, 2002; Sagart 1998).

3 It is noted that terminological issues arise when translating Chinese terms related to the subclassification of language into English. For example, both *fangyan* and labels designating lesser Chinese varieties are commonly referred to as 'dialects' in English, which could be problematic on several counts (see, e.g. DeFrancis 1990; Mair 1991; also see Groves 2008). Nonetheless, the term 'dialect' is used in this paper when generally referring to Hakka and other Chinese varieties, following common usage in the literature.

4 Hoklo is the local label that describes varieties of the Min *fangyan* including Chiu Chau, Minnan / Fukien (speech from Fujian Province) and their speakers. 'Fukien', when used in the local censuses, is understood to refer to 'Minnan'. However, since Minnan is not the only language variety spoken in Fujian Province, the use of this label is not entirely accurate.

population claimed to speak Hakka as their usual language; and today, a further two decades on, this figure has dropped to 0.9 per cent. For comparison, the 2011 figure for Fukien, the minority dialect currently with the most number of native speakers in Hong Kong, is 1.1 per cent (Hong Kong Government 2001, 2011).

Language shift, the change from the habitual use of one language to another (Weinreich 1953) is a natural consequence of sustained contact between the minority and majority language(s) within a speech community. In Hong Kong, rapid language shift away from Hakka and other minority Chinese dialects towards Cantonese was already in progress by the 1960s, if not earlier, and this trend is continuing. Early signs of shift were evidenced by documentary and historic data, and in particular by the corresponding increase and decrease in the percentage of speakers of Cantonese and that of the minority Chinese dialects respectively, in the period between the 1961 and 1971 censuses[5] (Lau & So 2005; So & Lau 2013; T'sou 1997a, 1997b).

This dramatic decline in the use of the minority dialects is attributed to a mix of factors common to many language contact situations, above all a lack of institutional support for those dialects combined with increased access to media and schooling in the dominant language(s), intermarriage between minority and majority language speakers, and changes in settlement patterns (Chow & Lau 2001). Another factor speculated to have contributed to, and accelerated, the shift towards Cantonese is the perceived pressure towards conformity in Hong Kong society (Bacon-Shone & Bolton 1998), which accompanied the forging of a sense of Hong Kong identity in the 1970s (So & Lau 2013). The current language-in-education policy promoting biliteracy in written Chinese and English, and trilingualism in spoken Cantonese, English and Putonghua, leaves no room for the institutional recognition of Hakka and other minority Chinese varieties, which struggle to survive. It was against this sociolinguistic backdrop that the present study was undertaken.

3 Methodology

This study approached language shift as a case of changing patterns of speaking among the community (e.g. Gal 1979). The goals of the study were to examine both individual and family-based language practices among members of the

5 After the 1911 census, the next census that included questions on language use was that of 1961. In the interim, the censuses were either cancelled or had omitted questions on language use.

local Hakka-speaking community, through observing their patterns of language choice with different interlocutors and their everyday language use in bilingual interactions. In order to study intergenerational differences in language use, target informants were speakers from Hakka families spanning at least two generations who (used to) have Hakka as their home language.

3.1 Initial research site

Fieldwork began in Sha Tau Kok, a rural border town situated between Shenzhen and Hong Kong in the far northeastern corner of the New Territories. The town began life as a Hakka farming village, and thus has always had a relatively stronger concentration of indigenous Hakka people compared with other regions of Hong Kong. What makes Sha Tau Kok a unique place is that much of the town and its surrounding villages lie in a Frontier Closed Area, which the government established in 1951 to provide a buffer zone to combat cross-boundary crimes (Hong Kong SAR Government 2001). Permits have been issued to outsiders to enter the region for visitation or work related purposes under very stringent conditions, but in recent years, parts of the restricted zone have gradually been opened up, allowing easier access into the area. It is perhaps due to its relative isolation that Hakka presence still remains fairly salient in this part of Hong Kong. For the current study, it was intended that not more than half of the entire informant sample be based in Sha Tau Kok, data from which could be used as a reference point for comparison with data from other parts of Hong Kong.

3.2 Locating informants

To observe the actual language use patterns and language behaviors of individuals, it was necessary to visit informants in their homes and to generally become acquainted with the social life of the individuals among their community. Therefore, the fieldwork and data collection methods were based on a social network methodology that incorporated ethnographic techniques. Being a member of the ethnic group under study and a speaker of the local Hakka variety enabled me to approach the target community through personal network contacts, which greatly facilitated the fieldwork process.

Informants were initially located through personal network ties in Sha Tau Kok. These original informants were asked to introduce further Hakka individuals or families in their personal networks, mirroring the ‘friend of a friend’

approach described by Milroy (1987) in her influential study of Belfast speech. Through this 'snowball' technique, it was possible to gain increasing access to Hakka families scattered across different parts of Hong Kong. The final informant sample comprised 32 Hakka speakers from 9 separate families (spread over many more households), aged between 9 and 82. 13 were from the grandparent generation, 10 from the parent generation, and 9 from the child generation.[6] Roughly half of the sample were residents of Sha Tau Kok, while the remainder were from other parts of the New Territories and Kowloon.

3.3 Data collection

A combination of methods was used to gather data. These included informal interviews, recordings of spontaneous conversations and participant observation. Once accepted into the community or into the informants' families, it was not an obstacle to make regular visits to the informants in their homes; in fact, the families encouraged frequent social visits. On those occasions, participant observation was a particularly useful data source for corroborating reported language use patterns between different members of the families or between friends. The resulting body of data collected included information on speakers' language use and language choice patterns, their social background and social networks, as well as conversational data.

4 Findings

4.1 Language choice

The matrix shown in Table 1 displays the patterns of language choice for the 32 informants in different situations. Information on the age and gender of each informant is provided on the left-most column of the table: informant (1) is an 82-year old male, informant (2) is a 79-year old female, and so on. Additionally,

6 In this study, generation refers to the highest generational ranking within the individual's own immediate family unit: that is, whether the individual is a grandparent, parent, or neither – for whom the label 'child' is given. The category 'child' therefore, is at times applied to an adult, as long as s/he has no generational superiority over any lineal family members. Hence, chronological age and generational ranking *across* families do not map onto one another directly, although there is overall a strong association between the two among the informant sample.

Table 1: Implicational scale showing the language choice patterns of the 32 informants.

Informant: Age (gender)	Interlocutor type										Average score (Informant)
	Grandparents	Parents	Worshipping	Uncles / Aunts	Siblings / Cousins	Grandchildren	Spouse	Pets	Children Nieces / Nephews	Doctor	
1. 82(m)*					H	H	H	H	H	H	5
2. 79(f)*			H		H	H		H	H	H	5
3. 71(f)			H	H	H	H	H		H	H	5
4. 70(f)*			H		H	H	H	H	H	H	5
5. 65(f)*			H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H(C)	4.88
6. 68(m)*			H	H	H	H(C)	H	H	H	H/C	4.63
7. 65(f)*			H	H	H	H(C)		H	H	H/C	4.57
8. 48(f)*		H		H	H		H	H	H(C)	C	4.29
9. 38(m)*		H		H	H		H	H	H/C	C	4.14
10. 38(f)*		H		H	H		H	H	H/C	C	4.14
11. 80(f)			C		H	H(C)		H	H	C	3.5
12. 73(f)			H	H/C	H	H/C		C	H(C)	C	3.14
13. 69(m)					H	C	H		C(H)	C	2.8
14. 65(f)					H	C	H		C(H)	C	2.8
15. 56(f)		H		H/C	H	C	H/C		C	C	2.71

16. 49(f)		H		H	H/C			C	C	C	2.67
17. 41(f)*		H	C	H	H/C				C	C	2.67
18. 42(f)		H	H/C	H/C	H/C		C		C(H)	C	2.57
19. 50(m)		H		H/C	H(C)		C		C	C	2.5
20. 33(m)*		H		H	C(H)			C	C	C	2.5
21. 29(m)*		H		H	C(H)			C	C	C	2.5
22. 52(m)		H		H	H/C		C	C	C	C	2.43
23. 68(m)				H/C	H	C	H/C		C	C	2.33
24. 45(f)		H		H/C	H/C		C		C	C	2.33
25. 42(f)		H/C	H	H/C	C(H)		C		C	C	2.29
26. 40(m)		H		H/C	H/C		C	C	C	C	2.14
27. 31(f)		H/C	H/C	H/C	C(H)			C	C(H)	C	2.14
28. 30(f)		H		H/C	H/C		C	C	C	C	2.14
29. 15(f)*	H	C(H)		C(H)	C			C		C	2
30. 12(f)*	H	C(H)		C(H)	C			C		C	2
31. 9(m)*	H	C(H)		C(H)	C			C		C	2
32. 28(m)	H	C		C(H)	C				C	C	1.83
Average score (Interlocutor)	5	4.15	4.0	3.77	3.66	3.38	3.32	2.9	2.59	1.72	

the asterisk placed beside the informant information on some of the rows indicates that those informants are from Sha Tau Kok.

Each of the ten columns in the matrix represents a different interlocutor type or situation of language use, while each row represents the choices made by an individual speaker for the various interlocutor types. It should be noted that the ten categories do not represent an exhaustive list, but rather a range of interlocutor types that are applicable to the most number of informants. Most of the categories belong to the home and family domain, because it is in this domain that the occurrence of language shift can most easily be detected, it being the 'last bastion of language maintenance' (Coulmas 2005; Dorian 1981). The category of 'worshipping' belongs either to the religious or family domain, as the addressee spoken to during the act of worshipping may be one's deity or one's ancestral spirits. The latter are often considered to be part of one's family in traditional Chinese worshipping practices. The interlocutor type 'doctor' is the only that unambiguously belongs to a non-family domain.

As can be seen in the matrix, almost two thirds of all the possible cells are filled (208 out of 320). The 112 unfilled cells represent cases where an interaction type is not applicable for a particular individual, for example because he or she does not have grandparents or children. The filled cells contain one of five possible code types, representing the language or languages used by a speaker when interacting with a particular interlocutor type. The five types are:

(i) H: exclusive use of Hakka
(ii) H(C): mostly Hakka with some Cantonese
(iii) H/C: both Hakka and Cantonese used in roughly equal amounts
(iv) C(H): mostly Cantonese with some Hakka
(v) C: exclusive use of Cantonese

A tally of the codes presented shows that approximately a quarter of all the filled cells (50 out of 208) indicate varying degrees of bilingual usage, where either roughly equal amounts of both languages are used to the same interlocutor type: 'H/C'; or one language is used more than the other: 'H(C)' and 'C(H)'. Fewer than half the filled cells (91 out of 208) indicate exclusive use of Hakka: 'H'; while almost a third of the filled cells (67 out of 208) indicate exclusive use of Cantonese: 'C'.

Following the technique of implicational scaling (Gal 1979; Li 1994), the speakers are ranked along the vertical axis, such that speakers with Hakka-dominant patterns appear at the top of the table, and those with Cantonese-dominant patterns appear at the bottom. Likewise, interlocutor types are ranked across the horizontal axis, so that on the left are interlocutors with whom Hakka is more likely used, and on the right those with whom Cantonese is more likely

used. However, there is much variability between speakers in their language choice patterns, and not all the cells conform to scalability. To facilitate the quantification (and ranking) of the data, a score representing average language choice was calculated for each informant (right-most column of table), and for each interlocutor type (bottom row of table). The five categories of language patterns: H, H(C), H/C, C(H) and C, were assigned values of 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The average scores were derived by adding up the values of all the filled cells in a particular row (for informant score) or a particular column (for interlocutor score) and then dividing this figure by the number of filled categories in the same row or column. For example, the average score for informant (32) is (5 +1 +2 +1 +1 +1) / 6 = 1.83. This is the lowest score among all the informants, and represents a strongly Cantonese-dominant pattern of language choice. The highest score of 5, belonging to the four informants at the top of the scale, represents a Hakka-only pattern of language choice.

Except for the four monolingual speakers, all other informants have both languages in their repertoire. They might make use of one or the other language, or a combination of the two, in different situations in their everyday lives. These speakers can be considered bilingual in Hakka and Cantonese, but to different extents. The way in which these bilingual patterns of language choice and language use are actually played out in everyday interactions will be illustrated below in section 4.2.

Reading across the implicational scale, it can be seen that approximately a third of the informants, counting from the top of the scale, would not normally use Cantonese except for speaking to interlocutors outside the family domain, or occasionally when speaking to younger family members (their own children, grandchildren, or the children of their siblings), or, in the case of the monolingual speakers, use no Cantonese in any context. These speakers could be considered as 'language maintainers' to a strong or moderate extent. Most of them are elderly speakers and/or informants from Sha Tau Kok. The remaining two-thirds of the informants could be considered as 'language shifters'. It can be seen that informant (13) and all those below him have average language choice scores that fall below 3, leaning towards a more Cantonese than Hakka-dominant pattern. Moreover, in spite of using Hakka in the home, the use of Hakka with the younger generations (children and grandchildren) is limited, and thus these speakers cannot be considered to be maintaining the language from the point of view of transmitting the language to future generations.

It should be pointed out however, that the ranking of the speakers on the scale does not necessarily bear direct relation to the actual amount of Hakka or Cantonese they may use in their everyday lives in absolute terms. Although a more Hakka-dominant pattern of language choice generally corresponds to more

Hakka usage, and vice versa, there are also examples where this is not true, such as in the case of the three youngest informants in the sample, informants (29), (30) and (31). The ranking of these speakers is joint-second from the bottom, reflecting a strongly Cantonese-dominant pattern of language choice. However, a closer examination of the speakers' backgrounds will reveal that they are three siblings from one family, who live in the same household as their grandparents in Sha Tau Kok, with whom they speak exclusively in Hakka every day. In other words, the table belies the fact that they currently speak more Hakka on a day-to-day basis compared to some other speakers who are positioned higher up the scale. This notwithstanding, it is also noted that the choice of language for these three young speakers with all other interlocutor types besides 'grandparents' is either exclusively Cantonese: 'C', or Cantonese-dominant: 'C(E)'. It could be said therefore, that their grandparents are the last remaining agents of their Hakka maintenance.

Looking at the effect of interlocutor type in more detail, broad differences in language choice patterns are apparent when reading down the columns of the matrix. The interlocutor type which is the most likely to elicit Hakka usage is 'grandparents', the only category with whom speakers use exclusively Hakka, again reflecting the significant role that the grandparent generation plays in the maintenance of Hakka. This is followed by the categories of 'parents', 'worshipping', 'uncles and aunts', 'siblings and cousins', 'grandchildren', 'spouse', 'pets', and 'children and nieces or nephews'. In last place is 'doctor' from the non-family domain, the interlocutor type which is the most likely to elicit Cantonese. The last three interlocutor types on the scale have an average score of below 3; that is, generally more Cantonese than Hakka is used to speak to these addressees. For all the other interlocutor types, generally more Hakka than Cantonese is used.

4.1.1 Language choice and generation

The display of patterns of language choice in the implicational scale represents not only a synchronic snapshot of the variation in language behaviour across the informant sample, but interpreted from a diachronic perspective, it may also represent a stage in the ongoing process of change at the community level. Statistical tests can establish whether the variation is indeed generation and age-related.

A Kruskall-Wallis test shows that differences in average language choice scores between the three generational groupings (grandparent, parent, child) are significant, with speakers of higher generational rankings having higher

language choice scores, that is, a more Hakka-dominant pattern ($H = 15.974$, $p < 0.001$). Follow-up Mann-Whitney U tests for evaluating pair-wise differences among the three groups again indicate a significant difference between the grandparent generation and the parent generation ($z = -2.707$, $p = 0.007$ when corrected for tied ranks), and between the grandparent generation and the child generation ($z = -3.657$, $p < 0.001$). This means that the grandparents display a more Hakka-dominant pattern than speakers in both the parent and child generations, and that this difference is statistically significant. While there is no statistically significant difference between the parent and child generations ($z = -1.561$, $p = 0.119$), the median score for speakers from the parent generation is marginally higher (showing a more Hakka-dominant pattern), as can be seen in the box plots in Figure 1.

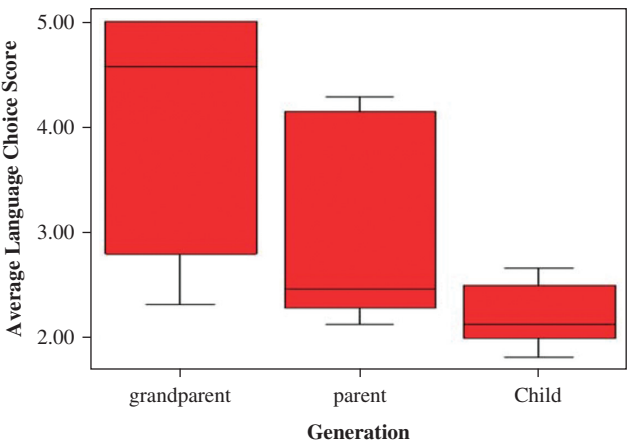

Figure 1: Boxplots showing the distribution of average language choice scores for informants from the grandparent, parent and child generations.[7]

4.1.2 Language choice and age

Results of a Spearman rank order correlation between average language choice score and chronological age shows a positive and highly significant correlation ($r = 0.765$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates a real and reliable relationship between a speaker's age and his or her language choice patterns, with older speakers tending to have more Hakka-dominant language patterns than younger

7 The shaded box represents the middle half of the scores in the distribution. The upper and lower edges of the shaded box represent the upper quartile (75th percentile) and lower quartile (25th percentile) respectively. The horizontal line inside the box represents the median score (50th percentile).

speakers. This is in line with the results found for language choice and generation. Both findings provide evidence that the existence of an intergenerational language shift among this community is a reality.

When the data is separated into two subgroups according to place of residence: Sha Tau Kok (STK) and elsewhere (non-STK), results of Spearman rank order correlations between average language choice score and chronological age are marginally stronger than that for the combined data (STK: $r = 0.975$, $p < 0.001$; non-STK: $r = 0.892$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that the STK and non-STK speakers have certain patterns of their own which are made less conspicuous when the data from the two subgroups are combined. The stronger correlation found for the STK subgroup suggests that age accounts for more of the change in language choice patterns for STK speakers than for the other speakers. A visual representation of this relationship can be seen in the two scatter plots in Figure 2. Due to the small sample size of each subgroup, it was not feasible to test whether this difference is statistically significant, but what is clearly evident is that an age-related language shift from Hakka to Cantonese is taking place among both subgroups of speakers.

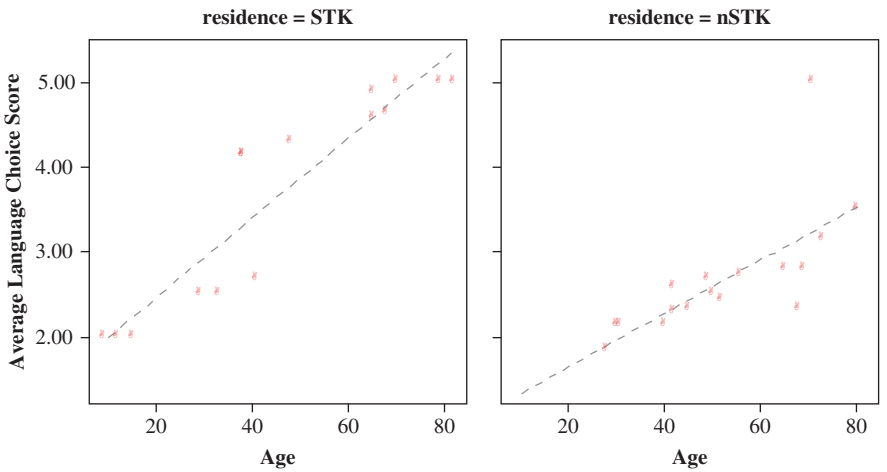

Figure 2: Scatterplots comparing the relationship between average language choice score and age for informants from Sha Tau Kok (STK) and elsewhere (nSTK).

4.2 Conversational code-switching among bilingual Hakka speakers

To illustrate how bilingual language use patterns are manifest in the actual speech of some of the informants, this section examines how certain bilingual

speakers from this community make use of their two language varieties to achieve communicative purposes in everyday conversations, from the perspective of conversational code-switching (Gumperz 1982). Code-switching is defined as the use of two or more languages or language varieties in the same stretch of discourse (Auer 1984), and is one of the most striking features of bilingualism. However, past studies of bilingual speakers have reported low overall rates of switching, both in intragenerational interactions (e.g. Shin 2005) and in intergenerational interactions (e.g. Li 1994). Li explains that in situations of language shift, code-switching tends not to be a community-wide phenomenon but instead is speaker and context-specific. In the current study too, code-switching was found to occur only between certain speakers in certain contexts, sometimes across generations, sometimes within the same generation. The interlocutor types with whom speakers were observed to code-switch can generally be predicted by the implicational scale (Table 1.), that is, indicated by those cells in the matrix containing codes representing some degree of bilingual usage: 'H/C', 'H(C)' or 'C(H)'. The Conversation Analysis approach to code-switching (Auer 1984, 1995; Li 2002) is adopted in the following discussion of two examples of bilingual talk, where switching is seen to serve as contextualisation cues in the discourse, contributing to the structural organisation of the ongoing interaction.

In the transcripts of the conversational data, the columns from left to right represent the turn number, initial of the speaker, the transcript in Chinese, an indication as to whether the contribution was made in Hakka (*H*) or Cantonese (*C*), and in the last column, an English translation of the turn. The Chinese speech is transcribed using standard written Chinese characters, in addition to characters that are specific to writing colloquial Cantonese, and characters that have been used to represent Hakka speech (Lau 1997, 2000). Romanisation of the Chinese items is provided beneath the Chinese characters, using the Linguistic Society of Hong Kong's Cantonese *Jyut6Ping3* system (LSHK 1997) and the Hakka romanisation system found in Lau (1997). For better ease of reading and to further indicate the alternation in code between Hakka and Cantonese, all instances of the Hakka items (including characters, romanisation and translations) are displayed in both bold and italic font.

4.2.1 Code-switching for accentuating paired contrasts

The following is an excerpt from a dinner-table conversation between two female cousins in their thirties, Wong (W) and Chan (C). The conversational topic was earlier initiated by myself, the researcher (R), asking them what types

of Hakka food they eat at festivals. The speakers had digressed to another topic, but Wong suddenly thinks of another food item and returns to this topic. The exchange mainly focuses on the difference between 'fish maw', which Wong implies is a Hakka delicacy, and 'fish stomach', which is understood to be a common Chinese food item.

1	W	***做節咩食魚鰾啊*** ***zo4 zed5 me4 sid6 ng2 piau4 o1***	*H*	***We eat fish maw during festivals***
2	C	***食魚鰾? 唔 (3.0) 魚鰾客家東西來該咩?*** ***sid6 ng2 piau4? m2 (3.0) ng2 piau4 hag5 ga1 dung1 xi1 loi2 ai4 me4?***	*H*	***You eat fish maw? Mm (3.0) Is fish maw a Hakka thing?***
3	R	***[唔知喎]*** ***m1 di1 vo3***	*H*	***[Don't know]***
4	W	***[我唔知]道喎*** ***ngai2 m1 di1 dao4 vo3***	*H*	***[I don't] know***
5	R	[((laughs))]		[((laughs))]
6	C	[((laughs))] ***唔, 還有麼東西呢?*** ***m2, han2 yiu1 mai3 dung1 xi1 ne4?***	*H*	[((laughs))] ***Mm, what else?***
7	W	***拿, 魚鰾那樣東西呢, 諗, 我就可以肯定該樣東西就係,*** 新界人, ***都識食那樣東西, 九龍人, 都唔 /ss/, 都唔會食那樣東西*** ***na2, ng2 piau4 ngia3 yong4 dung1 xi1 ne4, e1, ngai2 ceu4 ko3 yi3 hen3 tin4 ai4 yong4 dung1 xi1 ceu4 he4,*** san1 gaai3 jan4, ***du1 sid5 sid6 ngia3 yong4 dung1 xi1, giu3 lung2 ngin2, du1 m1 /ss/, du1 m1 fui4 sid6 ngia3 yong4 dung1 xi1***	*H/ C/ H*	***Okay, the thing about fish maw, erm, I'm certain about something which is that***, New Territories people, ***know how to eat this stuff***, ***Kowloon people, don't /ss/, they don't know how to eat this stuff***
8	C	魚肚吖嘛, 唔係咩? jyu4 tou5 aa1 ma3, m4 hai6 me1?	*C*	It's just fish stomach, isn't it?

(*continued*)

(*Continued*)

9	W	嘩! 爭好遠 ((elongated syllable)), 魚肚幾多錢, ***魚鰾幾多錢啊?*** waa1! zaang1 hou2 jyun5 ((elongated syllable)), jyu4 tou5 gei2 do1 cin2, ***ng2 piau4 gid5 do1 qian2 o3?***	*C/ H*	Gosh! There's a big difference ((elongated syllable)), how much does fish stomach cost, ***how much does fish maw cost?***
10	C	我以為一樣嘅咋 ((laughs)) ngo5 ji5 wai4 jat1 joeng6 ge3 zaa3 ((laughs))	*C*	I just thought they were the same ((laughs))
11	W	***嘩, 恁能大呀! 得閒買滴 魚鰾來係恁弄***,我要***魚鰾, 唔係***魚肚呀 ***va4, an2 nen2 tai4 a3! ded5 han2 mai1 did6 ng2 piau4 loi2 he4 an2 nung1***, ngo5 jiu3 ***ng2 piau4, m1 he4*** jyu4 tou5 aa4	*H/ C/ H/ C*	***Wow, you really are clever! Then next time you buy me some fish maw***, I want ***fish maw, not*** fish stomach

In turn 1, Wong states that she eats fish maw during festivals. Chan queries this and asks whether fish maw is specifically a type of Hakka food. Wong at first expresses her uncertainty about the cultural origins of this food item (turn 4) but a few turns later she states assertively that it is only eaten by people in the New Territories (turn 7), implying that it is indeed a Hakka food item. In turn 8, Chan suggests that fish maw is the same as fish stomach. To this, Wong gives a cry of astonishment (turn 9), and remarks to her younger cousin the difference between the two items in terms of price. When Chan appears not to be entirely convinced (turn 10), Wong attempts to deliver a rebuff in an authoritative but sarcastic tone (turn 11).

Three types of code-switching can be seen in this interaction: inter-speaker code-switching (e.g. between turns 7 and 8), intra-speaker code-switching across turns (e.g. turn 6 and turn 8; or turn 7 and turn 9), and intra-speaker turn-internal code-switching (in turns 7, 9 and 11). The speakers had already established a common code of interaction (Hakka) at the beginning of the exchange, which is sustained until the beginning of turn 7. During this turn however, Wong makes a turn-internal code-switch to Cantonese, which appears to trigger off a series of code-switches in the turns that follow.

One of the most striking functions of the code-switches made by the speakers in this interaction is to accentuate the contrast between the items they talk about. From

the transcript, we see that 'fish maw' is mentioned by both speakers on six occasions in total (in turns 1, 2, 7, 9, 11), and 'fish stomach' on three occasions (turns 8, 9, 11). What is interesting is that all instances of 'fish maw' are uttered in Hakka as 'ng2piau4' while all instances of 'fish stomach' are uttered in Cantonese as 'jyu4tou5'. This is in spite of the fact that there are corresponding names for both items in the other language variety. While the contrast in code highlights the distinction between the two types of food products, it so happens that the choice of code corresponds to the nature of the thing being described; that is, Hakka is used for referring to the supposed Hakka delicacy, and Cantonese for the more commonplace food item. The use of alternate codes to mark a contrast between the two items is particularly salient in Wong's two turn-internal code-switches (turns 9 and 11).

In turn 9, we see that the switch is not made only for the lexical item or noun phrase (fish maw/stomach), but for an entire clause. Following Wong's interjection and comment in Cantonese, she first poses a question in Cantonese, and then repeats the question in Hakka with a different subject. It appears that this alternation in code is used as a strategy by Wong to strengthen the content of her message – to convince her cousin of the difference between the two items. A gloss of the relevant parts of the turn helps to illustrate the effect of the paired contrast in the utterance:

(From turn 9)

魚肚幾多錢,	***魚鰾幾多錢啊?***
jyu4 tou5 gei2 do1 cin2,	***ng2 piau4 gid5 do1 qian2 o3?***
'fish stomach how much money,	***fish maw how much money PARTICLE?'***
(how much does fish stomach cost,	***how much does fish maw cost?)***

Wong uses a similar strategy in turn 11. Again following an interjection and statement, this time in Hakka, Wong switches to Cantonese for the subject and verb of her statement, then switches back to Hakka for the object (fish maw). She does the exact opposite in the postmodifier, using Hakka for the negation marker and switching once again to Cantonese for the object (fish stomach), marking as it were a double contrast:

(From turn 11)

我要***魚鰾,***	***唔係***魚肚呀
ngo5 jiu3 ***ng2 piau4***	***m1 he4*** jyu4 tou5 aa4
'I want ***fish maw***	***not*** fish stomach PARTICLE'

Earlier in turn 7, Wong makes a similar turn-internal code-switch to mark the contrast between 'New Territories people' and 'Kowloon people'. This time, the

switch occurs only for one of the two noun phrases, making it appear more like a momentary transfer or lapse into the other code. However, it is clear that Wong wishes to build up a contrast between the two groups of people. The contrasting elements are not only made salient by the change in code, but the syntactic structure of the sentence and the slight pauses on either side of the two noun phrases also make them focused elements. As in turn 9, the parallel structure of the two halves of the sentence is obvious:

(From turn 7)

... 就係, 新界人, ***都識食那樣東西***,
... ceu4 he4, san1 gaai3 jan4, ***du1 sid5 sid6 ngia3 yong4 dung1 xi1***,
'***... which is that***, NewTerritories people, ***'all' know eat this thing***,
(***... which is that***, New Territories people, ***know how to eat this stuff***

九龍人, ... 都唔會食那樣東西
giu3 lung2 ngin2, ***... du1 m1 fui4 sid6 ngia3 yong4 dung1 xi1***
Kowloon people, ***... 'all' not know eat this thing'***
Kowloon people, ***... don't know how to eat this stuff)***

Unlike in turns 9 and 11 however, the choice of language variety in turn 7 does not correspond to the content of the talk. That is, the speaker uses Cantonese to refer to the people who eat the Hakka dish, and vice versa. Therefore, it appears that here, it is not the actual direction of the code-switch that is significant, but the contrast created by the juxtaposition of the two codes.

4.2.2 Code-switching during story-telling in conversation

The second excerpt is from an episode that takes place in the home of Lam (L), a woman in her late forties. Participating in the interaction are her older brother (B), and her Cantonese neighbor who has no knowledge of Hakka (and who does not contribute to this presented portion of the talk). Most of the talk is produced by Lam in Cantonese, who is telling the others about the harms of eating the Chinese health food, bird's nest, and illustrates this by recounting the experience of her late brother-in-law, a cancer patient. This instance of talk represents an example of 'story-telling in conversation' (Alfonzetti 1998), where the speaker plays the part of a narrator who does not readily give up her turn until the narration is completed. The following transcript begins in the middle of Lam's account.

This interaction takes place entirely in Cantonese aside from one turn-internal switch by Lam. Lam's choice of Cantonese is most likely for the sake of the

1	L	係呃, 佢呢, 嗰陣時醫好咗咖啦 嘛, 喺私家嗰度, 係咪先 hai6 aak3, keoi5 ne1, go2 zan6 si4 ji1 hou2 zo2 gaa3 laa1 maa3, hai2 si1 gaa1 go2 dou6, hai6 mai6 sin1	*C*	Yes, you know he, at that time he was cured of it, at a private hospital, right
2	B	割咗吖嘛 got3 zo2 aa1 maa3	*C*	He had surgery
3	L	係呀, 已經好咗啲咖啦, 成日食 燕窩,我嗌佢唔好食燕窩呀, 你食 燕窩呢, 越快, 嗰啲癌, 細胞生 長得越快咖, 咁呀, ((raises volume)) ***我唔知食幾多呀, 我食呀, 諗諗, 諗多十, 諗多錢呀***, 咁喎, ((resumes normal volume)) 收尾即刻又要去, 去嗰啲, 政府 醫院就, 咁樣就乜嘢咯 hai6 aa3, ji5 ging1 hou2 zo2 di1 gaa3 laa1, seng4 jat6 sik6 jin3 wo1, ngo5 aai3 keoi5 m4 hou2 sik6 jin3 wo1 aa3, nei5 sik6 jin3 wo1 ne1, jyut6 faai3, go2 di1 ngaam4, sai3 baau1 sang1 zoeng2 dak1 jyut6 faai3 gaa3 gam2 aa3, ((raises volume)) ***ngai2 m1 di1 sid6 git5 do1 a3, ngai sid6 a3, e1 e1, git5 do1 sib6, git5 do1 qian2 a3***, gam2 wo3, ((resumes normal volume)) sau1 mei1 zik1 hak1 jau6 jiu3 heoi3, heoi3 go2 di1, zing3 fu2 ji1 jyun2 zau6, gam2 joeng2 zau6 mat1 je5 lok3	*C/* *H/* *C*	Yes, he was already a bit better, but he constantly ate bird's nest, I told him not to eat bird's nest, if you eat bird's nest, it will increase, those cancer, cells will grow much faster, I said, ((raises volume)) ***I've eaten loads, I've eaten, er er, a few tens of, who knows how many qian*[8] *actually***, he said, ((resumes normal volume)) then immediately after he had to go, go into a public hospital and, and then that was it

neighbour, since she would normally speak to her brother in a mix of Hakka and Cantonese. In turn 3, Lam recounts how her late brother-in-law's health worsened after he constantly ate bird's nest. In the middle of that turn, Lam makes a brief switch to Hakka, clearly to fulfil a local discourse function – to report direct speech. However, it is interesting to note that Lam actually reports two instances of direct

8 '*Qian*' is a Chinese unit of weight, roughly equal to five grammes.

speech that are woven into her narrative in the same turn. The first is when she reports her own warning to her brother-in-law about the harms of eating bird's nest:

你食燕窩呢, 越快, 嗰啲癌, 細胞生長得越快咖, 咁呀
(if you eat bird's nest, it will increase, those cancer, cells will grow much faster, I said)

The second represents the brother-in-law's apathetic response to her warning:

我唔知食幾多呀, 我食呀, 詼詼, 幾多十, 幾多錢呀, 咁喎
(***I've eaten loads, I've eaten, er er, a few tens of, who knows how many qian actually***, he said)

It is only in this second instance of reporting direct speech that Lam switches to Hakka, immediately followed by a switch back to Cantonese for the reporting particles 咁喎, which are interpreted to mean 'he said'. It appears that this instance of direct speech marks a change of footing in the story, with the brother-in-law's remark serving as a punch-line to the narrative. We learn that not only did the man not heed Lam's advice to avoid bird's nest, but we learn of the extent to which this advice was ignored: he consumed a considerable amount of the health food, in the order of a few tens of *qian*, and this, Lam believes, is what exacerbated his illness. The significance of this line to the story is in fact marked by two contextualization cues, the code-switch and a raise in volume (neither of which accompanies Lam's reporting of her own speech).As the transcript shows, following the switch for the punchline, Lam resumes her normal volume as she presents the coda of the story, where we learn that after eating bird's nest, her brother-in-law's condition immediately worsened (and he died).

Both of the above examples illustrate how the bilingual speakers are able to make use of their two language varieties to achieve communicative purposes in everyday interaction, through using code-switching to meaningfully organize and structure their discourse.

5 Conclusion

This paper has provided a sociolinguistic sketch of the bilingual language practices of members of the Hakka-speaking community in multilingual Hong Kong. With no institutional support, Hakka, along with other minority Chinese varieties in this metropolis, is fast declining. This is evidenced in census statistics

which show plummeting numbers of people who speak Hakka as their usual language over the past several decades. Local literature also points to the rapid language shift away from the Hakka variety towards Cantonese, as well as the disappearance of traditional Hakka enclaves in Hong Kong. Given its endangered situation, the present study adopted an ethnographic approach to enable an in-depth examination of the ways in which this language is being used by its speakers. Examination of the language choice and language use patterns among Hakka families and individuals in the local community showed considerable variation across speakers. Some speakers are obviously more Hakka-dominant, and are seen to be maintaining their Hakka insofar that they are transmitting the language to individuals of a younger generation through their speaking of Hakka with them. But most are bilingual speakers who are more Cantonese- than Hakka-dominant, and can be considered 'language shifters'. Intra-speaker variation was also observed, whereby the language choice patterns for a particular individual can sometimes be explained as a function of interlocutor type. Among some of the younger speakers, Hakka or Hakka-dominant language use is restricted to communication with grandparents or elderly parents. Statistical tests bore out what is already apparent from the data presented in the implicational scale showing the language choice patterns of the informant sample: that the variation is generation and age-related, in other words, that there is an ongoing intergenerational language shift from Hakka towards Cantonese among this community.

An examination of the effects of these language use patterns on the actual language behaviours of the informants revealed that some of the bilingual speakers would at times code-switch at ease between Hakka and Cantonese in their everyday conversations, and that this code-switching is used to fulfil various discourse-related functions. Even those individuals who could be described as strong or moderately strong 'shifters' were found to switch from Cantonese to Hakka in routine conversations to achieve different communicative purposes. It might be said then that in spite of the gloomy prospects for the Hakka language in Hong Kong, for the time being at least, Hakka remains to some extent an important linguistic resource for these bilingual speakers.

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Chinese Synopsis (中文簡介)

香港客家人的語言選擇和語碼轉換

這份文章旨在研究香港一個漢語方言少數族群——操客家話者的語用習慣。根據歷史文獻，客家人約於 300 年前到香港落地生根 (Johnson, 2000; Lau, 2001a; Liu, 1998; Yang, 1997)，並成為本地原居民 (Constable, 1996)。他們由中國大陸移居香港後，於新界地區建立村落群居。19 世紀中葉之後的客家移民，也會在九龍半島和香港島居住。

雖然客家族群現已淪為香港的少數族群，但他們一度是新界部分地區的最大族群，而客家話亦一度是全香港最多人說的少數族裔方言。1911 年的人口普查數據顯示，在新界北區，客家人的人數大幅多於廣東話族群，客家話佔全香港比例的 15.1%，屬全港少數方言中最高 (Bacon-Shone & Bolton, 1998)。當時大部分客家家庭住在新界約 400 座村落中，主要以務農為生 (Lau, 2001a)。這情況相信一直維持至上世紀中葉。到 1961 年，鶴佬話已取代客家話成為最普遍少數族群語言，分別有 6.3% 和 4.9% 的民眾使用。到 1991 年，全港只有 1.6% 人以客家話為主要語言；到 2011 年，比例更跌至 0.9%。相比之下，身為最多人使用少數族群語言的福建話，也只有 1.1% (Hong Kong Government, 2001, 2011)。到現在，香港只餘下少數客家人聚居點，並且散居各處，但仍主要集中在新界居住。在經過長時間異族通婚和同化後，很多客家人後裔甚至已經不知道自己是客家祖先後人的身份。

現時香港境內的客家方言分支大致相同，亦與鄰近地區(深圳和寶安縣)居民所說的客家話接近。不過，香港的客家話與香港的其他中國方言（包括廣東話）之間無法互通。然而，年輕一代客家原居民的客家話，在詞彙和音韻上明顯受到廣東話不同程度的影響 (Lau, 2000, 2005)。

由一種語言習慣轉移至另一種語言，這種語言轉移在一個擁有少數和多數語言的社區中，屬於自然現象 (Weinreich, 1953)。從文獻和歷史數據上得知，香港境內包括客家話等少數族群語言快速轉移至廣東話的情況，特別是操廣東話人口和操少數方言人口的此消彼長，在 1961 至 1971 年間的普查中就反映出來 (Lau & So, 2005; So & Lau, 2013; T'sou, 1997a, 1997b)。幾十年前的香港，大部分的客家人都只操單一語言，但隨著社會逐漸傾向廣東話主導，他們現在基本上已同時操客家和廣東話。這種轉變，反映出社區層面出現持續的語言轉移。

使用少數方言者大幅減少的原因，最主要的是社會機制欠缺對這些語言的支援，其次是媒體和教育都以主導語言即廣東話為主，另外還包括操少數方言者與操廣東話者通婚，以及居住模式改變等 (Chow & Lau, 2001).。另一個因素可能是1970 年代香港社會出現的本土意識認同感 (So & Lau, 2013)，令說少數方言者受無形壓力改說廣東話 (Bacon-Shone & Bolton, 1998)。現行教育制度鼓吹兩文(中文和英文)三語(廣東話、英語和普通話)，窒礙了其他少數方言的使用和發展空間。

在欠缺支援下，客家話與其他少數方言正面臨沒落。隨著客家話瀕臨被廣東話淹沒的危機加深，實在有需要研究這種少數方言在不斷萎縮的客家族群之間如何運用。本研究以民族誌研究方法為導向 (Gal, 1979)，透過探索這種語言轉變的過程和動態，深入觀察香港的客家話社區內的客廣雙語行為。本研究旨在分析言語社區內人們的言語模式轉變，目標是研究本地客家話社區成員的個人和家庭之語言習慣。

研究於香港新界最北端、接壤深圳的邊境小鎮沙頭角進行。沙頭角起初是一個客家農村，因此相比起香港其他地區，一直擁有較高比例的客家人口。它屬於禁區，人口出入受到限制，或許因此當地人口變化較境內其他地方少。沙頭角的研究對象最初是透過研究者的個人網絡取得，然後透過他們找到其他親友加入，藉此增加研究對象數目。這種透過社會網絡找尋研究對象的做法，與 Milroy (1987) 研究貝爾法斯特言語的研究中使用的「朋友的朋友」方式相似。利用這種「雪球」技巧，就能夠接觸到香港不同地區的客家家庭。研究將沙頭角的接受研究人數限制在少於一半，以便與境內其他地區的數據作有系統的比較。

參加這項研究的合共 32 人，年齡由 9 至 82 歲，來自 9 個家庭，當中 13 人屬於祖父母輩，10 人屬父母輩，9 人屬兒孫輩。數據來自研究者親身到他們的家庭進行語言交流、觀察和非正式訪問。

分析操客家話者的語言選擇和使用方式之後，數據顯示香港客家家庭和個人採用客家話的方式有很大分別。有些人明顯傾向說客家話，並會將客家話傳承給後代。不過，大部分操客家話者採用以廣東話為主導的模式溝通，屬於客家話的「轉移者」而非「維持者」。在新一代中，只有在與祖父母或年長父母溝通時才會採用客家話或以客家話為主。統計數據亦顯示，這種變化與年齡與不同輩份有直接關係。換言之，客家社區正持續出現由客家話過渡至廣東話的跨世代語言轉移情況。

為了顯示研究對象如何在對話中使用雙語模式溝通，本文同時以談話分析方法 (Auer, 1984, 1995; Li, 2002)，分析了對話人的語碼轉換 (Gumperz, 1982) 方面的數據，藉此了解他們如何在日常對話中採用廣客兩種方言來達到具體之溝通目的。語碼轉換的定義是在同一段談話中，採用兩種或以上的語言或語言變體 (Auer, 1984)，是雙語者之間甚為突出的行為。

研究結果顯示，部分雙語者會在日常生活中，為了滿足不同言談功能或目的，不時交替使用客家話和廣東話。即使是那些被視為中度或強烈「轉移者」的人，也會基於不同的溝通目的，由廣東話轉用客家話。因此，雖然客家話在香港前景暗淡，但就目前而言，客家話在某程度上仍然是這些雙語者的重要語言資源。

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