Exemplary Capstone Projects 2024

(Independent research projects by final year English Majors)

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Preface

I am very pleased to introduce here the showcase of exemplary capstone projects from the Department of English at Chinese University of Hong Kong for 2024-2025.

Every year, students research and write their own projects under the supervision of faculty. These projects in one way or another help students make the transition to their lives after graduation – in a job, in training, or further studies. The projects presented here were nominated by supervisors as exemplary of the combination of original research, effective rhetoric, and imagination that the Department fosters in all graduates.

The projects cover a wide range of work in creativity, fieldwork, language education, and literary aesthetics. General approaches are focused on diverse specific topics including neurodiversity and communication, South Asian communities, the poet Mary Jean Chan, and the epic hero. All projects reflect the clear methods, strong theoretical basis, and rounded skills developed across the Department. In the end, though, the Department's work only goes so far, and each project also reflects the unique mind of the individual student – congratulations to all students.

David Huddart

Chair, Department of English

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

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Facework and Conflict Management: A Qualitative Study of Pakistani Students'

Groupwork Experience in Hong Kong's Higher Education

TSE Wing Yan, Arius

Department of English, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

ENGE4700 Independent Research Project

Supervisor: Dr. Tongle SUN

Co-supervisor: Prof. Wilkinson Daniel Wong GONZALES

Abstract

Student-to-student level intercultural conflict is a major part in higher education that involves face, power, and intercultural competence, especially for ethnic minorities. This study explores the intricacies behind Pakistani students' conflict negotiation strategies in Hong Kong's higher education groupwork experience. By using in-depth interviews and combining Ting-Toomey's Face Negotiation Theory and Holliday's notion of Small Culture as tools for qualitative interpretation, this study first examines Pakistani students' facework and conflict management style, compare for possible style variations with member's cultural or linguistic background, and provide insights for their underlying motivations using their narratives. Findings have shown that Pakistani students use different types of conflict management style and have different face concern that may or may not differ based on group member's cultural background, but surprisingly may differ depending on Pakistani group member's gender. The underlying motivations are ingroup-outgroup categorizations, their reactance against ethnic marginalization and reciprocity towards their group members' behavior, which affects their conflict experience both behaviorally and cognitively. This study provides a more comprehensive understanding of Pakistani students' conflict negotiation situation in relation to self- and other-face, power imbalance, and majority group's inclusion, calling for more awareness for intercultural competence in groupwork situations.

1. Introduction

In recent years, globalization and internationalization in the higher education sector have led to an increasing number of intercultural interactions in education institutions. This increase also implies that it is more likely for conflict to arise between students. One significant zone of conflict is in group work, where members must negotiate between one another for mutual objectives, potentially causing friction between members. Language plays as a key factor in creating, exacerbating or resolving these conflicts, as group members can employ different communication strategies to negotiate conflicts depending on their face concern, which is related to linguistic or cultural background, and power imbalance between dominant and minority ethnic group.

One key element that underscores communication strategies is the notion of face (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987), in other words, interlocutors' public self-image. In addressing how face-losing and face-saving behavior can influence conflict situations in intercultural encounter, Ting-Toomey's face negotiation theory (1998, 2001, 2005, 2018) and conflict management style (Ting-Toomey, 1998; Ting-Toomey et al., 2001) can help relating self-face and other-face concern with communication preference.

While Ting-Toomey's theory argues that conflict is mediated by clashing values from different cultural systems, the current conceptualization of culture under Holliday's (1999) notion of Small Culture further scrutinizes how individual style is informed by previous and current experience without reducing them to a fixed set of culture values, enabling more nuanced understandings of how style choices are shaped by past and ongoing interactions, including how ethnic minorities is situated in a less powerful position, and how intercultural competence may influence the interactions. The role that power plays in communication is particular salient when

the group involves marginalized groups, including ethnic minorities that do not share the same dominant language and cultural background with the majority group members. Meanwhile, intercultural competence can help addressing the situation with increased sensitivity about cultural knowledge, power dynamics, and sociolinguistic intricacies.

Putting into the context of Hong Kong, a majority of the population are Chinese and uses Chinese or Cantonese as their dominant language (Census and Statistics Department [CSD], 2022). Excluding domestic helpers, 4% of the population are non-Chinese, mostly with South Asian or Southeast Asian origin, such as Nepalese, Pakistanis, and Filipinos. Pakistani is one of the largest non-Cantonese speaking ethnic minorities group in higher education and their number has been steadily increasing (CSD, 2022). However, their higher education experience and conflict situation is scarcely explored. Existing literature either focus on Mainland Chinese students' conflict with Hong Kong students in higher education, or Pakistani students' secondary school experience. To account for this research gap, a recent study by Gao (2024) has taken a beginning step to explore Pakistani students' higher education experience. However, the study's major findings are relevant to institution-to-student level marginalization, leaving research gaps on student-to-student level interactions, especially on how they resolve intercultural conflict.

Given existing research gap, this study aims to explore how language is used in Pakistani students' intercultural conflict negotiation experience in group work setting. Then, this study also aims to provide explanations for the students' communicative choices. Incorporating Ting-Toomey's face negotiation theory with Holliday's notion of small culture, this study proposes the following research questions:

(1) What facework and conflict management styles do students with Pakistani backgrounds employ to resolve potential conflicts in intercultural groupwork?

(2) Do their styles vary depending on the linguistic / cultural background of their

groupmates?

(3) Under the lens of Small Culture, how to interpret their style choice and face-orientation

with respect to their experience?

2. **Background and Literature Review**

2.1 <u>Conflict, Intercultural Interaction and Face</u>

Borrowing views from the field of Psychology, the nature of conflict has long been grounded in interactions. Among the major theories surrounding the interactive nature of conflict, both Interpersonal Theory (Sullivan, 1953; Leary, 1957; Acton & Revelle, 2002) and Integrative Theory (Yalom, 1995) emphasize the social aspect of conflict and highlight interlocutors' effort to protect self-esteem and self-image as the source of small-group conflicts. While the latter put more focus on how status and power concerns are ingrained into conflict, the theories take similar point of view on the role self-image plays in conflict situations and see conflict management as an interpersonal negotiation of self-image and other's self-image. One of the widely accepted frameworks developed from this assumption is Rahim's (1983, 1992) model of conflict management style, which later inspires Ting-Toomey's Face Negotiation Model (1998, 2001, 2005, 2018) in the field of Intercultural Communication and will be used in the theoretical framework in this study. Considering how language plays an important role in interactions and the relationship between models of these two fields, the means to protect self-image which are grounded in language – the notion of face (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987) – is the key in understanding how conflicts unfold and resolve. In Brown and Levinson's notion of face, face is defined as the "public self-image" that one wants to claim for oneself.

The notion of face is also a key factor in higher education's intercultural interactions. In how multicultural university students define, construct and make sense of intercultural contact, Halualani (2008) shows that the complex and multilayered interpretations of interaction are significantly mediated by student's face concern. Seeing

how the concept of face plays an important role in both conflict and intercultural interaction, it is necessary to examine the role of face in intercultural conflicts both in terms of its influence on language style and interpretation of experience.

2.2 <u>The Role of Power in Intercultural Conflict</u>

Power dynamics between involved parties are crucial in conflict management. In the discussion of intercultural conflict that involves ethnic minorities, it is crucial to consider the role of power and how it influences negotiation process and outcome. Power asymmetry can influence negotiation process and outcome, with the lower-power individuals more likely to concede to the decision of higher-power individuals (Fousiani, 2020; Fousiani et al., 2021; 2022), which is reflected in their communication strategies and language use.

Current studies on the relationship between conflict and power focus largely focus on status difference between senior and junior workers (e.g. Brew & Cairns, 2004; Liu, 2018; Liu et al., 2019), or in professional settings (e.g. Schnurr & Chan, 2011; Lü, 2018). While common zones of conflict often involve multilayers of power concerns, it is worth scrutinizing how power imbalance on an ethnic level operates without the explicit influence from occupational factors. An examination on student-to-student level conflicts will enable insights on this matter and allow more in-depth understanding of the educational experience for ethnic minority groups.

2.3 <u>Conflict and Intercultural Competence</u>

Individual's intercultural competence is crucial in evaluating rapports and interactions in intercultural conflict because of the cognitive skills and knowledge required to observe nuance situational sentiments within conflict (Canary & Lakey, 2006;

Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). Out of the many definitions of this concept across the field of Intercultural Communication, Deardorff's (2006; 2008) process model of intercultural competence is mostly relevant to the study of conflict interactions because of its emphasis on the interactive nature of intercultural competence; in other words, intercultural competence is shaped by personal factors such as previous knowledge and attitudes and then transforms to intra- and interpersonal communications, such as in the enactment of verbal and non-verbal message exchanges during the conflict situation.

Empirical findings have linked intercultural competence with successful source elimination, conflict management and conflict resolution in higher education. The study of Murtiningsih (2016), for example, identified the source and outcome of conflict negotiation to be both relevant to student's intercultural competence, such as their competence in cultural sensitivity and sociolinguistic awareness. Examining conflicts between South Korean students and Indonesian exchange students in Kyungsung University, the strength of this study is to highlight the relationship between intercultural competence and racial stereotyping. The lack of sensitivity to power dynamics is encapsulated in both parties' deficient intercultural competence, creating conflicts and the inability to effectively solve them.

2.4 <u>Empirical Findings in Hong Kong</u>

Putting in the context of Hong Kong, empirical studies about Pakistani students' intergroup conflict with Hong Kong Chinese students are lacking. Existing studies largely focus on the conflict between Hong Kong students and Mainland Chinese students and has identified strong ingroup-outgroup divide and stereotyping as influential to the root cause and developmental trajectory of intergroup conflicts (e.g. Ladegaard & Cheng,

2014; Tian, 2019). As similar ingroup and outgroup boundaries are observed between Pakistani secondary school students and Hong Kong Chinese students (Shum et al., 2012), it is worth bridging the gap between the two groups of studies. While Gao (2024) takes the beginning step to bridge this gap by investigating Pakistani university students' marginalization, her major findings focus on institution-to-student level power imbalance and do not specifically examine conflict situation. Hence, this study aims to fill in the gap by investigating how Pakistani students negotiate conflicts with other students in Hong Kong's higher education.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

The importance of face in intercultural interaction and conflict negotiation has inspired this study to implement Ting-Toomey's Face Negotiation Theory to examine the relationship between face and language use in conflict situations. Meanwhile, to address the theory's limitation in providing explanations, this study incorporates Holliday's notion of small culture with the model for more nuanced understandings of individual's language choice.

2.5.1 *Face Negotiation Theory*

Face is found to be one key factor in intercultural interactions. How individuals maintain or disregard their face and the other members' face in conflict situations can be examined with Ting-Toomey's Face Negotiation Theory (1998, 2001, 2005, 2018), its relevant categorization of Conflict Management Style (Ting-Toomey, 1998; Ting-Toomey et al, 2021) and Face Negotiation Model (Ting-Toomey, 2005).

Using Brown and Levinson's (1978; 1987) notion of face as the basis, Face Negotiation Theory aims to identify the relationship between language use and its

underlying culture. In this theory, facework is the "communication strategies used to defend, challenge, support, or even upgrade self-face and other-face identity issues in an emotionally vulnerable encounter" (Ting-Toomey, 2018:776). Self-face is individual's public self-image and other-face, other's public self-image.

Based on the two dimensions of self-face and other-face and Rahim's conflict management style (1983, 1992), Ting-Toomey (1998) identifies five conflict management styles that encapsulates the concern of face in conflict negotiation process. Later, Ting-Toomey identifies three additional management styles of emotional expression, third party help, and neglect, to give a fuller picture of individual's strategy preference during conflict situation. The styles are as follows:

Table 1. Conflict Management Styles

Conflict Management Style	Description
Dominating	Promotes self-goal and self-interest above other's interest
Avoiding	Eludes conflict topic, party, or situation
Obliging	Promotes other's interest over self interest
Compromising	Reaches a midpoint agreement through a give-and-take concession
Integrating	Addresses both self-need and other's need; reflects need for solution closure
Emotional Expression	Uses emotion to guide conversation
Third Party Help	Appeals to outsiders, such as higher authority
Neglect	Uses passive-aggressive responses

The relationship between style choice and face-orientation can be explained using Face Negotiation Model (Ting-Toomey, 2005):

Figure 1. Face Negotiation Model

Individualistic → Independent → Self-face Maintenance → Dominating /Competing / Emotional Expression / Passive Aggressive

Collectivist → Interdependent → Mutual-Face Maintenance / Other Face Maintenance → Compromising /Integrating / Third-Party Help / Avoiding /Obliging
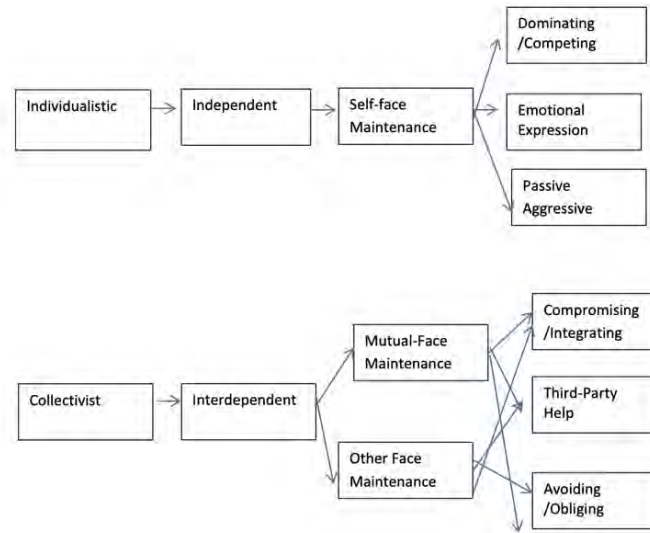
By using this model, identified management style choice can be traced back its face orientation, and possibly to the underlying cultural system.

Ting-Toomey's theory is not without its limitations. First, as Figure 1 has shown, the assumption behind this model takes an essentialist point of view, which is to explain interlocutor's behavior as the essence of their culture. The underlying culture can be categorized as either individualistic or collectivistic, overlooking the dynamics behind language behaviors and may possibly provide overgeneralizing explanations.

Second, although Ting-Toomey acknowledges that individual difference is one of the accountable factors, it is subordinated under a fixed set of cultural values, and can be reduced back to the two categories of cultural system. The underlying cultural system still prescribes and determines individual's behavior and is unlikely to change.

Therefore, although Ting-Toomey's model allows one to shed light on the role of face in conflict situation, it may not provide adequate explanations behind language behavior and communication strategies. A reconceptualization is required to provide more nuanced understanding of individual's choice.

2.5.2 *Small Culture*

To address the model's limitations, this study incorporates the notion of Small Culture (Holliday, 1999) into the interpretation of participant's communicative choice. Aligning with the current conceptualization of culture, it views culture as non-essentialist, dynamic and contested. The strength of this notion is to interpret previous experiences, such as peer, classroom or ethnic experience as building blocks of new small culture in groupwork situation. Meanwhile, new small culture can also evolve along with interaction at that moment. Hence, it allows scrutinization of individual's experience despite them sharing the same cultural or linguistic background, and refrains from reducing their beliefs, norms and values to individual's ethnic or cultural group.

3. Methodology

3.1 <u>Participants</u>

Participants are selected based on their cultural background and their previous experience in groupwork in Hong Kong's tertiary education institutes. As students with Pakistani background in higher education are uncommon, to facilitate effective participant identification, convenient and snowball sampling are used. Using these methods, two participants are selected. The first participant, under the pseudonym Ada, is first approached through convenient sampling at student hostel using interviewer's personal network. Ada then helps reaching the second participant, with the pseudonym Bella, with Ada's personal connection. The two participant's demographic information is as follows:

Table 2. Participants' Information

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Year of Study / Major	Cultural Background	Year of Residency in Hong Kong	First Language / Other Languages
Ada	22	F	Year 1 (Senior Entry) / CUHK English	Pakistani	Since Birth	L1: Urdu L2: English
Bella	21	F	Year 1 (Senior Entry) / HKU Comparative Literature	Pakistani	Since Birth	L1: Urdu L2: English / Cantonese

For other languages, despite not having learned Cantonese in any formal or school settings, Ada has reported that she understands basic Cantonese phrases commonly used

in daily conversations, such as "thank you" or "sorry". For Bella, she has learned

Cantonese from her secondary school, but her proficiency remains at beginning level.

Since both of them are Year 1 senior entry students, majority of their groupwork

experience comes from their community college, The University of Hong Kong School of

Professional and Continuing Education (HKUSPACE), where both of them were

Associate degree students majoring in English Language and Literature from the year

2022-2024.

3.2 Data Collection Method

After filling in consent form (See Appendix A), participants' basic demographic

information is first collected using pre-interview survey (See Appendix B). Then, a semi-

structured interview in two parts, with three to five days interval in between, is conducted

to gather information about their language style and experience during groupwork

interactions.

The first 30-minute part of the interview is conducted face-to-face and follows an

interview protocol amended from Chell's (2004) Critical Interview Technique to elicit

what happened, how conflict was managed, and the final outcome in particular

groupwork situation (See Appendix C). This technique is to extract relevant information

behind groupwork conflicts and identify crucial elements contributing to conflict

negotiation or style choice in that particular experience. To allow evaluation of any

changes in negotiation styles, the protocol is amended for additional questions about

comparison between experience working with members with same or different cultural

background respectively. In addition, to evaluate individual's intercultural competence,

reflective questions such as their recommendations for future students working in similar group compositions are also included.

After three to five days, the second 1-hour part of the interview is conducted through face-to-face or Zoom, depending on participant's availability and preference. The key is to allow participant to choose a mode they are comfortable with in order to minimize potential emotional distress during recall of negative groupwork experience. This part includes follow-up questions developed based on participant's initial response in the first interview, and stimulated recalls aiming to elicit actual language used in conflict situations. Participants are asked to imagine the interviewer as the interlocutor involved during groupwork conflict situations and recall actual language and actions done accordingly. This practice allows actual language data to be recorded and analyzed in order to examine their style choice. Data obtained from the interview are recorded, transcribed manually and then coded for further analysis.

This two-part practice is adopted from Dekker et al. (2008), in which participants familiarize themselves with the interviewer and interview questions in the first part of the interview and provide more detailed information in the second interview. Due to the potential face-threatening act of recalling negative groupwork experience and the demand on detailed recall, this approach can facilitate recollection of events and allow more nuanced details to be extracted. Participants can also be more comfortable in disclosing narratives related to their negative experience.

3.3 <u>Data Collection Procedure</u>

The first part of interview is conducted face-to-face with two participants individually in mid-October 2024. Participants also fill in consent form and pre-interview survey before the start of the interview. The two interviews last for half an hour respectively. Interview questions are also given to the participants in hard copy, with a reminder that relevant questions may appear in the second interview, to facilitate their recall of details in the situation. Interview data is recording and transcribed to identify face-threatening situations and develop follow-up questions based on relevant concepts, such as participant's view on language barrier and their ethnic identity.

The second part of interview is conducted approximately three to five days later, depending on participant's availability and preference. For Ada, her second interview is conducted three days later in face-to-face mode and lasts for 1 hour and 15 minutes. Bella's second interview is conducted on Zoom five days later than the initial interview and lasts for around 1 hour. Both participants are asked to recall actual groupwork situation and tell interviewers about what they would do or say in that situation. Interview data is recorded, manually transcribed and coded accordingly for further analysis.

3.4 <u>Data Analysis</u>

Language samples and recalled actions obtained from the second part of interview is analyzed to identify the conflict management style and underlying face-concern used in particular groupwork situation using Ting-Toomey's Face Negotiation Model and Conflict Management Style, answering research question 1. Afterwards, to answer research question 2, possible style changes depending on group member's cultural or

linguistic background will be identified using contextual information provided by the

participants. Then, guided by Holliday's notion of Small Culture, their style choice will

be interpreted with respect to intricacies in the relevant experience and context, including

members' cultural or linguistic background, to answer research question 3.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Participants' Style Choice and Relation with Interlocutor's Cultural Background

Based on participant's language data and actions recalled, three face-threatening

situations are identified, namely confronting potential non-contributing members, disagreeing on

work quality or workflow, and linguistic exclusion from other members. The third type of

situation is exclusively seen in groupwork with members from Hong Kong Chinese background,

as their first language, Cantonese, is the dominant language being used in groupwork

discussions. Language barrier becomes a major problem that Ada and Bella have to overcome

when working with those members.

Ada and Bella's conflict management style choice can be summarized in the table below:

Table 3. Ada and Bella's Conflict Management Style Choice

Face-threatening situations	Ada's Style	Bella's Style	
Confronting potential free riders	**Integrating** e.g. Uses hedging Avoids direct accusation	Hong Kong Chinese Member	**Dominating** e.g. Request to leave group Expresses self-need about grades
		Pakistani Male Member	**Neglect / Emotional Expression** e.g. Passive aggressive comments Expresses regret
		Pakistani Female Member	**Obliging** e.g. Offers help Explains based on member's conflict interest
Disagreeing with work quality / workflow	**Integrating / Third Party Help** e.g. Uses hedging Uses politeness marker (e.g.	Hong Kong Chinese Member	**Dominating / Emotional Expression** e.g. Requests to correct work herself Expresses dissatisfaction

| | could you please…)
Refers to marking rubrics / lecturer | Pakistani Male Member | **Dominating / No Mitigation**
e.g.
Uses personal attack
Uses profane language |
| | | Pakistani Female Member | **Compromising**
e.g.
Explains based on both member's conflict interest
Uses hedging in request |
| Handling language barrier / language exclusion | **Integrating**
e.g.
Tries to interpret messages using translator
Responds in English to subtly hint her existence
Takes a leadership role | **Avoiding**
e.g. totally avoids communication | |

From Table 3, it is found that Ada's style choice does not change with group member's cultural or linguistic background. Her major style choice is integrating, with slight preference for third party help.

Yet, for Bella, her style choice changes with group member's cultural background, and surprisingly also with member's gender, if the member is from the same cultural background as Bella. Her major style choice for Hong Kong Chinese members includes dominating and emotional expression, and she would sometimes use similar style with male members from the same Pakistani background. However, she would also use neglect and even no mitigation, such as using personal attack to confront Pakistani male members. Meanwhile, she switches to obliging and compromising if the members are of same gender and same cultural background as her.

4.2   Style Choice and Face Orientation

Ada and Bella's face orientation choice can be identified by putting their style choice onto Face Negotiation Model. The result is as follows:

Figure 2. Ada and Bella's Style Choice on Face Negotiation Model
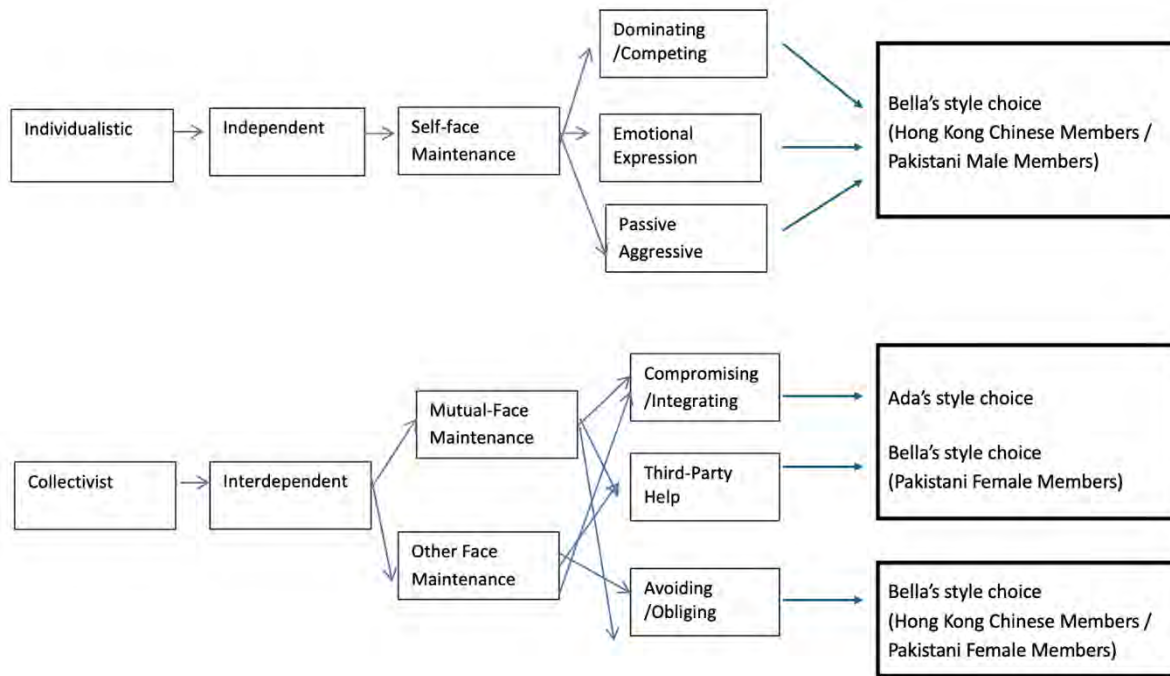
From Figure 2, it can be concluded that although sharing the same cultural background, Ada and Bella have different face maintenance orientation. Ada's choice reminds consistently mutual-face-orientated; Bella is self-face-orientated when working with Hong Kong Chinese members or Pakistani male members, but she sometimes uses avoiding when facing language barrier with Hong Kong Chinese members. However, when she works with Pakistani female members, she shifts as mutual-face maintenance orientated.

By examining how Ada and Bella choose to maintain different face with the model, four significance points for analysis are identified:

(A) Why would Ada maintain other-face and mutual-face regardless of members' cultural background?

(B) Why would Bella maintain self-face but sometimes avoids communication when working with Hong Kong Chinese members?

(C) Why would Bella maintain self-face while sometimes make no attempt to save face when working with Pakistani male members?

(D) Why would Bella maintain other-face and mutual-face when working with Pakistani female members?

These four questions are guiding questions to interpret their experience. They will be discussed in the following sections with reference to the interview data to provide insights into the reasons behind. However, as the focus of this study is on intercultural conflict, question (C) and (D) will be combined to examine Bella's underlying motivation in relation to intercultural conflict only.

4.3 Ada's Groupwork Experience

The following discussion is to provide possible explanations behind Ada's preference of mutual-face maintenance facework and her disregard of member's cultural background upon deciding conflict management style. The explanations are divided into two interrelated parts: first, the underlying reasons behind her mutual-face maintenance preference. Second, her motivations to use the same style regardless of member's cultural background.

4.3.1 *Ada's Mutual-face Maintenance: Anxiety to Combat Misrepresentation and Act of Convergence*

Upon reflecting on her communication preference, the actual quote from Ada suggests her awareness of negative stereotypes towards her ethnic group:

I think I have some sort of problem of wanting everyone around me to like me. (Ada, second interview)

Let's say instances of doing illegal stuff. It is understandable that some locals may have a bad image of people like us. So I think I want to change their views on their presumptions or assumptions about us. (Ada, second interview)

The key issue here is how negative stereotypes and misrepresentations becomes threats to ethnic identity and invites reactance as a form of social resistance. Stereotyping threatens ethnic identity because of its imposition of a set of social norms and values that challenge existing ones with the ethnic group (de Lemus et al., 2015). One of the responses to this challenge is group reactance; initiated by members of the ethnic group, they will attempt to improve group image and counter those stereotypes through different means, especially during intercultural or intergroup conflict (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Ada's decision to use mutual-face orientated styles, as a way to address to other's self-image, can be seen as her attempt to portray herself in a positive light as a response to the stereotypes that associates her ethnic group with unlawful behaviors.

By considering the underlying concern, Ada's choice can be seen as tactics to protect her self-face through treating the dominant ethnic group's other-face as the central concern. This tactic is different from the mutual-face orientation in Ting-Toomey's original model, which does

not differentiate status or priority between self-face or other-face for interlocutors with power imbalance.

Ada's choice is not just influenced by the broader social constructs in the society. Her narrative reflects her choice is reciprocal of the positive experience she has had with Hong Kong Chinese members to overcome language barrier. To communicate and resolve potential conflicts with Ada, they use translators facilitated with body gestures and Chinglish. Meanwhile, Ada also responds in the same way, and combines the basic Cantonese vocabulary she knows with English. She describes the interactions in a positive light and emphasizes the reciprocity in interactions:

It is heartwarming to see that they're trying their best to make sure that whatever message that they're trying to convey is understood by me. (Ada, second interview)

It is a two-way relationship. (Ada, second interview)

Viewing from the notion of face and conflict management style, Ada's members' behavior is a way of integrating with an aim to maintain mutual face, especially Ada's self-face concern, beyond the constraints of language. In particular, the use of Chinglish helps bridge the gap between Ada and other members by addressing to the language preference of every member. This use of dynamic code-switching aligns with the act of convergence in Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles et al., 1987), in which both parties adapt each other's language and communication choice to meet each other's communication approach. This act can facilitate resolution of conflict situation through signaling respect and desire to preserve interpersonal relationship.

With Ada's members' communication strategy in consideration, Ada's style can be viewed as an act of accommodation to her member's style choice. This act manifests in two levels: language choice and conflict management style.

4.3.2 *Ada's Disregard of Cultural Background: Weak Intercultural Group Boundary*

To account for Ada's uniform conflict management style choice for members across all cultural background, it is found that she believes culture is not the cause for conflicts, nor a motivation behind conflict negotiation:

I don't think culture plays a role when there is a conflict in the group. (Ada, first interview)

If someone's not cooperating, I don't see if they're from my culture or if they're local. (Ada, first interview)

However, she believes one salient difference between members from different cultural background is in language:

I think one of the most obvious reasons is definitely the language barrier. (Ada, first interview)

Drawing from the quotes above, Ada's perception about intergroup boundaries is related to linguistic background rather than individual's cultural background. In other words, her perception about cultural level intergroup boundaries is weak, and she believes the obstacle in communication and conflict negotiation is more about language than culture. Yet, even though language barrier does exist, the boundary is dissolved by her experience with group members of other linguistic background. As shown in the previous session, language barrier has become the

group's opportunity for communication accommodation to happen and foster mutual face maintenance. According to Gallois et al., (2005), one function of accommodation is to identify in-group members through the act of convergence. Hence, the interaction between Ada and Cantonese-speaking members not only has facilitated reciprocal in their conflict management style, but has also acted as behavioral ritual to dissolve pre-existing intergroup boundaries and invite the ethnic minority member into the dominant group. This kind of adjustment, as Gallois and Giles (1998) has suggested, does not simply operate within interactions. It can also operate on a cognitive level and shape Ada's perception about ingroup and outgroup, motivating her to disregard explicit cultural boundaries and hence using the same style for members across all cultural backgrounds.

4.4 <u>Bella's Groupwork Experience with Hong Kong Chinese Members: Power Dynamics and Marginalization</u>

This section aims at providing insights into the underlying motivation behind Bella's choice of self-face maintenance and avoidance when working with members from the majority group in Hong Kong's society. During the interview, Bella explicitly states that her experience working with them was negative:

If they don't care, why should I care? You should just care about your grade and then just go with the flow and then just complain about it. (Bella, second interview)

This actual quote from Bella highlights her anger and frustration, and her determination to choose for self-protection in the group. To explain for this, the key issue is how power dynamics and ethnic marginalization can influence conflict management style when working with members from a dominant culture. The two significant anecdotes that are involved in ethnic marginalization are racial discrimination and linguistic exclusion. First, Bella has faced racial

discrimination from group members in class, including insulting her with racial slurs and deliberate spatial exclusion:

I think it was something like, koi hai so loi (佢係傻佬, she is dumb) or something like ar char(呀差, racial slur for South Asian in Hong Kong). (Bella, second interview)

I remember we used to meet in computer room to do discussions and they would sit far away from me and I would sit alone in a corner. (Bella, second interview)

Second, power inequality also underscores intragroup linguistic exclusion. Bella is the only group member who does not know Cantonese, the dominant language in the society. Facing language barrier, the other group members do not address this problem, but rather choose to discuss groupwork in Cantonese, completely excluding Bella from discussion, or simply ignore Bella's input:

When we used to discuss in the group, they would basically just ignore me or give me very stupid relies. (Bella, second interview)

Bella's experience aligns with Shum et al. (2012)'s findings that racial discrimination is part of the educational experience for many Pakistani students, and also resonating with Lee and Law (2016) and Gao (2024)'s findings that Pakistani ethnic group attains a weaker position and is perceived as being subordinated to the Hong Kong Chinese majority. As shown in the second anecdote, power dynamics also influence the power to determine within-group communication choice. In this groupwork culture, language choice and the focal of interaction are held in the hands of the majority group. This relationship between power and communication aligns with Jackson's (2020) idea that party with more power can determine how communication unfolds. It also aligns with Henry (2015) that low-power group tend to speak a different language other than

the high-power dominating group. It reaffirms that the marginalization of Pakistani students is partially relevant to the language barrier between the minority group and the majority Cantonese-speaking group in Hong Kong.

These two anecdotes also show how social categorization can lead to otherization and marginalization. Racial discrimination and linguistic exclusion act as rituals to categorizing Bella as out-group members subordinated to the dominant Hong Kong culture. Based on these categorizations, ingroup and outgroup members are treated differently, with discrimination against outgroup members (Brown & Hewstone, 2005), positioning her as the less powerful member in the binary opposite construct of "dominating Hong Kong Chinese student versus dominated Pakistani student" in a "us vs them" mindset. As one of the negative consequences of otherization is the disregard of outgroup member's values and preferences (Holliday, 2010), Bella's language preference and need is neglected in the group, possibly leading to damage to her self-image and esteem in groupwork situation.

Given how Bella's self-face is damaged by the group member's behavior, it is not surprising to see her respond with self-face orientated styles to reflect her already damaged self-image. In fact, both high self-face maintenance preference and avoidance can be viewed as defensive mechanisms to strive for dignity and respect and also as means to resist against and regain power (Henry, 2015). However, as Jackson (2020) has stated, resistance process may further induce sidelining and marginalization. This not only operates as external behavior that pushes away group members, such as totally avoiding communication and requesting members to leave groups. The reinforcement of marginalization can also operate in the underlying psychological process. It is evident in Bella's narrative that she is also otherizing her group members and even the entire majority group. When asked about suggestions for future Hong

Kong Chinese students working with Pakistani students, Bella positions the two groups in an "us" vs "them" narrative:

> *We do not really understand how you come up with words* (Bella, second interview)

> *Try to use English more and be accepted towards us instead of sitting in groups and just talking shit about us.* (Bella, second interview)

Here, Bella has over-projected her negative impression towards Hong Kong Chinese group members in previous experience onto future experience and escalate intrapersonal experience as intragroup prejudice. As the approach of this study is to interpret groupwork experience, the key is not to identify a causal relationship between Bella's otherizing tendency and her being otherized during her groupwork, nor is it known based on existing data. Rather, existing data points to the vicious cycle between otherization from the majority group and minority individual's otherization tendency. This vicious cycle affects Bella's mindset, face concern and behavior during conflict negotiation, showing that power imbalance can detrimentally influence groupwork dynamics and language use.

4.5 <u>Bella's Groupwork Experience with Pakistani Members: Further Investigation into Linguistic Otherization and Ingroup Boundary</u>

As the focus of this study is on intercultural interaction, it is tempting to conclude that Bella's experience working with members with the same cultural background is irrelevant to this study. However, as Bennet (1993) has stated, culture can only be understood when reference is made to another culture. In other words, since Bella's style choice differ by interlocutor's cultural background, by examining its underlying motivations, Bella's assumptions about cultural

differences or relevant mindsets can be understood in a fuller picture to provide more comprehensive insights about intercultural conflicts between minority group and majority group.

Bella's different approach in conflict management style and face-orientation is motivated by her belief that cultural difference cannot be overcome:

I think it would be due to cultural differences, since we also have a disparity in terms of language. (Bella, second interview)

If I scold Pakistani, I think the Chinese will get more offended than a Pakistani because they would know that maybe somehow I'm being humorous and I'm not being like, you know, that rude. (Bella, second interview)

For her, the incompatibility of cultural difference is strongly linked with language barrier. She believes that the subtle meaning behind her language is better understood for members coming from her same cultural background. This belief not only explains her attempt to have no mitigation towards Pakistani male members, but also points to the reason behind her relatively more polite approach to Hong Kong Chinese members, despite retaining the same self-face maintenance orientation.

Relating this to the study by Grant et al. (2022) on the hidden threat of language barrier to conflict resolution, Bella's choice and motivation show that the influence of such barrier is more complex. Although Bella's experience contradicts with Grant et al.'s (2022) findings that language barrier between cultural groups creates higher level of hatred when they use lingua franca, the negative emotions, as shown by previous section, seem to still exist in Bella's mind. In other words, while a language barrier can induce negative emotions, it may possibly impede

the expression of hatred, or other kinds of negative emotions, when they negotiate conflict with other members.

Meanwhile, there is a significant difference between Bella's style choice for Pakistani male and female members. When asking for the motivations behind such difference, Bella's answer also displays a strong ingroup-outgroup divide:

So I think for females, they would just be, you know, very considerate if you just talk to them properly and nicely. But for men, they're very, I don't know, very, what's the word I forgot? Very entitled. (Bella, second interview)

For men, they've been told that education has no… you know, good impact on you and you'll just end up in construction. (Bella, second interview)

For Bella, otherization does not simply happens between cultural groups. This process also happens between gender within her own culture. However, the motivation behind such divide, while being different from that between cultural groups, is related to how the Pakistani ethnic group is otherized in the broader context of the whole Hong Kong society. Pakistani male's lack of cultural capital and job prosperity aligns with Lee and Law's (2014) findings, and this study has shown that this deficit can create indirect impact beyond the particular gender group. It can implicitly influence Pakistani female students' mindset, and when complicated by otherization tendency, can cause a significant difference in language choice during conflict negotiation. In short, although this difference exists for interlocutors with the same cultural background, the underlying motivation is highly racialized and related to intercultural relationship on a societal level.

Due to the scope of this study, nuances behind this gender divide will not be discussed in detail. However, the divide between interactions for male and female Pakistani group members is beyond expectation and worth further investigation. Further studies about the role of gender in Pakistani student's conflict experience is recommended for more detailed insights on this issue.

4.6 <u>General Discussion: Intercultural Competence</u>

Summarizing Ada and Bella's experience, it can be found that the underlying motivations point to the importance of intercultural competence in conflict negotiation. It is because personal level sentiments such as knowledge, awareness or mindset would transform to either challenges or facilitators in interaction or conflict situations (Deardorff, 2006; 2008). In the case for Ada and Bella, it is both their personal level sentiments and their group member's sentiments that interrelatedly contribute to conflict management style and face concern in the conflict situation. In other words, their style choice is product of the power imbalance on the micro intragroup level as well as on the macro societal level, mediated by inclusion or exclusion from their other group members, and their own ingroup-outgroup mindset. Behind this otherization process is the need to improve sociolinguistic awareness and sensitivity to power imbalance (Murtiningsih, 2016), which are all encapsulated under intercultural competence. hence, to facilitate more effective conflict style choice behaviorally and perceptually, intercultural competence for both parties should be improved and promoted.

5. Conclusion

Ada and Bella's experience have shown that being an ethnic minority in Hong Kong has influenced their conflict management style and face-orientation in different ways. Language barrier, negative stereotypes and marginalization have positioned them as out-group unfavorable members in the society, pressurizing them to negotiate ways to regain power in the social construct.

Another insight from the experiences is that conflict negotiation choice is reciprocal of the group and power dynamics in that conflict situation, and the behavior of other members. Despite the implicit power imbalance underneath dominant and non-dominant ethnic group, member's inclusion or exclusion and its impact on ethnic minorities' self-face can influence ethnic minorities' face-orientation. It either encourages mutual-face concern through the act of convergence, or invokes high self-face maintenance styles through eliciting resistance against power dominance.

Ada and Bella's experience has highlighted the importance of intercultural competence in higher education. It encapsulates the above experience and is crucial in facilitating conflict management and resolution. Otherization mindset and insensitivity to power can be better combated when intercultural competence is trained.

For theoretical implication, this study has shown that incorporating the notion of Small Culture with Ting-Toomey's Face Negotiation Theory can provide more in-depth insights into the motivations behind face concerns and communication styles in intercultural groupwork.

For societal implication, this study has shown that otherization and "us vs them" mindset on both individual and societal level have significantly influenced conflict experiences in Pakistani student's groupwork. The government and education institutions should hold initiative programmes and workshops to promote intercultural competence such that otherizing mindset can be actively combated. Meanwhile, group member's linguistic inclusion has shown to be beneficial to conflict negotiations. Education institutions should provide assistance to intercultural groups with language barrier so that higher education can be more culturally inclusive.

Two of the limitations of this study is that first, this study does not recruit every member in a particular group work situation as participants. Hence, actual rapport and interaction are not recorded to examine the perceived face orientation and motivation by the other parties, especially concerns for the majority Hong Kong Chinese students. Second, since Bella is reached through the help of Ada, their level of familiarity and social distance with interviewer is different. This difference may influence their willingness to disclosure information about groupwork experience and affect findings.

Suggestions for further studies include recruiting all members in an intercultural groupwork to study the role of face in interactions between majority and minority ethnic groups. Additionally, as one surprising finding in this study is the role of gender in Pakistani student's conflict management style choice, further investigation into the relationship between gender and motivations behind conflict management style is recommended.

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Appendix A: Consent Form

The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK)
Department of English
Informed Consent Form for Adults

Project Title: Facework and Conflict Management: A Qualitative Study of Pakistani Students' Groupwork Experience in Hong Kong's Higher Education

Principal Investigator: Tse Wing Yan, Arius

Supervisor:

Dr. Tongle Sun / Prof. Wilkinson Daniel Wong Gonzales

Department of English, The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK)

Description of the Study:

The purpose of this study is to examine the intercultural conflict management styles employed by Hong Kong Pakistani university students and its relationship with groupmates' linguistic or cultural backgrounds. This research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the underlying motivations that influence intercultural communication strategies in universities.

Questions to be Asked:

Participants will be asked to recall their experience working with students from the same cultural background and from different cultural background respectively. The total interview time is approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Follow-up questions may be asked via email or phone after the initial interview.

Target Participants / Inclusion Criteria:

- Age 18-25

- Pakistani

- University Student

- Had groupwork experience with students from the same and different cultural background (i.e. ethnic Chinese) recently

Risks:

There are minimal risks associated with this study. However, participants may feel discomfort when discussing their groupwork experience. Sensitive questions regarding conflicts in groupwork and perceptions about students from other cultural backgrounds may arise.

Benefits:

Participants may benefit from increased awareness of their communication strategies in academic groupwork, as well as reflection on their intercultural competence. The findings of this study may also contribute to resources promoting cultural inclusivity in tertiary education in Hong Kong.

Information Protection:

All personal information collected will be kept confidential and stored securely. Data will be anonymized to protect participants' identities, and only aggregated results will be reported.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

Contact Details:

For any questions, concerns, or complaints, please contact:

Name	Tse Wing Yan, Arius
Email	1155205503@link.cuhk.edu.hk
Phone	

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I understand the nature of this study and agree that the information collected will be kept by the researcher for at least 30 days beyond the end of the study.

By signing below, I indicate my consent to:

- ☐ Take part in the study.

- ☐ Agree to audio-recording during the procedure.

Signature of
Participant: _____   Date: _____

(Printed Name: _____)

Signature of Person
Obtaining Consent: _____   Date: _____

(Printed Name: _____)

Appendix B – Pre-interview Survey

1. Basic information

      Age: _____
      Gender: _____

      Place of Birth: _____

      Year of residency in Hong Kong: _____

      First language(s):_____

      Other languages: _____

2. Have you taken any courses related to concepts in intercultural communication before?

      Yes / No

3. On a scale of 1-7, how would you rate your own intercultural competence? Intercultural competence is "the capability to shift one's cultural perspective and appropriately adapt behavior to cultural differences and commonalities" (Hammer, 2015, p. 483)

        1 (Very Incompetent)

        2 (Incompetent)

        3 (Slightly incompetent)

        4 (Neutral)

        5 (Slightly competent)

        6 (Competent)

        7 (Very Competent)

Appendix C – Interview Questions

1. What are your experiences working with students/groupmates from different linguistic or cultural backgrounds? Please specify.

2. As a university student, have you experienced any conflictual situation when working on a group project?

A. Experience working with students from the same cultural background

Recall a recent experience when you work with student from your same cultural background in a group project.

    i)   Discuss your overall experience with this particular group project.
    ii)   Any potential conflicts / disagreements / misunderstandings / crisis within the group?
    iii)   Recall the time where potential conflicts or disagreements arise. What had happened? (Ask for possible recall of exact wording)
- a. What happened next? (Ask for possible recall of exact wording)
- b. Why did it happen?
- c. How did it happen?
- d. With whom did it happen?
- e. What did you feel?
- f. What were the consequences – immediately and longer term?
- g. How did the other group members cope?
- h. Would you have done something differently if you were in the same situation again?
- i. Would you have done something differently if your groupmate comes from another cultural / linguistic background?
- j. How would you evaluate your strength(s) and weakness(es) when it comes to communicating and resolving potential crisis(es) with your groupmate?
- k. Overall, when compared to working with students from mainstream Hong Kong culture (ethnic Chinese?), what do you think are the pros and cons to work with students from the same cultural background?

B. Experience working with students from mainstream Hong Kong culture in a group project
Recall a recent experience when you work with student from mainstream Hong Kong culture
(i.e. ethnic Chinese) in a group project.

   i) Discuss your overall experience with this particular group project.

   ii) Any potential conflicts / disagreements / misunderstandings / crisis within the group?

   iii) Recall the time where potential conflicts or disagreements arise. What had happened? (Ask
   for possible recall of exact wording)

         a. What happened next?

         b. Why did it happen?

         c. How did it happen?

         d. With whom did it happen?

         e. What did you feel?

         f. What were the consequences – immediately and longer term?

         g. How did the other group members cope?

         h. Would you have done something differently if you were in the same situation again?

         i. Would you have done something differently if your groupmate comes from the same
         cultural / linguistic background?

         j. How would you evaluate your strength(s) and weakness(es) when it comes to
         communicating and resolving potential crisis(es) with your groupmate?

C. Overall Reflection

i) Overall, when compared to working with students from the same cultural background, what
are the pros and cons to work with students from a different cultural / linguistic background?

ii) Any suggestions you would make to future Pakistani students wishing to work with students
from mainstream Hong Kong culture in a group project?

iii) Any suggestions for Hong Kong Chinese students who wish to work with students from a
different linguistic/cultural background in a group project?

Critical Reflection

This study is the culmination of what I have learnt from my previous courses, including ENGE2700 Language and Intercultural Communication, ENGE 2960 The World in English: An Oxford Summer Programme and ENGE3780 Methods in Applied Linguistics Research. The course Language and Intercultural Communication has informed me of the need to address implicit intercultural issues in higher education, and has also taught me important concepts used in this project, such as intercultural competence and Small Culture. Meanwhile, the latter two courses taught me how to conduct a research. The Oxford Summer Programme gave me first-hand experience in conducting interviews and doing qualitative analysis, and has taught me to expect for uncertainties during data collection; whereas the Methods course informed me of the basic principles in doing a research, the key elements in drafting interview questions, and the ways to code and analyze data. I have the fortune to be supervised by the instructors in these courses: my supervisor Dr. Tongle Sun and co-supervisor Prof. Wilkinson Daniel Wong Gonzales. I would like to use this opportunity to thank both of them; without your support and guidance in the courses and during my capstone project, this project would not have been successful.

I see the greatest strength in my project to be critically combining the use of two models/theories under distinctive paradigms. Ting-Toomey's theory is typically constructivist, whereas Adrian Holliday's Small Culture tends to be used by interpretivist. At first, I believed it was quite impossible to combine them in one study, leaving a disorganized and misfocused analysis. Yet, thanks to the constant reminder to critically evaluate theories in Language and Intercultural Communication, and the idea about possibly combining two paradigms from the Methods course, I came up with the incorporation and provides a more in-depth analysis about participants' style choice. I believe this skill will be crucial in my future pursue of Applied Linguistics research in postgraduate program; I should always examine my assumptions about the theories and paradigms, and look for possibilities to explain the data outside the box.

The biggest area of improvement in my project is the skills in searching for existing background concepts and literature review. Initially, I struggled in finding a connection between many of them because the keywords I have put on search engines are umbrella terms like "intercultural conflicts", and I simply browsed all of them without paying attention to the types of literature (e.g. empirical findings or Elements or meta-analysis). This lack of awareness in how to search for academic sources and distinguish between genres has made the search overwhelming, and I simply gave up on finding meaningful connections, leading to a lack of focus in my initial analysis. I believe the lack of focus is still a problem in the paper right now because there are too many concepts. In later stages of my project, I started to realize that there are genre differences between different kinds of journal articles (or academic sources) and I can make good use of them to search for more meaningful and creditable academic sources. For example, I can use a meta-analysis to help me find empirical findings in a certain context, and I can look for related concepts or studies using the reference list in any good academic sources I

have found. Although this realization may be too late for this project, I believe it will be useful for my future research in helping me draw better roadmaps and gain more comprehensive understandings.

One of the biggest challenges in this project is the unpredictability in data collection procedure, both during finding participants and collecting interview data. My original topic is to observe actual interactions in an intercultural group, and I attempted to recruit every member. However, due to the unavailability of target participants, I have to change my topic to accommodate for the participants I have found. Meanwhile, as I set my topic to be the differences between cultural sociopragmatic expectations, the participants' answers are quite out of my expectations, and I have to change my topic once again. Working within a limited time has given me great anxiety, but I have learnt that flexibility is the key in doing qualitative study. I have to be patient and keep calm when these uncertainties happen, and make amendments accordingly. Although qualitative study can be a time-consuming process, I have gained confidence from this capstone project because I can work through it and overcome the huge emotional turmoil. This experience will be very valuable in my future research studies when I do qualitative studies again.

In the future, I will be either pursuing a research-intensive MA Linguistics program in Lancaster or continue my study as an MPhil in Applied English Linguistics in CUHK. The skills I have learned from the project, including thinking critically and creatively, strategically search for academic sources, and being flexible when facing uncertainties, will be useful in the postgraduate program, and I will be forever grateful for having completed this project.

Investigating the prevalence of American English features among local CUHK students

in Hong Kong

Ho Yee Leung

Department of English, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

ENGE4700: Independent Research Project

Supervised by Professor Jette Hansen Edwards

Abstract

Previous studies have highlighted a growing prevalence of American English (AmE) in Hong Kong, a former British colony. This mixed-method study investigates AmE features among ten local English majors from the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), focusing on rhoticity, flapping, T-Glottalization, and the BATH and LOT lexical sets. Participants read English texts and answered five questions about their perceived accents and accent preferences. Speech data from both reading and interview tasks were analyzed using Pratt and transcribed into IPA. Drawing on Hansen Edwards' study (2016), this research aims to assess the prevalence of AmE features, the degree to which speakers aspire to adopt them, and the influences on their accents, while also analyzing style-shifting between AmE and British English (BrE) across the two tasks. Findings indicate that despite the prestige associated with BrE, AmE is increasingly prominent in Hong Kong. Most students aim for BrE while exhibiting AmE features, likely due to globalization and American media. However, further research is needed to examine the impact of American media on accents in Hong Kong, especially in education.

Keywords: English accents, American English, Hong Kong, style-shifting, American media.

1. **Introduction**

The history of Hong Kong's English language usage is closely tied to its colonial past and its status as a Special Administrative Region of China. Following the handover from British rule on July 1, 1997, Hong Kong retained English as one of its official languages along with Chinese, which includes both standard written Chinese and the vernacular Cantonese. Hong Kong's education language policy promotes "biliteracy and trilingualism," emphasizing proficiency in Cantonese, English, and Putonghua (Li, 2017). This policy reflects the region's distinctive linguistic environment, where English plays a significant role in formal domains such as government, business, and law (Evans, 2011; Li, 1999; Setter, 2010). For instance, the *South China Morning Post* was once seen as a status symbol (Chan, 2000). In the colonial era, English language proficiency signified status and power. Just as top executives in leading companies consistently read the Post, employees should also stay updated with it to understand their superiors' perspectives (Chan, 2000).

Unsurprisingly, the status of English in Hong Kong has remained relatively stable since the handover (Li, 1999). Its official status means that English is prevalent in many aspects of daily life, including media, business documents, educational materials, and public signage (Luke & Richards, 1982). Despite the shift in sovereignty, English remains a prestigious language, often viewed as a crucial asset for social mobility and professional

advancement (Boyle 1995; Evans, 2009, 2011; Hansen Edwards, 2015; Lai, 2013; Li 1999; Luke & Richards. 1982). This perception is ingrained in white-collar professions, where strong English communication skills are expected, contrasting with blue-collar jobs that may not require such proficiency (Lin, 1996).

While both British English (BrE) and American English (AmE) norms are present in the education sector, research indicates a preference for BrE among Hong Kong speakers (Grove 2011; Hansen Edwards, 2016; Lau & Ho, 2023; Li, 1999). Nevertheless, Hansen Edwards' research (2016) demonstrates the emergence of AmE features in English spoken in traditionally BrE-oriented societies. Her study (2016) reveals a steady increase in AmE characteristics, with 93% of participants exhibiting some AmE features, underscoring AmE's rising prestige in Hong Kong. This growing preference for AmE may be attributed to heightened exposure through American media (Chan, 2018; Hansen Edwards, 2016; Lau & Ho, 2023).

Researchers have noted the significance of this media influence, especially considering the current generation's access to global digital platforms like YouTube, which may impact how English is learned and used worldwide (e.g., Bielby & Harrington, 2008; Blommaert, 2009; Bolton, 2008; Hansen Edwards, 2016; Holt & Perren, 2009). In Asia, the impact of American media on English language learning and usage has been acknowledged by scholars (e.g., Bolton, 2008; Hansen Edwards, 2016; Lau & Ho, 2023; Kirkpatrick, 2007).

However, the swift pace of change in this area necessitates further investigation.

This investigation builds on Hansen Edwards' 2016 research titled "Accent preferences and the use of AmE features in Hong Kong: A preliminary study," motivated by the increasing prominence of AmE in Hong Kong and the need to understand its impact on experienced English speakers. The study analyzes the prevalence of AmE features among Hong Kong university students. By examining shifts in usage patterns, attitudes, and influences on accents over the past eight years, this research seeks to quantify AmE feature usage and explore the motivations behind students' accent preferences, thereby addressing a gap in the existing literature on English accents in Hong Kong.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Exonormative Hong Kong

2.1.1. Kachru's Three-Concentric Model

Kachru (1985) categorizes the global English-speaking community into three concentric circles. The Inner Circle comprises "norm-providing" countries where English is the native language, such as the UK and the US. The Outer Circle includes former British and American colonies where English has become an official language; Hong Kong falls into this category due to its colonial past. The Expanding Circle consists of countries without historical connections to English, such as Brazil and Russia, and these nations are regarded as "norm-dependent."

Nevertheless, like other frameworks for model design, the Three Circles framework has faced criticism for failing to adequately reflect the diversity and evolving nature of English-speaking communities in a rapidly globalizing world (Bruthiaux, 2003; Evans, 2014).

2.1.2. Englishes in Hong Kong

Hong Kong is recognized for its strong exonormative focus on native-speaker models; BrE and AmE are more preferred in the city (Chan, 2013, 2016; Chan, 2016/2017, 2018; Grove 2011; Hansen Edwards, 2016; Kang, 2015; Li, 2009). Rindal (2010) stated that in Norway, as in many other nations where English is learned as a second or foreign language,

students are exposed to two main varieties: BrE and AmE.

The findings from Chan's 2013 study reinforce that many local teachers adhere to exonormative standards of English, often viewing Hong Kong English (HKE) as a "nonstandard" variety. This labeling contributes to a perception of HKE as "broken," "inaccurate," and "stigmatised," which may affect both teaching practices and students' attitudes toward their language use (Chan, 2013). Likewise, Lee and Collins (2006) stated that Hong Kong people's acceptance of HKE in terms of lexico-grammar is rather low, and native accents are still viewed favorably compared to those with more identifiable Hong Kong phonological characteristics (Setter et al., 2014).

Between BrE and AmE, BrE is favored in various sectors in Hong Kong, including education (Grove 2011; Hansen Edwards, 2016; Lau & Ho, 2023; Li, 1999, 2017). The "traditionalist" approach prevails in English language teaching with a fixed curriculum based on BrE (Sewell, 2009). Chan's 2013 research revealed that most professionals in Hong Kong preferred a British accent, followed by American, Australian, and Hong Kong accents across different contexts, including teaching, news broadcasting, business meetings, job interviews, giving directions to native-speaking tourists, and socializing with non-native speakers. Chan attributed this preference for BrE to Hong Kong's colonial history, suggesting a bias or inclination towards BrE among working adults in the region.

2.2. The Rise of American English in Hong Kong

In 2016, Hansen Edwards discussed Zhang's (2013) examination of attitudes toward AmE, Received Pronunciation (RP) of BrE, Mandarin-accented English, and HKE. Participants rated these varieties, finding AmE the most preferred, followed by RP. These findings indicate a shift in language use and attitudes: AmE is gaining prestige in Hong Kong, even as BrE remains popular.

Research on phonological features of HKE suggests that some AmE characteristics are emerging. Bolton and Kwok (1990) found that about 10% of university students adopted AmE features, such as flapping and the [æ] vowel in the BATH lexical set, despite all participants being non-rhotic. In 2008, Deterding, Wong, and Kirkpatrick reported that 40% of participants exhibited AmE pronunciation, including rhoticity. Eight years later, Hansen Edwards (2016) found that 88% of her participants exhibited rhoticity at some level, indicating a rapid growth in American influence in the former British colony.

This increasing use of AmE features may be attributed to greater exposure to AmE accents through the global dominance of American media. Hansen Edwards (2016) noted that while precise statistics on the proportion of AmE content across global digital platforms are lacking, Chan (2013) found that American media predominates over British and other forms of media in Hong Kong. Additionally, the head of YouTube content partnerships in Hong

Kong pointed out that a significant amount of viewed content originates from the U.S.

(Woodhouse, 2015).

As American media continues to dominate, the perception of English evolves, with

AmE becoming increasingly viewed as a global standard (Lau & Ho, 2023). Therefore, it is

crucial to assess the changes in the accents of English speakers in Hong Kong.

2.3. American English Features

2.3.1. Postvocalic [ɹ]

AmE is often characterized by rhoticity, meaning the [ɹ] sound is pronounced after

vowels within a syllable, which contrasts with many BrE dialects that tend to be non-rhotic,

including RP (Dimitrova, 2010; Gomez, 2009; Hansen Edwards, 2016; Hosseinzadeh et al.,

2015). In AmE, words like "hard" [hɑɹd] and "here" [hɪɹ] demonstrate rhoticity. The use of

postvocalic [ɹ] is not present in Cantonese, suggesting its presence in HKE may stem from

AmE influence (Hansen Edwards, 2016).

2.3.2. Flapping

Flapping, also known as intervocalic tapping, occurs when the alveolar flap replaces the [t] or [d] sounds between stressed and unstressed vowels (Hansen Edwards, 2016). When flapping, whether in single words or at word boundaries, [t] is articulated as a rapid tap and is voiced, making it sound nearly like a [d] (Dimitrova, 2010; Gomez, 2009; Hansen Edwards, 2016; Hosseinzadeh et al., 2015). In AmE, "butter" is pronounced as [ˈbʌɾ.ɚ] and "water" as [ˈwɔ.ɾɚ]. This feature is absent in Standard Southern BrE, which often uses aspiration instead (Dimitrova, 2010; Gomez, 2009; Hansen Edwards, 2016; Hosseinzadeh et al., 2015).

2.3.3. T-Glottalization

In AmE, T-glottalization involves replacing the [t] sound with a glottal stop, particularly in stressed syllables before a syllabic nasal (Hansen Edwards, 2016). This can be observed in words like "button" [ˈbʌʔ.n] and "mountain" [ˈmaʊn.ʔn]. This phenomenon is less common in BrE, where the [t] is typically aspirated (Dimitrova, 2010; Gomez, 2009; Hansen Edwards, 2016; Hosseinzadeh et al., 2015).

2.3.4. BATH [æ]

The BATH vowel is pronounced as [æ] in AmE, while it is articulated as [ɑː] in BrE (Dimitrova, 2010; Hansen Edwards, 2016; Hosseinzadeh et al., 2015). For instance, "bath" is pronounced [bæθ] in AmE compared to [bɑːθ] in BrE, and "dance" is [dæns] in AmE versus [dɑːns] in BrE.

2.3.5. LOT [ɑː]

In the LOT lexical set, AmE speakers typically pronounce this vowel as [ɑː], in

contrast to the [ɒ] sound found in BrE (Dimitrova, 2010; Hansen Edwards, 2016;

Hosseinzadeh et al., 2015). For instance, "lot" is pronounced [lɑːt] in AmE, while it is [lɒt] in

BrE.

2.4. Research Questions

This study is a smaller-scale examination eight years after Hansen Edwards' research (2016). The four research questions focus on assessing shifts in usage patterns and attitudes among Hong Kong university students, while also examining the influences on their accents:

1. Which features of American English pronunciation are used by local CUHK English majors in Hong Kong?

2. How prevalent is the use of each feature?

3. To what extent do participants aim to speak American English?

4. What factors have influenced the accents of these individuals?

The first research question will be discussed in the findings section (Section 4), while the remaining three questions will be addressed in the discussion section (Section 5).

3. Methodology

In this mixed-methods study, qualitative and quantitative approaches were employed to gather comprehensive data on accent features. The reading task served as an experimental component, providing quantitative data through collecting specific linguistic tokens. Each participant's reading produced measurable results, enabling the calculation of the percentage of AmE features present in their speech. The interviews provided quantitative and qualitative data, offering insights into participants' perceptions of their accents, accent influences, and aims, while also gathering additional speech data. By integrating both methods, the study was able to quantify the presence of AmE features while also examining the contextual factors that shape language use.

3.1. Participants

The data collection involved gathering speech samples and interview data from ten highly proficient English speakers, all of whom are English majors at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK). The participants, aged between 18 and 25, were born between 1999 and 2006, in the postcolonial context of Hong Kong following the 1997 handover. All participants had studied English for at least 12 to 15 years within the Hong Kong education system. Given their upbringing, their speech may reflect the rising influence of AmE.

To control for gender as a variable, only female students were selected for this study,

as analyzing rhoticity using Praat can be challenging with male voices, which often exhibit

low F3 frequencies (Tan, 2012). Adult females generally have shorter vocal tracts compared

to adult males, which results in higher frequency formants for females (Diehl et al., 1996).

Female voices, therefore, provide clearer detection. Furthermore, Tan's study (2012)

exclusively focused on females. According to Trudgill (1972) and Labov (1990), women's

linguistic behavior is often influenced more by community prestige norms than that of men.

Labov (1990) further argued, based on his research in Philadelphia, that women's use of

linguistic variants is motivated by both global and local prestige norms. If postvocalic [ɹ] is

indeed regarded as a marker of prestige within the Singapore community, as suggested by Tan

and Gupta (1992), it stands to reason that females are more likely to use this linguistic

feature. Thus, this study will adopt the same approach in the context of Hong Kong.

3.2. Data collection

To assess participants' accents, this study consists of two components: reading and

interview. As noted by Rickford and McNair-Knox (1994), all individuals and social groups

have stylistic repertoires; therefore, the styles in which they are recorded must be considered

during comparison. Reading a list of words is a strictly experimental task which produces

another less regular style (Labov 1966, 1972). An interview conversation has its own rules

and produces a characteristic style (Wolfson, 1976). During the reading task, participants may

be more careful and conscious of their pronunciation. In contrast, the speech data collected

during the interviews may be closer to authentic and natural speech, as participants were

unaware of the questions beforehand and could not prepare or memorize their responses. As a

result, two recording environments were created as variables, reading and interview.

All ten participants were first asked to read aloud speech samples for recording, which

included the sentence "Bother, father caught hot coffee in the car park" from the Audio

Archive (http://alt-usage-english.org/audio_archive.shtml), as well as a word list containing

words for each of the five features: postvocalic [ɹ], flapping [ɾ], T-Glottalization [ʔ], and the

BATH [æ] and LOT [ɑː] lexical sets (see Appendix A). By combining the sentence and the

word list, the linguistic variables for reading were controlled, with five words allocated for

each feature. The order of the words was randomized to elicit more authentic data from

participants, preventing them from recognizing the five features and potentially affecting the

results. Each participant was given time to familiarize themselves with the materials before

the reading portion of the recording. Following the reading tasks, a structured interview

lasting approximately 10 minutes was conducted with each participant, consisting of five

questions (see Appendix B). Participants were asked about their perceived accents, the

influences on their accents, and their accent aims. Their speech was recorded and transcribed

for analysis. Throughout both the reading and interview processes, participants were

encouraged to speak as naturally as possible. This paper will contrast the two speech events

and examine style-shifting as a sociolinguistic phenomenon (Beebe, 1980).

3.3. Data Transcription

In the reading task, each participant provided a total of 25 words for analysis, resulting in 250 tokens for examination, which were transcribed in IPA format and managed using Excel (see Appendix C). In contrast, the interview responses varied, leading to a different number of possible environments for each feature, totaling 674 tokens. The recordings of the interviews were transcribed into Word documents (see Appendix D). All possible environments of AmE were first highlighted and calculated. Then, the AmE features present in their speech were subsequently identified. Analysis was conducted using Praat. Finally, the AmE features were transcribed in IPA and stored in Excel (see Appendix E).

3.4. Linguistic Variables

Table 1. Linguistics variables

Variable	Standard Southern British English	General American	Cantonese L1 influence on English	Examples
Postvocalic [ɹ] (n = 5)	-	[ɹ]	-	Bother Car
Intervocalic alveolar flap (n = 5)	Aspiration [tʰ] or T-Glottalization [ʔ]	[ɾ]	-	Water Metal
T-Glottalization (n = 5)	Aspiration [tʰ]	[ʔ]	-	Mountain Button
LOT (n = 5)	[ɒ]	[ɑ:]	[ɔ]	Hot Coffee
BATH (n = 5)	[ɑ:]	[æ]	[ɛ]	Ask Path

As shown in Table 1, the five linguistic variables explored in this study, namely

rhoticity, flapping, T-Glottalization, and BATH and LOT vowels, mirror those in Hansen

Edwards' 2016 study, contrasting General American (GA) pronunciation with Standard

Southern BrE pronunciation. This study aims to investigate the features of AmE that are

prevalent among English speakers in Hong Kong and to examine their accent preferences,

specifically whether AmE is favored over BrE. In addition, the factors that contribute to their

accents will be explored.

4. Findings

The analysis begins with an overview of the overall usage of AmE features in reading and interview contexts combined. Following this, the focus will shift to examining the reading and interview data separately. Participants will be then categorized into three groups based on the percentage of AmE in their speech, allowing for a deeper analysis of their style-shifting through qualitative data gathered from the interviews. Lastly, the paper will analyze the interview data regarding participants' exposure to different Englishes, their accent aims, perceived accents, and their influences.

4.1. Overall Usage of American English Features

Table 2. Range of AmE features among participants in reading and interview.

	Participants	
Percentage of AmE features	Number	Percentage
100	0	0
75-99	4	40
50-74	1	10
25-49	3	30
1-24	1	10
0	1	10

The percentage of AmE features among the participants is presented in Table 2. It reveals that 90% (n = 9) of students exhibited some AmE features in their pronunciation, a slight decrease from 93% in 2016. Notably, while no participant utilized AmE features in every context, 40% (n = 4) demonstrated 75-99% of these features. In contrast, Hansen

Edwards' 2016 study found that only 10% (n = 7) of participants exhibited 75-99% of AmE

features, indicating an increase in the use of rhoticity at a high level. Furthermore, while 40%

(n = 27) of participants in 2016 used AmE features 50% of the time or more, the current study

indicates that 50% (n = 5) of participants did so, suggesting an overall increase in the

prevalence of AmE features.

Table 3. Most prevalent AmE features in reading and interview combined by number of

participants.

Percentage of AmE features	Postvocalic [ɹ] (n = 334)		Intervocalic flap (n = 229)		BATH [æ] (n = 130)		LOT [ɑː] (n = 178)		T-Glottalization (n = 53)	
	Participants									
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Total usage	231	69	97	42	54	42	62	35	2	4
100	4	40	1	10	5	50	2	20	-	-
75-99	4	40	3	30	1	10	2	20	-	-
50-74	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
25-49	1	10	-	-	2	20	3	30	-	-
1-24	-	-	4	40	1	10	2	20	1	10
0	1	10	2	20	1	10	1	10	9	90

Table 3 displays the frequency of each AmE feature in reading and interview tasks,

indicating the number of participants who utilized each feature. Rhoticity emerged as the

most used AmE feature, occurring in 69% (n = 231) of all possible environments. This

represents an increase from the 52% (n = 527) reported by Hansen Edwards in 2016. The

second common feature, the intervocalic flap, was observed at a frequency of 42% (n = 97),

which is 1% lower than the figure recorded in 2016. For the lexical sets BATH [æ] and LOT

[ɑː], there has been an increase in usage since 2016. In that year, the BATH [æ] set was

utilized 37% (n = 25) of the time, whereas it has now risen to 42% (n = 54), making it the

third most common feature among the five. The LOT [ɑː] set, which was less prevalent in

2016 at just 24% (n = 81), has shown a significant increase to 35% (n = 62). This trend

indicates that both features are steadily emerging as markers of AmE, in contrast to T-

Glottalization, which has not seen similar growth. In both the reading and interview tasks, T-

Glottalization [ʔ] was the least frequently used feature among participants at 4% (n = 2),

falling far below the 22% (n = 61) reported in the 2016 study.

In terms of the frequency of use for each feature across participants, it is found that

the postvocalic [ɹ] is the most prevalent and frequent feature in the participants' speech. 40%

(n = 4) of the participants were fully rhotic in both the reading and interview tasks. In

comparison, Hansen Edwards' 2016 study found that only 13% (n = 9) of her participants

were fully rhotic, indicating a significant increase in the prevalence of postvocalic [ɹ] since

then. However, the current study revealed less variability in rhoticity usage. While nearly all

participants demonstrated some use of postvocalic [ɹ], this study shows less variation overall.

Specifically, 40% (n = 4) of participants used rhoticity 75-99% of the time, reflecting a more

consistently high level of rhoticity compared to 2016, when only 18% (n = 12) of participants

fell into this category. In the current study, 90% (n = 9) of participants demonstrated some

degree of rhoticity, a slight increase from 88% (n = 60) in 2016. Furthermore, the proportion

of non-rhotic participants decreased from 12% (n = 8) in 2016 to 10% (n = 1), indicating that

more individuals are becoming semi-rhotic. Fully rhotic participants also increased from 13%

(n = 9) to 40% (n = 4). The postvocalic [ɹ] remains one of the most salient features of AmE.

There is an increase in the usage of flapping. At first glance, it appears that flapping

has decreased since the 2016 study. In that year, 28% (n = 19) of participants exhibited 100%

flapping, whereas the current figure is only 10% (n = 1). However, a closer examination

reveals that the previous data displayed more extreme patterns, with 69% (n = 47) of

participants either fully flapped or not flapped at all, leaving only 30% (n = 21) with some

degree of flapping. Yet, the current data shows a higher percentage of participants, 70% (n =

7), demonstrating some flapping in their speech. Furthermore, 40% (n = 4) of participants

used the intervocalic flap between 1-24% of the time, whereas in the 2016 study, no

participants fell within this range. Moreover, in this study, 20% (n = 2) of participants did not

use flapping, a significant decrease from 41% (n = 28) in 2016. While 10% (n = 1) fully

flapped in the current study, this is considerably lower than the 28% (n = 19) recorded in

2016. In that year, 58% (n = 40) of participants exhibited some use of the intervocalic flap,

with 48% (n = 33) using it in 50% or more of the possible environments. The current study

shows that 80% (n = 8) of participants demonstrated some degree of flapping, marking a

notable increase since 2016. However, only 40% (n = 4) used it 50% or more of the time this

year, a decrease from 58%, which suggests that while more participants are flapping, they are

doing so less frequently overall.

In 2016, only 37% (n = 25) of participants exhibited 100% usage of BATH [æ] in

Hansen Edwards' study. In this study, 50% (n = 5) demonstrated this in both reading and

interviews, indicating an increase. While 63% (n = 43) previously did not have this feature,

only 10% (n = 1) lack it now, meaning all but one participant used it. Eight participants

incorporated this feature in at least two out of five words during reading tasks, while two did

not use it at all.

Regarding LOT [ɑː], in 2016, only one participant achieved 100% usage. Now, in

Table 3, 20% (n = 2) showed this level of usage. Previously, most participants, 44% (n = 30),

did not use this feature, but now that number has decreased to only 10% (n = 1).

As presented in Table 3, T-Glottalization [ʔ] was the least frequently used feature

among participants at 4% (n = 2), falling far below the 22% (n = 61) reported in the 2016

study. Additionally, T-glottalization was rarely observed, with only three possible

environments identified across ten interviews, and it was not used by any participants. Eight

years later, its limited use among Hong Kong English speakers becomes clear.

4.2. American English Features in Reading and Interview

Table 4. Most prevalent AmE features in reading and interview separately by number of participants.

Reading	Postvocalic [ɹ] (n = 50)		BATH [æ] (n = 50)		LOT [ɑː] (n = 50)		Intervocalic flap (n = 50)		T-Glottalization (n = 50)	
Percentage of AmE features	Participants									
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Total usage	36	72	33	66	20	40	18	36	2	4
100	4	40	5	50	3	30	2	20	-	-
75-99	2	20	1	10	1	10	1	10	-	-
50-74	2	20	-	-	-	-	1	10	-	-
25-49	-	-	2	20	1	10	-	-	1	10
1-24	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	30	-	-
0	2	20	2	20	5	50	3	30	9	90

Interview	Postvocalic [ɹ] (n = 284)		Intervocalic flap (n = 179)		LOT [ɑː] (n = 128)		BATH [æ] (n = 79)		T-Glottalization (n = 3)	
Percentage of AmE features	Participants									
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Total usage	195	69	79	44	42	33	21	27	-	-
100	4	40	2	20	3	30	5	50	-	-
75-99	3	30	1	10	-	-	-	-	-	-
50-74	2	20	1	10	6	60	-	-	-	-
25-49	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	20	-	-
1-24	-	-	3	30	-	-	-	-	-	-
0	1	10	3	30	1	10	3	30	10	100

The rankings differ when considering the combined data for reading and interviews versus examining them separately. Therefore, we will now examine the percentages of reading and interview usage separately, categorized by the number of participants.

As indicated in the reading section of Table 4, rhoticity continues to be the most frequently used feature, with a usage rate of 72% (n = 36). The second most common feature in reading is BATH [æ], at 66% (n = 33), with 50% (n = 5) of participants exhibiting 100% usage of this feature. Surprisingly, LOT [ɑ:] ranks third in the reading section, appearing in 40% (n = 20) of instances, contrary to predictions made in the 2016 study. Notably, 30% (n = 3) had 100% usage of LOT in reading. Flapping is near the bottom of the list, with a usage rate of only 36% (n = 18). Here, 60% (n = 6) of participants demonstrated 24% or less usage of this feature, while 40% (n = 4) used it 50% of the time or more. Finally, T-Glottalization remains the least common feature, with only 10% (n = 1) using it 25-49% of the time, and 90% (n = 9) never employing it at all.

When examining the interview tasks specifically, the rankings reveal some notable shifts. Rhoticity remains at the top, with a usage rate of 69% (n = 195), slightly lower than in reading. Flapping comes in second, with 44% (n = 79) usage among 70% (n = 7) of participants. LOT [ɑ:] ranks third at 33% (n = 42), with 90% (n = 9) of participants using it 50% of the time or more, while only one participant did not use it at all. BATH [æ] is less common in interviews, appearing at a rate of 27% (n = 21), although 50% (n = 5) of participants exhibited 100% usage. Lastly, T-Glottalization was not used at all in the interviews.

Comparing these findings with the 2016 study highlights significant changes. In 2016, Hansen Edwards found that only 37% (n = 25) of participants exhibited 100% usage of BATH [æ], whereas this study shows that 50% (n = 5) demonstrated this in both reading and interviews. Additionally, LOT [ɑː], which had only one participant achieving 100% usage in 2016, now has 20% (n = 2) showing this level of usage in reading and 30% (n = 3) in interviews. The prevalence of T-glottalization has decreased significantly, dropping from 22% (n = 61) in 2016 to just 4% (n = 2) in the current study, even from a previously low level.

As shown in Table 4, rhoticity is the most prevalent feature in both reading and interview tasks, with a usage rate of 72% (n = 36) and 69% (n = 195), respectively. This consistency underscores its significance as a marker of AmE.

On the other hand, BATH [æ] shows a remarkable increase in usage. In Table 4, BATH is noted at 66% (n = 33) in reading, while in interviews, it appears less frequently at 27% (n = 21). 50% of participants exhibited 100% usage of this feature in both tasks.

LOT [ɑː] demonstrates a significant rise in usage as well, increasing from 24% (n = 81) in 2016 to 40% (n = 20) in reading tasks. Table 3 reveals it as the fourth most common feature overall, with a usage rate of 35% (n = 62). Yet, Table 4 shows that it ranks third in reading, with 40% (n = 4) of participants using this feature 50% of the time or more. Surprisingly, in interviews—where the ranking remains the same—90% of participants

exhibited this level of usage.

Flapping presents a contrasting trend. Although Table 4 lists its usage at 36% (n = 18), Table 3 shows a higher frequency of 42% (n = 97), indicating a 6% increase in interview tasks. However, the percentage of participants exhibiting 100% flapping has decreased from 28% (n = 19) in 2016 to just 10% (n = 1), suggesting a shift towards more varied usage patterns. Interestingly, in reading tasks, the usage of flapping was significantly higher at 43% (n = 118) in 2016, whereas it has now dropped to 36% (n = 18), reflecting a 7% decrease.

T-Glottalization remains the least commonly used feature across both tables. Table 3 presents its decline to 4% (n = 2), while Table 4 shows a usage rate of 0% in interviews.

Examining the data from reading and interviews separately reveals that rhoticity is the most significant feature in both contexts. In interviews, flapping is the second most prominent feature, with a usage rate of 44% (n = 79). Meanwhile, instead of flapping, BATH [æ] ranks second in reading, showing a 39% higher usage compared to interviews. Both BATH [æ] and LOT [ɑː] are becoming more prevalent, particularly in the reading context. Notably, LOT [ɑː] has gained popularity and now exceeds BATH [æ] in interviews, ranking third. It has also surpassed flapping in reading, where it holds the third position as well. These trends indicate participants' increased use of these vowels.

In the following section, the data comparison of participants' style-shifting between reading and interviews takes into account participants' accent aims and their exposure to various Englishes.

4.3. Style-shifting between American English and British English

Table 5. Grouping categorized by the prevalence of AmE features among participants 1-10.

Participants	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
1	86%		
2		0%	
3			37%
4			27%
5			37%
6	84%		
7			18%
8			53%
9	81%		
10	87%		

Figure 1.
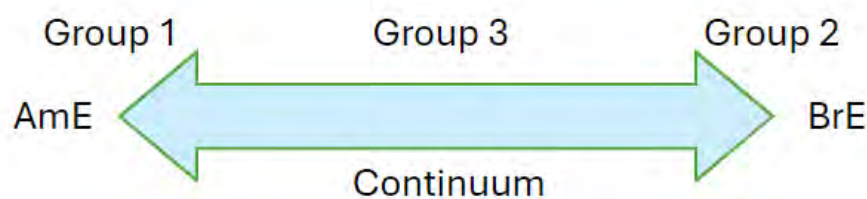
Participants in this study are categorized into three groups along a continuum between AmE and BrE that reflect their accents (see Figure 1). As presented in Table 5, the first group comprises participants who predominantly used AmE features, exceeding 81% of the time, Participants 1, 6, 9, and 10. The second group leans more toward BrE, represented by

Participant 2, who showed 0% use of AmE features. The third group includes participants

who exhibited a mix of both AmE and BrE features, ranging from 18% to 53%—specifically,

Participants 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8. Our focus will be on this phonetically unstable group, as they

engage in style-shifting and accommodation between the two variants, AmE and BrE. The

analysis will focus on how the participants' pronunciation features relate to their stated accent

aims by comparing their speech data from reading and interview tasks. This is to determine

whether their actual speech aligns with their accent aims. The five features will be examined

individually.

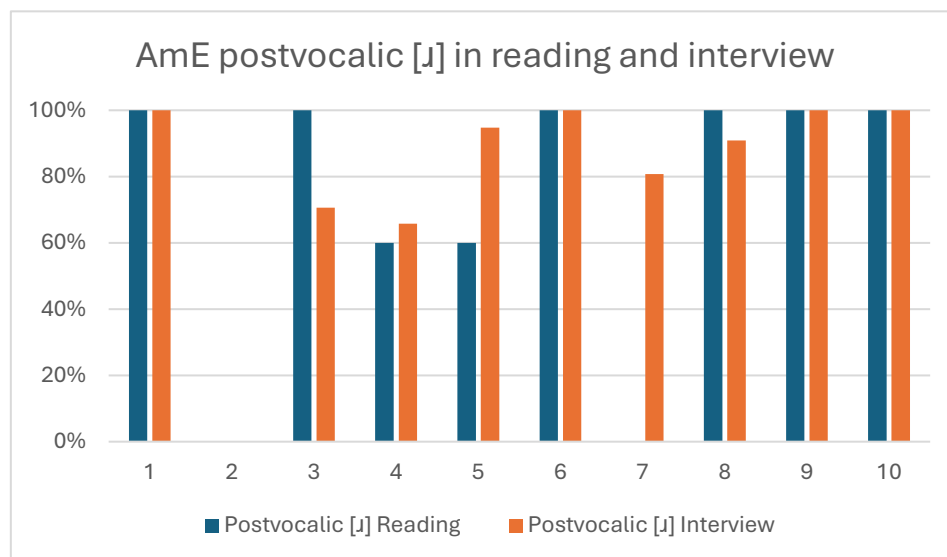Figure 2. Rhoticity among participants 1-10 in reading and interview.

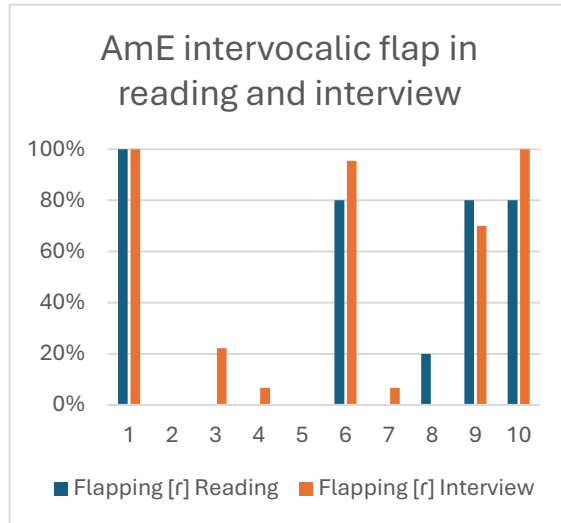Figure 3. Flapping among participants 1-10 in reading and interview.

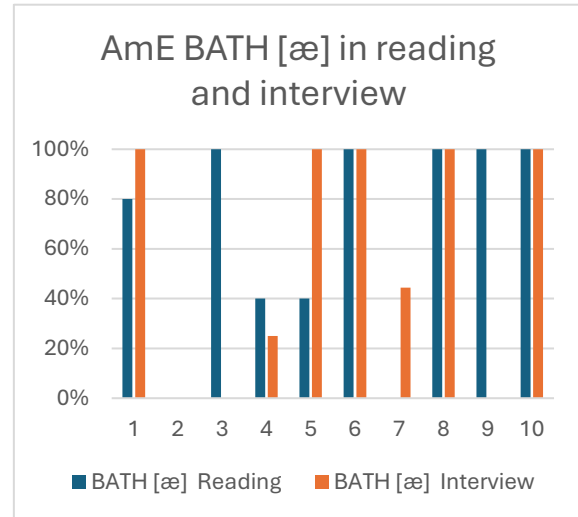Figure 4. BATH [æ] among participants 1-10 in reading and interview.

AmE intervocalic flap in reading and interview

AmE BATH [æ] in reading and interview

Figure 5. LOT [ɑ:] among participants 1-10 in reading and interview.

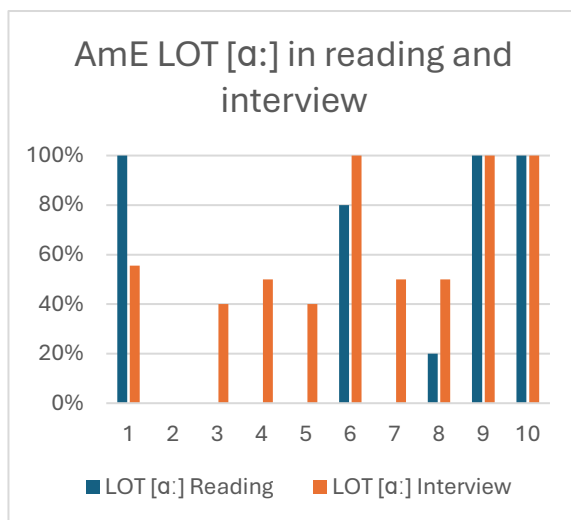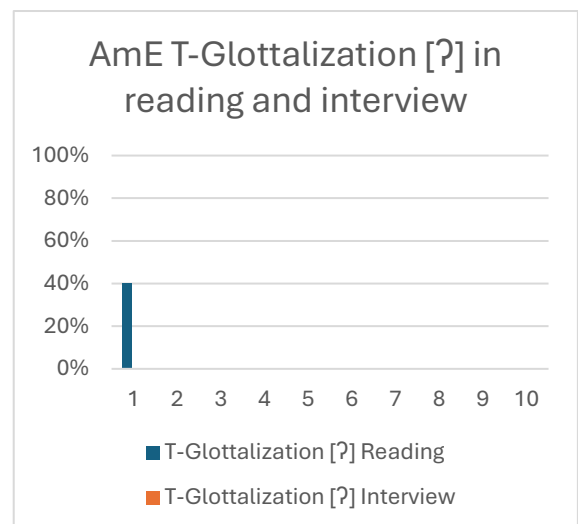Figure 6. T-Glottalization among participants 1-10 in reading and interview.

AmE LOT [ɑ:] in reading and interview

AmE T-Glottalization [ʔ] in reading and interview

In terms of the postvocalic [ɹ], the discussion will focus on the third group with mixed accents, as Group 3 displayed significant differences in rhoticity levels between reading and interview tasks, specifically among Participants 3, 5, and 7 (see Figure 2).

Participant 3 was fully rhotic in reading but only 71% (n = 12) rhotic in the interview. She reported that she was most exposed to AmE and aims to speak the Cockney accent, one of the BrE varieties. Her strong belief in the fact that she speaks AmE is evident, as it was the only variety she mentioned. Hence, she may have been more conscious of rhoticity during the reading task but did not consistently use it in the interview. Another explanation is that her goal of speaking BrE may have led her to tone down her AmE features, particularly rhoticity, to sound more British.

Participant 5 who aims to speak BrE exhibited significantly more rhoticity in the interview; her rhoticity increased from 60% (n = 3) in reading to 95% (n = 18) in the interview. She identified her speech as BrE and HKE, without realizing she had some AmE features. Factors influencing her accent included education, peers, and family. Although she did not mention the media or any AmE influences, her performance in the interview indicates she is under the influence of AmE, as she was semi-rhotic in both reading and interviews.

Participant 7's speech in reading was even more monitored, as she was non-rhotic during this task but demonstrated 81% (n = 24) rhoticity in the interview. This significant

jump from 0% to 81% implies that she actively shifted or accommodated between AmE and

BrE. Since she aims to speak BrE, she may have been consciously trying to avoid features

associated with AmE during the reading task to align more closely with BrE norms.

Conversely, the interview, a more naturalistic setting, allows her to express her more

authentic linguistic features. Her ability to adjust her rhoticity suggests either a heightened

awareness of her speech in different contexts or an effort to meet her accent aim of BrE. This

also indicates that she possesses AmE features that she may wish to downplay.

Figure 3 shows that flapping occurred at 70-100% in the first group, which spoke

more AmE. Among the ten participants, only one exhibited 100% (n = 25) flapping. In the

second group, there was no flapping at all. In the third group, Participant 5 did not flap, while

Participants 4 and 7 showed minimal flapping in their interviews. Participants 3 and 8

exhibited notable differences and will be discussed further.

Participant 3 did not flap in reading but flapped 22% of the time in the interview.

Since she aims to speak the Cockney accent, a BrE variety, she may have monitored her

speech closely in reading to avoid flapping. In the interview, she used flapping twice out of

eight instances, both occurring in the phrase "lot of" [lɑ.ɾʌv]. As she claimed that she speaks

AmE, this could be her fixed American way of pronouncing "lot of," which contributed to an

increase in her flapping rate.

It is also noteworthy to examine participant 8, who flapped only 20% in reading and did not flap at all in the interview due to the absence of environments. She aims to speak AmE and monitored her pronunciation in reading, where she flapped the word "water" [ˈwɔ.ɾɚ] in one of the five environments. This word is often considered an accent marker, making it significant in triggering her accent awareness. So, it is likely she intended to sound American when pronouncing "water." In the interview, however, there were no opportunities for flapping, so no judgment can be made about her usage in that context.

Overall, flapping was less varied than rhoticity. When participants did flap, they tended to do so fairly frequently, as seen with participants 1, 6, 9, and 10 from Group 1. The word "water" was the most flapped, occurring in 50% (n = 5) of instances, while "metal" was the least flapped word, appearing with a flap in only 10% (n = 1) of cases.

As illustrated in Figure 4, the AmE feature BATH [æ] was heavily used by Group 1, including participants 1, 6, 9, and 10, as well as some from Group 3, like Participants 5. Note that Participants 3 and 9 exhibited 100% usage of this feature in reading but none in the interview due to the lack of environments conducive to its use.

To begin with Participant 5, she was not exposed to AmE much, as she did not mention it; she stated that she spoke BrE and HKE. She had this AmE feature 40% of the time in reading and 100% (n = 1) in the interview because there was only one environment.

Participant 7, on the other hand, showed no usage of this feature in reading, but the number rose to 44% (n = 4) in the interview. As mentioned, she aims to speak BrE and was monitoring her accent in reading yet expressed her more authentic speech patterns containing AmE features during the interview.

The biggest difference between reading and interview is observed for the AmE feature LOT [ɑ:] in the third group, which includes Participants 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8, as well as Participant 1 from group 1 (see Figure 5). The discussion will focus on Group 3 first. Except for Participant 8, who used LOT 20% (n = 1) in reading, no one else in Group 3 used it in that context. However, all five participants used this feature in interviews, ranging from 40-50%.

Participant 3 did not use the feature in the reading task, but in the interview, she utilized it 40% (n = 3) of the time. The phrase "lot of" is a high-frequency expression that often appears in conversation. Therefore, it may serve as a recognizable marker of AmE. Besides "lot of" [lɑ.ɾʌv], she also used it in "honestly" [ˈɑn.əst.li]. Although Participant 3 aims to speak BrE, she showed no effort to conceal her use of the LOT feature.

Participant 5 employed the feature 40% (n = 2) of the time across five environments, using it in "job" [dʒɑb], etc. Given her aim to speak BrE, this suggests an influence of AmE that she may not be consciously aware of.

Meanwhile, Participant 4, who did not use this feature in reading, used it in the

interview 50% (n = 1) of the time with the word "confident" [ˈkɑn.fə.dənt], given only two possible environments.

Likewise, the 30% shift observed in Participant 8 is likely due to the limited environments in the interview as well. She aims for an AmE accent, and her usage was 20% (n = 1) in reading. Yet, in the interview, her usage increased to 50% (n = 1). In spite of this, she used the feature only once in both contexts, specifically in "probably" [ˈpɹɑ.bəb.li].

Participant 1 from Group 1 exhibited a 100% (n = 5) use of the American LOT [ɑː] in the reading task but only 56% (n = 5) in the interview, resulting in a significant 44% decrease. This discrepancy suggests three possibilities.

First, she might have consciously shifted toward a more AmE accent during the reading task, possibly to align with perceived expectations based on her self-assessment. She self-reported that she spoke a blend of AmE, BrE, and HKE. This self-perception may influence her pronunciation choices, leading her to emphasize AmE features in more formal contexts, such as reading.

Second, her low accent awareness could contribute to this phenomenon. She might not realize the extent of her AmE features, mistakenly believing she primarily speaks BrE when it is likely the opposite. When asked which variety she aimed to speak, she responded:

I'd say British English because I don't know, like, um, this kind of accent has been

with me for so long, and like, having to pursue education specifically in this accent, I

think it's kind of hard for me to change from British English to like other Englishes, if

that's a word. Um, yeah, I think probably British English. But for Hong Kong

English, I think it's mostly reserved for friends and family because, like, I'm not,

like... usually you would say English in a more formal sense, right?

Third, her speech indicates that she is significantly influenced by the AmE accent,

even if she is not fully aware of it. Although in the interview, she used the AmE feature in

only five out of nine possible environments, which is notably less than in the reading task,

this inconsistency, combined with her stated aim of adopting a BrE accent, suggests that she

may be actively trying to achieve a BrE pronunciation, a more "formal" variety. As a result,

this effort could lead her to present herself in a manner that aligns more closely with BrE

norms during the interview.

Nonetheless, during the interviews, all but one participant used LOT [ɑ:] at least once,

indicating that they are starting to adopt this feature more. This does not necessarily mean

they prefer AmE; rather, it suggests that they are being influenced by AmE without fully

realizing it.

Finally, Figure 6 shows minimal usage of T-Glottalization among participants. Only

one participant (Participant 1) used it, and it was in the reading task, a more controlled environment. She stated that her speech reflected a blend of AmE, BrE, and HKE. It is unclear whether she was intentionally shifting toward AmE or genuinely possessed this feature; the overall occurrence of T-Glottalization remained quite low.

4.4. Interview Data: Participants' Accent Influences and Accent Aims

Table 5. Participants' accent aims, current accents and their influences.

Participants		Number	Percentage
Variety(s) of English most exposed to	BrE	2	20
	AmE	2	20
	HKE	1	10
	BrE + AmE	3	30
	BrE + HKE	1	10
	BrE + AmE + HKE	1	10
Variety(s) of English spoken currently	AmE	3	30
	HKE	1	10
	HKE + BrE	2	20
	HKE + AmE	2	20
	BrE + AmE	1	10
	BrE + AmE + HKE	1	10
Accent aim(s)	BrE	7	70
	AmE	2	20
	No preference	1	10
Influence(s) on their accent(s)	Media	9	90
	Education	7	70
	Peers	4	40
	L1 Cantonese	2	20
	Family	2	20
Participants might have more than one influence.			

As presented in Table 5, 30% (n = 3) of participants were most exposed to BrE and AmE, whereas 20% (n = 2) reported exposure to BrE only, and 20% (n = 2) to AmE only. A

total of 70% (n = 7) were exposed only to Inner Circle Englishes.

Regarding their perceived accent, the most common was AmE at 30% (n = 3), followed by a combination of HKE and BrE at 20% (n = 2), and another 20% (n = 2) reported a combination of HKE and AmE. Additionally, 40% (n = 4) of participants believe they speak Inner Circle Englishes, while 90% (n = 9) want to speak Inner Circle Englishes. Specifically, 70% (n = 7) want to speak BrE, 20% (n = 2) want to speak AmE, and 10% (n = 1) have no preference.

Moreover, participants identified media as the primary influence on their accents, with 90% (n = 9) citing it as a significant factor. 80% (n = 8) mentioned American media, while 10% (n = 1) referenced British drama. Participant 9 in Group 1, who was influenced by American media, emphasized that during her formative years, the United States was the most "influential" country in terms of "popular culture." Similarly, Participant 10 in the same group highlighted how learning unconsciously through social media platforms was different from learning in a classroom:

I think nowadays not only do I listen to English through YouTube, Instagram reels is also a very big source of my English and how I am exposed to it. I think, um, because basically, I intake these English media daily, so because I listen to it so often, I feel like also, it's because I am… it's not a conscious process of learning English. It's very

different from learning English in the classroom; in a classroom, you have this

pressure.

Media was followed by education at 70% (n = 7). Interestingly, 50% (n = 5) of them

mentioned that besides BrE, they were exposed to AmE through their teachers, who had an

American accent or a mix with AmE. This influence was also mentioned by participants in

Hansen Edwards' study (2016). In this study, Participant 3, whose self-reported accent was

AmE, explained her educational influences which involved both varieties, AmE and BrE:

Um, I think if it's like grammar or usage-wise, it would be British English, because in

the Hong Kong education system, they teach us British English, like the phrases and

grammar structure. But most of my teachers speak with a very strong American

accent.

This experience is echoed by Participant 4 with native English teachers from America:

I think the most is, I think British English and American English are both exposed

because of my middle school and primary school teachers. We have those native

English speaker teachers who are mainly from America......so whenever I have lessons

with them, it's American English. But for my class teacher, he's from Hong Kong,

he's a local Hong Konger, but he speaks with a British accent.

Meanwhile, peers ranked third at 40% (n = 4). Participant 10 mentioned peers as a major influence:

So I think that contributes to me being able to speak fluently and then peers, um, I can talk about university, because right now, I'm an English major and interestingly a lot of my friends now, like my closest friends, they are non-Chinese speakers. My friend group consists of one Korean, one mainland girl and also a Pakistani girl and then our common language is English. That's why and then the Korean girl and the mainland girl. They're educated in an IB school, so I think they speak in an American accent too, and I think I also picked up the way that they speak.

Additionally, 20% (n = 2) of participants noted that their first language, Cantonese, contributes to their accent, while another 20% (n = 2) indicated that family influences play a role.

The study reveals a strong preference for Inner Circle Englishes, particularly BrE, among participants, alongside exposure to AmE. Although many participants aspire to speak BrE, their exposure to American media likely contributes to the increased adoption of AmE features.

5. Discussion

The following section will address the remaining three research questions, focusing on trends in the prevalence of AmE features, the extent to which participants aim to speak AmE, the motivations behind their style-shifting, and the media and educational influences of AmE in Hong Kong.

5.1. Trends in the Prevalence of American English Features

5.1.1. Rhoticity as the Most Prevalent American English Feature

The study demonstrates that rhoticity is increasingly prevalent among Hong Kong English speakers. This marks a significant departure from traditional non-rhotic varieties commonly associated with BrE, such as RP.

Interestingly, many individuals who claimed to aim for a BrE accent (Participants 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7) (n = 6, 60%) still exhibited instances of rhoticity. Thus, rhoticity is the most noticeable, prevalent, and frequent feature among participants. According to Hansen Edwards (2016), "there is little to no variation" in its use within AmE. The presence of the [ɹ] sound is readily noticeable, as Hansen Edwards (2016) noted that rhoticity is more acoustically salient to both listeners and speakers. This feature stands out distinctly and is both acoustically and articulatorily unusual, making it easily recognizable in speech production, whether done consciously or not. Furthermore, the letter "r" appears in written form, unlike other features

such as flapping, which require a deeper understanding of specific phonetic rules. Across

both the 2016 study and the current research, rhoticity demonstrates the highest frequency of

occurrence, appearing in the largest number of contexts and showing the greatest overall

usage. This aligns with findings from the study by Lau and Ho (2023), which indicate that

among linguistic variables in AmE, the postvocalic [ɹ] is the most salient feature.

The emergence of rhoticity in Singapore reflects a significant shift in linguistic

attitudes, paralleling similar trends observed in Hong Kong. Traditionally, both Singapore

English (SgE) and HKE have been characterized as non-rhotic due to their historical ties to

BrE. However, Tan's study (2012) indicates that younger speakers in both regions are

increasingly adopting rhotic pronunciations. This change suggests a growing acceptance of

features associated with AmE, driven by a desire to align local speech patterns with those

perceived as more prestigious or globally relevant (Tan, 2012).

In Singapore, research has shown that younger generations no longer view rhoticity as

unusual or unnatural. Studies by Tan (2012, 2016) found that many Singaporeans, especially

tertiary students, exhibit a high frequency of rhotic pronunciations, indicating a shift in

perception regarding what constitutes "accurate" English. This trend is echoed in Hong Kong,

where Hansen Edwards (2016) documented a similar increase in rhoticity among experienced

English speakers. This current study also confirms that rhoticity is the most prevalent AmE

feature and is gaining traction in Hong Kong, a former British colony.

5.1.2. The Emergence of BATH [æ] and LOT [a:] vowels

Figure 7. BATH and LOT in American and British English vowel charts

<div style="text-align: center">(San Diego Voice and Accent, 2020)   (Roach, 1971)</div>
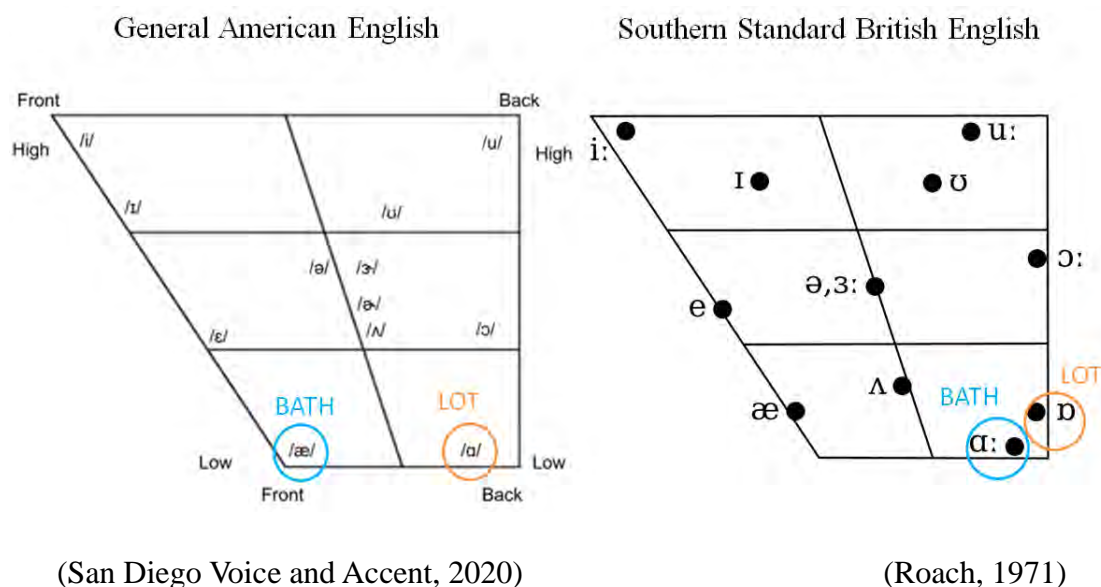
The BATH [æ] and LOT [ɑ:] vowels as AmE features are emerging in Hong Kong. To begin with the BATH vowel, there is a significant difference in pronunciation between AmE and BrE, making it quite noticeable. As the BATH/TRAP split is marked by a clear distinction between front and back vowels, they sound very different from one another. This difference is easily perceptible because different parts of the mouth are used to articulate these sounds (see Figure 7). While the LOT [ɑ:] vowel may not be as immediately noticeable and is somewhat less significant, 90% (n = 9) of participants produced it more than 50% of the time during interviews, settings that tend to elicit more spontaneous speech. This finding suggests that even if participants aim for a BrE accent, they are unconsciously incorporating LOT [ɑ:] into their speech, indicating its emergence, albeit less prominently than BATH [æ].

In this study, BATH [æ] ranked second out of the five features in reading tasks at 66%, much higher than in interviews, where it appeared only 27% of the time, ranking second last. This disparity suggests that formal education may influence these pronunciations, as interviewees (Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6) (n = 5, 50%) noted that their teachers spoke with American accents. Additionally, 50% of participants exhibited 100% usage of BATH in reading tasks, including Participants 3 and 8 from Group 3, the phonetically unstable group. In interviews, 50% also demonstrated 100% usage, including Participants 1, 5, and 8 from Group 3. Even though they were not influenced by AmE through education, they displayed this AmE feature at a high level.

Regarding LOT [ɑː], participants used the vowel over 50% of the time: 40% in reading tasks and 90% in interviews. The LOT vowel appears in more conversational contexts, such as in words like "not" [nɑt], "lot" [lɑt], and "honestly" [ˈɑn.əst.li]. This context-dependent usage indicates that LOT was utilized more frequently than BATH in interview speech, and it had more environments than BATH. In contrast, during reading tasks, participants had time to familiarize themselves with the words and sentences, leading them to select pronunciations that avoided sounding American, as their accent aims align more closely with BrE.

Despite Hong Kong's long colonial history, where the accent is predominantly based on BrE, a significant minority are adopting GA features. Bolton and Kwok (1990) reported

that about 10% of respondents expressed a preference for an American accent. In their study, of the fifteen students, six demonstrated clear American influences in their speech. One participant (F14), for instance, used [æ] in "last" and [ɑː] in "lot," reflecting typical American pronunciation.

Similarly, Hansen Edwards' study (2016) found that 37% of participants used [æ] in BATH lexical set words, while the majority (68%) did not. The current study in 2024 shows an increase compared to the 2016 findings, indicating a trend toward increased usage.

It seemed unlikely for LOT [ɑː] to emerge in Hong Kong, but it has, alongside BATH [æ].

5.1.3. The Diminishing T-Glottalization

T-glottalization is currently at a low point in usage, with only three instances found across ten interviews and no participants consistently employing this feature. One possible reason for this infrequent usage is that T-glottalization typically shortens and reduces word length, often leaving only a nasal sound, which makes it harder for speakers to learn. Furthermore, as an unaspirated feature that occurs before a syllabic nasal, it becomes less noticeable and more challenging for speakers in Hong Kong to articulate. This combination of low frequency and subtle articulation suggests that T-glottalization is not a feature that speakers in Hong Kong tend to adopt as part of their AmE pronunciation, which aligns with

Hansen Edwards' findings in 2016.

5.2. Exonormative Tendency: British English Accent Aim

The phenomenon of exonormative tendency, where speakers look to external models for their accent aims, is evident in the preference for BrE among many learners of English as a second language (L2) (Sung, 2016). Previous research on motivation and accent aims also indicates that many speakers actively seek to replicate native speaker models (Marx, 2002; Piller, 2002; Rindal, 2010). Participants may strive to adopt a particular Inner Circle accent, such as AmE or BrE, based on their personal preferences or the perceived advantages associated with those accents.

The study by Bolton and Kwok (1990) was conducted pre-handover in Hong Kong and unsurprisingly found that the majority of respondents (65.1%) preferred to sound like a "native" speaker of BrE, though over a quarter wanted to sound like a Hong Kong bilingual (English and Cantonese). In 1998, Luk hypothesized that Hong Kong people would have a strong desire for "linguistic emancipation" from the colonizer and would therefore prefer an HKE accent to a "native" BrE accent. Contrary to this expectation, he found that BrE (RP) was preferred over HKE, asserting the exonormative status in Hong Kong. Similar developments exist in many ex-colonial English-speaking regions, where local norms of speech are emerging in competition with an inherited, colonial, usually British norm

(Hilliard, 2009). Additionally, studies have consistently shown a preference for BrE

pronunciation, as learners often perceive this variety as aspirational (e.g., He & Zhang, 2010;

Kang, 2015; Luk, 1998).

To answer the third research question, this study suggests that participants do not aim

to speak AmE to a large extent, as most (n = 7, 70%) want to sound British. This finding

aligns with previous studies (Bolton & Kwok, 1990; He & Zhang, 2010; Kang, 2015; Luk,

1998) yet differs somewhat from Hansen Edwards' results from eight years ago. In 2016, her

study yielded more balanced results, as an equal number of participants expressed a

preference for "only" AmE (n = 21, 31%) and "only" BrE (n = 21, 31%). Nevertheless, when

considering all responses combined, slightly more participants preferred BrE (n = 44, 65%)

compared to AmE (n = 42, 62%). Yet, this current study demonstrates more extreme results,

with the majority of participants aiming for BrE; only 20% (n = 2) indicated an aim for AmE.

To summarize, the findings reveal that BrE is still preferred over AmE, spotlighting

the significance of BrE due to colonization. The exonormative tendency toward BrE as an

accent aim reflects a desire for social prestige among L2 speakers, a topic that will be

explored in more detail in the next section.

5.3. Motivations behind Style-shifting

Eckert (2003) argued that "style (like language) is not a thing but a practice." It is worth considering motivation in L2 users when analyzing their patterns of variation. L2 users may strive for different production models and utilize these for socio-stylistic purposes (Nance et al., 2016). Consequently, the motivations behind the style-shifting will be investigated, including contextual influences, formal education, and perceived prestige associated with BrE.

5.3.1. Contextual Influence: Reading vs Interview

Contextual influence significantly impacts style-shifting, particularly in how individuals modify their speech across different settings. Labov (1966) employed a method to elicit more formal speech patterns by having participants read prose passages and isolated word lists at the end of interviews. This approach allowed him to identify four distinct contextual styles: casual speech, careful speech, reading style, and word lists, enabling him to analyze changes in accent and pronunciation concerning social class differences. The evidence from Labov's studies (1966, 1969) illustrates the significant impact of contextual constraints on pronunciation patterns. When speakers pronounce words in isolation, they may feel inclined to adopt more affected or foreign pronunciations. Yet, in real social interactions, even formal ones, it is unlikely that individuals will achieve the highest prestige forms

elicited in a word list task, as the surrounding context often reveals the artificiality of such pronunciations (Labov, 1966, 1969).

In this study, reading allowed participants to consciously align their speech with the formality associated with this context. The controlled nature of reading provided participants with the opportunity to practice and refine their pronunciation and intonation, leading to a more "deliberate" accent. In comparison, spontaneous settings like interviews often result in less formal speech due to the lack of preparation. Participants, not knowing the interview questions in advance, are more likely to revert to their more natural accents due to the immediacy of the conversational context.

This difference in preparation contributes to varying levels of formality between the two settings. Irvine (1979) noted that formality is often associated with "seriousness," positioning reading as a more "serious" task compared to interviews. This perspective is exemplified by Participant 7, who exhibited a significant shift toward BrE during reading tasks. In Hong Kong, BrE is frequently perceived as a more formal variety, further motivating participants to adjust their speech accordingly (Chan, 2018).

However, as Dörnyei and Ushioda (2009) suggest, language learning motivation is influenced by individuals' images of their "ideal self" and "ought-to self." While formality plays a role, many other factors, such as social contexts, also affect how participants speak.

The dynamics of the interview, including the rapport with the interviewer and the nature of the questions posed, further shape speech patterns. If the interviewer employs a particular accent or style, participants may unconsciously mirror this. In this case, along the continuum between AmE and BrE, the interviewer veered heavily toward AmE.

As noted by Elhami (2020), the concept of communication accommodation theory (CAT) has historical roots, with its origins in the 1970s as speech accommodation theory (SAT) introduced by Giles (1973). Giles noted that speakers often modify their accents to align more closely with their interlocutors. Six years later, in 1979, Giles and Smith expanded on this by pointing out that the speakers also adjusted their speech rate, pronunciation, utterance length, and pauses. This adjustment is driven by a desire for acceptance and understanding. In a subsequent study, Putman and Street (1984) observed that interviewees often modify their speech to appear more likable to interviewers. Consequently, it is possible that the AmE features of the interviewer influenced the interviewees' accents.

It is also important to consider that style-shifting factors vary for everyone. To conclude, contextual factors, as well as the accent of the interviewer, influenced the formality of speech and shaped the linguistic choices participants made, resulting in a spectrum of speech styles in different contexts.

5.3.2. Formal Education

In Hong Kong, BrE is often taught as the standard in education (Grove 2011; Hansen Edwards, 2016; Lau & Ho, 2023; Li, 1999, 2017). This emphasis may lead students to internalize British pronunciation and grammatical structures. According to Evans (2011), the norms of correctness in key areas such as education, government, business, and law adhere to the standards of BrE varieties. Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, and 10 (n = 8, 80%) all reported being exposed to BrE during formal education. Therefore, during reading tasks in academic environments, students may consciously or unconsciously adopt these "correct" forms, striving for certain features that are deemed more "appropriate" or "prestigious." When engaging in reading activities, participants may consciously aim to employ BrE pronunciations. This adherence to educational norms is further reinforced by curriculum and pedagogical practices, which can have a lasting impact on individuals' accent aims.

Furthermore, attitudes toward "nonstandard" variation among educators can influence language use in formal settings like reading. Millar (1997) found that teacher attitudes toward nonstandard variants often exhibit low overall tolerance, especially regarding grammatical features, while nonstandard phonological features are relatively more accepted. This evaluation tends to depend on contextual factors, such as the formality of the speech context and whether the activity is planned, like debates or prepared talks. In these scenarios, teachers generally advocate for the use of the standard dialect, although opinions on the role of accent

can vary (Milroy, 1981). Therefore, teachers' attitudes toward different Englishes can impact

students' perception on accents, hence influencing their accent aim and actual speech.

In short, since Hong Kong's education system tends to favor BrE, students may

unconsciously adhere to BrE in reading tasks due to the formality and a sense of

"correctness."

5.3.3. Perceived Prestige Associated with British English

Perceived prestige influences language use and style-shifting. When certain accents or

speech patterns are associated with higher social status, participants may be motivated to

style-shift to these forms in specific contexts.

In this study, Participants 3, 4, 5, and 7 (n = 4, 40%) aimed for a BrE accent,

exhibiting more BrE features during reading tasks, but showing more AmE features in their

interviews (see Appendix F). The findings reveal that in more controlled contexts such as

reading tasks, where participants can prepare, they may modify their speech in pursuit of their

accent aims. Accent aims are defined as the specific linguistic goals individuals set for their

speech. For example, if they aim for BrE, they are more likely to adopt a BrE pronunciation

during the reading task, where they aim to project an image of professionalism. This shift can

be driven by the desire to be perceived favorably by peers, educators, or interviewers

(Elhami, 2020).

English represents "upward and outward mobility," brighter prospects that carry significant value, making it crucial for people aspiring to advance socially and professionally in Hong Kong (e.g., Boyle 1995; Li 1999; Li, 2011; Luke & Richards. 1982: So, 2002). It is widely believed that knowledge of English correlates with improved financial and occupational opportunities (Chan, 2000; Luke & Richards, 1982). The perceived "eliteness" associated with English leads to a greater emphasis on achieving a high standard of English, often viewed as the "native" form. Similarly, a study by Lai (2001) indicated that residents of Hong Kong consider English proficiency a crucial factor for career advancement, viewing it as the High language used in professional contexts.

According to Bolton (2000), there is a significant social-class dimension regarding access to English education in Hong Kong, where many parents expressed concern that recent policy measures of Chinese-medium instruction are limiting their children's opportunities to learn English. If these policies continue, parents fear that English-medium schools will predominantly serve children from middle-class and upper-middle-class backgrounds, who are better positioned to succeed in the competitive environments of kindergarten and primary education. English holds a high status in Hong Kong, especially regarding economic opportunities.

Rindal (2010) found that, consistent with earlier studies involving L2 speakers, RP

was considered the most prestigious pronunciation model among participants (Ladegaard &

Sachdev, 2006; Van Der Haagen, 1998). Contrary to expectations from Bradac and Giles

(1991), the L2 speakers did not favor AmE as a model. RP was rated superior across all

dimensions of "linguistic quality," with most participants expressing a desire to adopt a

British accent when speaking English. Findings by Bayard et al. (2001) and Van Der Haagen

(1998) also demonstrated that GA was not viewed as equally or more prestigious than RP.

Instead, Norwegian participants reflected a more traditional view, recognizing RP as the

variety with the highest status; those aiming for a British accent cited status and competence

as reasons for their preference (Rindal, 2010).

Therefore, one explanation for the exonormative orientation in Hong Kong is its

historical background as a former British colony, which leads individuals to associate BrE

with prestige and opportunities for social mobility. Their accent aims reflect the influence of

social perceptions and the desire to align with perceived standards of competence. Participant

5 explained how proficiency in BrE, an Inner Circle variety that is preferred in Hong Kong,

enhances her chances of success:

"Because the prestige and how people feel you when you're speaking this Inner Circle

English. And I think it is better for getting a job."

Participant 10's remarks on the perceived elitism of a British accent, a variety that is often

viewed as "pretentious," also suggest that BrE carries connotations of higher social class. She

noted:

> I have this concept of British English being a little bit, you know, like if you speak
>
> with a British accent, sometimes people might think you're pretentious. It has this
>
> connotation of being higher class. But then, I have a friend who speaks in British
>
> English, and she mentioned that she sometimes masks her natural accent to fit in with
>
> her friends who speak with an American accent. I think that's the same for me,
>
> because most of the people I am around lean towards American English. It creates this
>
> environment of peer pressure. I would say that British English feels less desirable than
>
> American English.

Interestingly, this perspective reveals that the perceived prestige of BrE may be

overshadowed by the dominant influence of AmE. As the environment becomes increasingly

globalized, the appeal of AmE, often associated with widespread media representation and

solidarity, can create a sense of peer pressure that lowers the desirability of BrE. Zhang's

study (2009) found that speakers from the USA received the highest solidarity rating,

indicating a strong preference for AmE in terms of perceived social connection and

relatability. During more informal interactions, such as interviews, individuals may prioritize

authenticity or solidarity over perceived prestige, resulting in a more relaxed and natural speech style. This theory aligns with the experiences of Participants 5, 6, and 7, who all aspire to speak BrE but demonstrated more AmE features than BrE ones in their interview tasks.

In conclusion, within the realm of Englishes in Hong Kong, the "standard" variety BrE is often regarded as more prestigious than other varieties, such as AmE and HKE, leading to its strong association with prestige and competitiveness. On the other hand, while the prestige associated with BrE can influence accent aims, aspects that may favor AmE, like authenticity and social connection, also significantly influence the development of individuals' accents.

5.4. American English in Hong Kong: Media and Education

The following part answers the last research question on participants' accent influences.

5.4.1. Media Influence

American films, television programs, music, and online content dominate the media in Hong Kong, profoundly affecting how English is perceived and utilized within the local population (Bolton, 2008; Chan, 2013; Hansen Edwards, 2016; Lau & Ho, 2023; Kirkpatrick, 2007). As of 2022, about 88% of Hong Kong residents were active social media users, with

approximately 65% engaging daily with platforms like YouTube, where most of the content is created by American producers (Kemp, 2022). Moody (2020) proposed that analyzing English in the context of popular culture involves exploring both the worldwide expansion of English and the global spread of popular culture. The influence of American pop culture, through various forms of entertainment, has led to a merging of BrE and AmE in everyday use in Hong Kong (Chan, 2013).

In this study, 90% (n = 9) of participants exhibited some AmE features in their speech, and 80% (n = 8) reported being influenced by American media, whereas only 10% (n = 1) mentioned British drama. The influence of American media creates an environment where AmE features become integrated into their speech, underscoring the reality that while BrE may be seen as the "prestigious" aim, AmE is the dominant influence in communication across different platforms. This blending of linguistic influences illustrates how globalization impacts local language use in the former British colony: The distinctions between BrE and AmE are increasingly blurred.

As a result of this cultural exchange, Hong Kong students may find themselves leaning toward AmE due to its prevalence in popular media, regardless of their intentions. Also, participants in this study specifically mentioned "learning English through YouTube and Instagram reels" and being influenced by "American pop culture." This long-term

exposure to American media has contributed to a noticeable shift in language use, where

many Hong Kong English speakers have begun to adopt features of AmE pronunciation,

consciously or unconsciously.

In the early 2000s, Chan (2000) highlighted a significant shift in the media landscape

of Hong Kong and Asia, noting that global media, which had struggled to penetrate the Asian

market just five years prior, was beginning to dominate the scene (Vines, 1996). Amidst this

transformation, Chan (2000) observed a troubling trend: The decreasing influence of local

English media. As global media outlets established themselves in Hong Kong and Asia, they

focused on prioritizing Chinese-language content aimed at the Greater China market (Chan,

2000). At the time, this shift posed a challenge for local English media, which risked further

marginalization unless they formed regional alliances.

Fast forward to the next decade, and the influence of globalization has accelerated. In

Hong Kong, American media has been increasingly overshadowing British media (Chan,

2013; Hansen Edwards, 2016). While local English media has struggled to maintain its

relevance, the omnipresence of American media has propelled the rise of AmE (Chan, 2013).

Chan (2013) reported that American content dominates the viewing preferences of Hong

Kong residents, with a significant amount of content produced by American creators.

Statistics from a report also indicated that among the 6.68 million YouTube users in Hong

Kong, approximately 65% engaged with the platform daily (Woodhouse, 2015). As Hong

Kong residents frequently consume this content, they may begin to internalize AmE features.

In addition, the impact of American media is pronounced among younger generations, who

are more likely to engage with digital content and thus more susceptible to adopting AmE

features (Lau & Ho, 2023). As a result, English learners in Hong Kong are increasingly

exposed to AmE features, which may lead to a redefinition of what it means to be proficient

in English.

The online environment has revived the belief in the importance of English as a

requirement for global literacy (Chan, 2000). The Internet has expanded the reach of English,

making it more accessible to a wider audience. This phenomenon has led to a growing

recognition that proficiency in English, particularly in its American variant, is important in

the globalized world (Lau & Ho, 2023).

As local English media diminishes in prominence, the increased consumption of

American content through digital platforms has significantly impacted language usage and

learning among Hong Kong speakers, contributing to the prevalence of AmE in the city.

5.4.2. Educational Influence

The education sector in Hong Kong has significantly adapted to the increasing importance of English as a global lingua franca. Historically, English language teaching in Hong Kong emphasized native speaker norms, particularly RP (Grove 2011; Hansen Edwards, 2016; Lau & Ho, 2023; Li, 1999). However, the findings of the current study indicate that AmE is used in the classroom among students and educators.

The current study discovers that while 70% (n = 7) of participants learned BrE in formal education, over 50% (n = 5) reported having teachers who spoke with an AmE accent. Some participants aimed to become English teachers but did not specify which accent they would teach, raising questions about the future of English instruction in Hong Kong.

Although much research (e.g., Chan, 2016; Hansen Edwards, 2015, 2016; Luk, 1998; Sung, 2014; Zhang, 2013) has been conducted on learners' attitudes toward different accents, there is a significant gap in studies examining the various varieties of English utilized in Hong Kong classrooms. Given current trends, it is likely that AmE will gain prominence in formal education as the influence of American pop culture and media continues to shape the accents of English speakers in Hong Kong.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Implications

While BrE has historically dominated the education sector of Hong Kong, the increasing presence of AmE features among students reflects the significant impact of American media and globalization (Chan, 2018; Hansen Edwards, 2016; Lau & Ho, 2023). This study reveals that learners may aim to speak BrE while unconsciously integrating AmE features into their speech.

As BrE remains prevalent in textbooks and spoken contexts, the influence of American media and teachers with American accents calls for further research on the role of AmE in Hong Kong classrooms. As AmE gains traction, the potential impact of teachers' accents on students warrants attention. The increasing number of aspiring English teachers with AmE features may contribute to the spread of AmE.

The importance of recognizing the fluidity of language identity is recognized by previous studies (Hansen Edwards, 2015; Shohamy, 2017). Moreover, according to Woolard (2020), language ideology encompasses beliefs about what constitutes a "real" language, as well as the idea that languages can be distinctly identified and categorized. These beliefs, together with systems that rank languages as more or less evolved, are problematic. Currently, BrE is regarded as a prestigious form of language in Hong Kong, meaning it holds a higher status than other varieties.

Meanwhile, studies on English teaching indicate that it is often unsuitable for many international English learners to aim for a native speaker accent. A more appropriate target variety would represent an international, multilingual identity (e.g., Jenkins, 2000, 2007). For instance, when teachers assess their students' spoken English, it is common to base the marking scheme on BrE, especially in contexts where BrE has historically been dominant. Could the marking scheme be more tolerant of other English varieties besides BrE, such as AmE and HKE?

To better understand this phenomenon, further research is needed. Examining how the integration of AmE into the curriculum affects students' language acquisition, engagement, and attitudes toward various Englishes will provide valuable information for educators seeking to enhance their teaching methodologies.

By fostering a more flexible approach to evaluation, educators can acknowledge the linguistic diversity in their classrooms. Such a shift would not only validate students' English learning experiences but also encourage them to value all varieties of English. Policymakers, curriculum designers, and educators should collaborate to create frameworks that embrace diverse English varieties to prepare students for a globalized world.

6.2. Limitations

The current study aims to assess changes in accent features and attitudes among English speakers in Hong Kong since Hansen Edwards' 2016 research. While her study involved speech samples and questionnaire data from 68 English majors, the present study includes a smaller sample of 10 participants aged 18 to 25. This difference in sample size and demographic range may impact the generalizability of findings. Moreover, the current study does not account for gender and age variations, which could further influence the participants' linguistic identities and attitudes. Although all participants share the same L1, Cantonese, HKE features are not explored in the current study, which may limit the depth of understanding regarding participants' accents and attitudes.

Hansen Edwards (2016) utilized specific reading materials, including the "Please Call Stella" passage and the sentence "Bother, father caught hot coffee in the car park." These texts are commonly employed for accent analyses due to their inclusion of words that represent various English accents, such as those in the LOT lexical set and examples of rhoticity. In contrast, the current study employed a custom-designed word list alongside the same "Bother, father" sentence to control for linguistic variables across 25 words per participant. This methodological variation allows for a tailored and controlled examination of accent features but may limit direct comparisons with Hansen Edwards' findings.

6.3. Concluding Remarks

As AmE becomes increasingly prevalent in the former British colony, the English accents of Hong Kong speakers reflect both historical ties to BrE and, more significantly, global trends in AmE. While BrE has maintained a dominant position in the education sector, the growing integration of AmE features among students highlights a fluid linguistic identity. This study found that the majority of participants aim to speak BrE while simultaneously absorbing features of AmE into their speech. As rhoticity remains the most prevalent feature of AmE, the BATH and LOT vowels are also emerging among speakers in Hong Kong, likely driven by globalization and the impact of American media. However, it is crucial to explore aspects that this paper did not fully address, such as how American media specifically influences individuals' accents, to gain a deeper understanding of the evolving language dynamics in Hong Kong. Further investigation will provide insights into the rapid transformation of English accents in the region.

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Appendix A: Sentence and Word List (Reading)

Sentence:

Bother, father caught hot coffee in the car park.

Word list:

Store, later, button, ask, clock, butter, path, kitten, dance, city, mountain, class, metal,

fountain, water, stop, mutton, mass.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. Which variety(s) of English were you exposed to the most prior to tertiary education?

2. Which variety(s) of English do you speak?

3. What has influenced you the most in the way you speak? Consider factors such as

education, family, peers, exposure to media, etc.

4. What are some features of your variety(s) of English that set it apart from other varieties?

5. Which variety(s) of English do you aim to speak? Why?

Appendix C: Phonetic Transcription of Words in Reading (Sample)

Feature	Word	AmE	BrE	Phonetic Transcription
Postvocalic [ɹ]	bother		1	[ˈbɒðə]
	father		1	[ˈfɑːðə]
	car	1		[kʰɑːɹ]
	park	1		[pʰɑːɹk]
	store	1		[ˈstɔɹ]
		3	2	
		60%	40%	
Flapping [ɾ]	water		1	[ˈwɔːtə]
	butter		1	[ˈbʌtə]
	later		1	[ˈleɪtə]
	city		1	[ˈsɪti]
	metal		1	[ˈmɛtᵊl]
		0	5	
		0%	100%	
BATH [æ]	ask		1	[ɑːsk]
	mass		1	[mɑːs]
	path		1	[pʰɑːθ]
	dance	1		[dæns]
	class	1		[ˈkʰlæs]
		2	3	
		40%	60%	
LOT [ɑː]	bother		1	[ˈbɒðə]
	hot		1	[hɒt]
	coffee		1	[ˈkʰɒfi]
	clock		1	[kʰlɒk]
	stop		1	[stɒp]
		0	5	
		0%	100%	
T-Glottalization [ʔ]	button		1	[ˈbʌtʰ.ən]
	mountain		1	[ˈmaʊn.tʰən]
	fountain		1	[ˈfaʊn.tʰən]
	mutton		1	[ˈmʌtʰ.ən]
	kitten		1	[ˈkʰɪtʰ.ən]
		0	5	
		0%	100%	

Appendix D: Interview Transcript (Sample)

Speaker 1 as the interviewer; Speaker 2 as the interviewee.

Speaker 1 (00:00)

Thank you so much for coming. Uh, so let me start with the first interview question. Which variety of English were you exposed to the most prior to tertiary education and why?

Speaker 2 (00:12)

I think I was exposed to Hong Kong English and a mixture of American English and British English because I was born here, and people around me mostly speak Hong Kong English and then my education background is local schools as well, and the teachers that are also local. So, I think they mostly speak a mixture of American English and British English because they have a mix of accent.

Speaker 1 (00:42)

Thank you. Which variety of English do you speak?

Speaker 2 (00:47)

I will say I'm speaking a mixture of Hong Kong English and British English because I try to

speak of a more British accent, and I will pronounce my /t/ and such.

Speaker 1 (00:58)

Hmm, so what has influenced you the most in the way you speak? You can consider factors

such as education, family, peers, exposure to media etcetera.

Speaker 2 (01:10)

I think media has influenced my speech in a way because I was really into British drama for a

while, like Sherlock Holmes and I like the way to speak and pride and prejudice like, oh my

gosh so fancy. And my peers as well, because here I've met a lot of different people from

different backgrounds, and they all speak a different variety of English. And education as

well. I think. Because my teacher speaks a mixture. And I also feel like I have a mixture of

both American and British English style yeah.

Speaker 1 (01:53)

What are some of the features of your variety of English that set it apart from other varieties?

You pronounce your /t/.

Speaker 2 (02:02)

I pronounce my /t/ and then I tried to um aspiration of my /h/ and then I guess I would say, unlike Hong Kong English, I would try to pronounce my TH and DH more instead of just fronting or backing yeah.

Speaker 1 (02:24)

Thank you. Which variety of English do you aim to speak?

Speaker 2 (02:28)

I try to speak of a you know RP accent because I feel like it's very attractive. It's very attractive and it sounds more sophisticated, but obviously I know that's not the reason. I feel like yeah, just it sounds so good and maybe it's because Hong Kong people really like British accent.

Appendix E: Phonetic Transcription of American English words in Interview (Sample)

	Postvocalic [ɹ]		Flapping [ɾ]		LOT [ɑː]
structure	[ˈstɹʌk.tʃɚ]	little	[ˈlɪr.əl]	honestly	[ˈɑn.əst.li]
for	[fɔɹ]				
more	[mɔɹ]				
grammar	[ˈɡɹæm.ɚ]				
entertainment	[ˌɛn.tɚ.ˈteɪn.mənt]				
informal	[ɪnˈfɔɹməl]				
understand	[ˌʌndɚˈstænd]				
hard	[hɑɹd]				

Appendix F: Percentage of American English Features among Participants 1-10

	Postvocalic [ɹ]		Intervocalic flap		BATH [æ]		LOT [ɑː]		T-Glottalization	
	Reading	Interview	Reading	Interview	Reading	Interview	Reading	Interview	Reading	Interview
1	100%	100%	100%	100%	80%	100%	100%	56%	40%	N/A
2	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	N/A	0%	0%	0%	N/A
3	100%	71%	0%	22%	100%	N/A	0%	40%	0%	0%
4	60%	66%	0%	7%	40%	25%	0%	50%	0%	N/A
5	60%	95%	0%	0%	40%	100%	0%	40%	0%	N/A
6	100%	100%	80%	95%	100%	100%	80%	100%	0%	N/A
7	0%	81%	0%	7%	0%	44%	0%	50%	0%	0%
8	100%	91%	20%	N/A	100%	100%	20%	50%	0%	N/A
9	100%	100%	80%	70%	100%	N/A	100%	100%	0%	N/A
10	100%	100%	80%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	0%	N/A

Note: N/A refers to the absence of an environment in the interview.

Neurodiversity in Digital Communication: Analysing Texting Habits, Perceptions, and Influential Factors on Neurodivergent Individuals

Luo Hiu Lam Kelly

Supervisor: Professor Wilkinson Daniel Wong GONZALES

Introduction

The rapid advancement of technology has notably elevated the significance of digital communication channels such as SMS (Short Message Service) and online blogging. As text messaging increasingly becomes the primary mode of communication, it is clear that the language used in digital contexts diverges significantly from traditional face-to-face interactions. This shift in language usage not only reflects the evolving ways we communicate but also offers insights into the identities and personalities of those engaged in digital conversations. Research has shown that linguistic choices in digital communication, ranging from the use of abbreviations and slang to morphosyntactic variations, can reveal significant aspects of an individual's personality and help establish their linguistic profile (Caplan et al., 2020).

Despite the breadth of studies focused on the unique linguistic styles of digital communication, there is a tendency to limit analyses to certain demographic groups. These studies predominantly focus on specific cultural groups, such as Chinese, Japanese, or Spanish speakers, or on individuals with particular language backgrounds, such as ESL (English as a Second Language) learners or bilingual speakers. Despite covering a wide array of recognized cultural and linguistic backgrounds of people, these studies nonetheless leave a gap in the research concerning other significant populations.

One such overlooked group is neurodivergent individuals. According to Harvard Health Publishing, neurodiversity refers to 'the diversity of all people, but is often used in the context of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), as well as other neurological or developmental conditions such as ADHD or learning disabilities' (Baumer & Frueh, 2021). Recent scholarly attention, as indicated by Shah and Holmes (2023) in figure one, demonstrates a significant increase in discussions around 'neurodiversity'. This indicates a growing interest in exploring how neurological variations influence in different aspects in life, including communication.

Figure 1

Publications referring to 'neurodiversity' since 2000
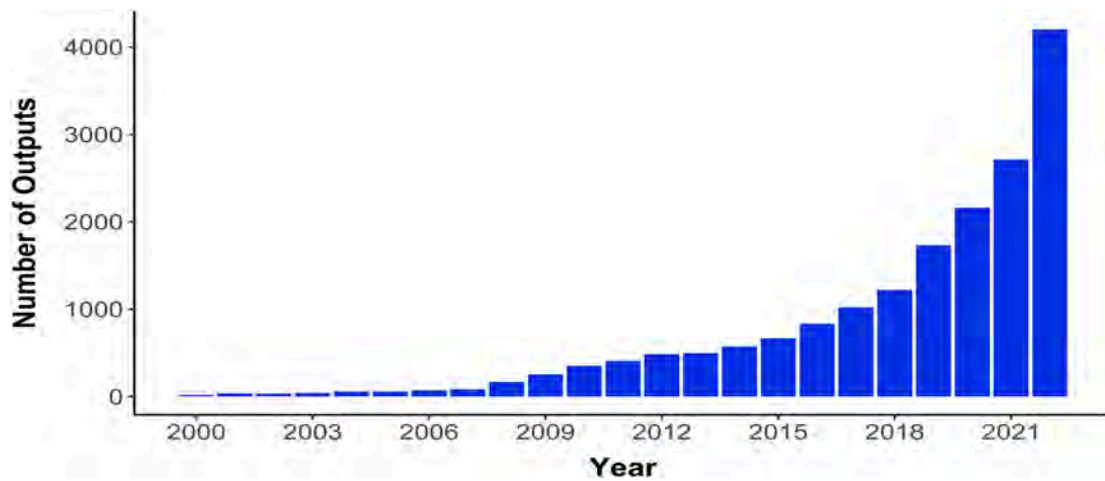
Note. Scholarly outputs including 'neurodiversity'. Google Scholar analysis on 06/09/2023 for outputs including 'neurodiversity' as a term, showing an average year-on-year increase of over 40% between 2000 and 2022.

The significance of the research to include neurodiversity lies in its ability to promote a more inclusive society. By exploring the distinct communication styles of neurodivergent individuals, this study paves the way for various important applications. For example, it can lead to the development of more effective pedagogical implications tailored to diverse learning needs. Additionally, this research could inspire further studies on different types of neurodiversity and their impact on communication strategies in other sorts of digital communication platforms. It also has the potential to shift perceptions of neurodiversity, improving the understanding and interactions between neurodivergent and neurotypical individuals.

Motivated by the trend and its significance, my research aims to delve into the texting behaviors of neurodivergent individuals, examining their unique linguistic features in digital communication. By comparing these features with those of neurotypical individuals, this study seeks to identify variations in language use and understand the societal perceptions towards neurodivergent individuals through their texting styles. This approach not only broadens the scope of digital communication research within neurodivergent community, but also contributes to a more inclusive understanding of how diverse neurological conditions influences and impacts communication in the digital age.

Literature Review

In this section, I will be reviewing *Analysing the Meaning of Tone Indicators by Neurodivergent Community in Twitter* by Christanti, Mardani, and Fadhila (2022). This research brought out the theme of how neurodivergent navigate digital communication, especially in twitter, to avoid miscommunication or communication breakdown. Neurodivergent individuals often face unique communication challenges due to differences in how they perceive, process, and respond to information compared to the neurotypical community (Hobson, Toseeb, & Gibson, 2024, p. 1511). As mentioned in the study, the neurodivergent community often heavily relies on explicit verbal cues during face-to-face interaction as they struggle with implicit social signals such as subtle cues in sarcasm or flirtation, which are often integral to conventional communication practices. Digital communication often typically lacks the non-verbal cues that help clarify messages, making it difficult for neurodivergent individuals to infer the emotional context or intent behind text-based messages. This can lead to misunderstandings or anxiety, as the usual indicators used to gauge conversational nuance are absent. The study by Christanti, Mardani, and Fadhila (2022) focuses specifically on how tone indicators are used and perceived by the neurodivergent community on Twitter. It highlights the adoption of these linguistic tools as a strategy to overcome communication barriers, demonstrating their effectiveness in creating a predictable and user-friendly communication landscape. This approach not only aids in reducing miscommunication but also supports the creation of a more inclusive digital space for neurodivergent individuals.

The study utilizes a qualitative approach which conducts interviews with participants from the neurodivergent community who are active users of tone indicators on Twitter, aging from 15-20. These participants were selected by the purposive sampling techniques to address the primary research question 'What is a tone indicator?', which involves examining the usage and perceptions of tone indicators among neurodivergent individuals. The findings are structured into three key themes: clarifying the tone or context of messages, emphasizing expression in text, and minimizing misinterpretation of messages. Together, these themes highlight how tone indicators play a crucial role in enhancing clarity, expressing emotions more effectively, and preventing misunderstandings in digital communications, thus facilitating more accurate and empathetic interactions which benefits the neurodivergent community.

To start with, tone indicators serve as a tool for clarifying the tone or the context of the message, demonstrating how digital communication lacks this kind of expression for the neurodivergent community. In the study, participants describe tone indicators as paralinguistic cues, which are especially helpful for those who might struggle with text-based communication due to neurodivergence, but they are also beneficial for neurotypical individuals, fostering safer and more comfortable interactions across various online communities. Furthermore, a neurodivergent participant commented how tone indicators help reduce the level of anxiety as

they will have more information regarding in interpreting what kind of context the online communication is about:

> I use it because I know how helpful it is for me personally in understanding what people are saying, it reduces a lot of anxiety I feel being online and knowing if someone is being serious or joking. (Christanti, Mardani, & Fadhila , 2022, p. 10)

Based on the result, the study indicates that neurodivergent people often need linguistic aid in terms of clarifying the context of the message in digital communication platforms.

The study also reveals that the neurodivergent community frequently relies on tone indicators to express emotions in text, avoiding ambiguous and confusing expressions. One participant described tone indicators as necessary 'add-ons' to emojis or emoticons, which often carry ambiguous meanings. For instance, a smiling emoji might be misinterpreted as passive-aggressive, and a crying emoji could be seen as either crying or excessively laughing. These misinterpretations demonstrate one of the purposes of tone indicators, in which, clarifying emotional intent. Tone indicators facilitate the expression of emotions in environments with limited non-verbal cues, thus enhancing the emotional clarity needed for healthy digital communication. The study also includes practical use of tone indicators, such as /p for platonic and /r for romantic, indicating how such linguistic feature helps articulate emotions more clearly in text-only communication settings. This finding highlights a specific linguistic adaptation that benefits the neurodivergent community to accurately express their emotions in digital communication platforms.

Lastly, the study reveals that neurodivergent utilise tone indication as to minimise the chances of misinterpretation of messages. Through analysing all the interviewing results from the neurodivergent community that actively use tone indication on twitter, the study concluded that tone indicators serve as informative aids for message interpretation. Particularly for individuals diagnosed with ADHD or autism, there is a strong tendency to over interpret the meaning of messages, pathing away from the original intention. One participant elaborates on this struggle, explaining:

> Some jokes sound serious and some serious matters seem jokingly presented. A common issue for myself and others I know with ADHD or autism is the tendency to overthink everything, including texts. I prefer texting to speaking on the phone, but the lack of vocal tones or facial expressions can easily lead to misunderstandings. Tone indicators serve as a substitute for these missing cues, allowing for clearer communication. (Christanti, Mardani, & Fadhila , 2022, p. 12)

Therefore, based on the responses from the participants, tone indicators are popularly used as it effectively helps message interpretation. This highlights that neurodivergent communities often need other linguistic aid in terms of decoding the meaning of the message in order to avoid misinterpretation that ultimately leads to miscommunications, arguments or conflicts.

The study significantly highlights the challenges faced by the neurodivergent community when communicating through online platforms. It demonstrates the limitations of digital communication for these individuals, who often struggle with both expression and interpretation. While the study introduces the use of tone indicators as a linguistic cue, it also reveals a gap in the exploration of other linguistic features that could aid neurodivergent individuals in the context of online communication. Additionally, the focus on Twitter as the sole platform for analysis overlooks the potential variations in the use of linguistic cues across different platforms, such as SMS or other online messaging services, which might offer more intimate and private communication settings compared to the public nature of Twitter. This could lead to differences in how neurodivergent individuals express themselves authentically. Furthermore, the study does not explore the perceptions of these linguistic cues from the perspectives of neurotypical individuals. These gaps demonstrate the need for a broader investigation into various linguistic tools that could facilitate better understanding and interaction within and beyond the neurodivergent community across multiple digital platforms.

Research Questions

1. Do linguistic variations exist between neurodivergent and neurotypical individuals in online texting?

2. How are neurodivergent individuals perceived based on their text messages? Can observers distinguish texts written by neurodivergent individuals from those written by neurotypical individuals?

3. What factors contribute to the linguistic differences observed in the texting habits of neurodivergent individuals?

Methodology

This research utilizes a qualitative approach to examine the text messages from self-identified neurodivergent and neurotypical individuals by using convenience sampling due to the limited timeframe of the capstone project. Additionally, data collection includes interviewing methods during peer review sessions to understand perceptions of neurodiversity by analyzing text messages. Within these sessions, an experimental method is also employed where the original data is modified to enhance the clarity of the perception results. Furthermore, these

results are utilised in investigating the influential factor for using linguistics variation by the neurodivergent community.

I. Data Collection

In this study, I gathered 9 sets of text messages from individuals identified as neurodivergent, each displaying characteristics of various conditions such as dyslexia, speech disorders, ADHD, and autism. The following table indicates the different types of condition of each text. Apart from that, 8 sets of text messages from neurotypical individuals are also collected. These samples serve dual purposes for this research: firstly, to analyse and compare the linguistic variations between messages from neurotypical and neurodivergent individuals; secondly, to facilitate a peer review session during which both neurotypical and neurodivergent groups have to evaluate and provide feedback on the text messages.

Neurodivergent Sets	Person A	Symptoms	Person B	Symptoms
Set Text 1	Neurodivergent	Dyslexia	Neurodivergent	ADHD
Set Text 2	Neurodivergent	Dyslexia	Neurodivergent	ADHD
Set Text 3	Neurodivergent	Dyslexia	Neurodivergent	Autism
Set Text 4	Neurotypical	NA	Neurodivergent	ADHD, Dyslexia, Speech Disorder
Set Text 5	Neurodivergent	Dyslexia	Neurodivergent	Speech Disorder
Set Text 6	Neurotypical	NA	Neurodivergent	Speech Disorder
Set Text 7	Neurotypical	NA	Neurodivergent	Speech Disorder
Set Text 8	Neurotypical	NA	Neurodivergent	Dyslexia
Set Text 9	Neurodivergent	Dyslexia	Neurotypical	NA

II. Peer Review Session

Before the peer review session, all evaluators are required to fill out a Google Form for a brief background check. This form gathers information about their age, occupation, academic background, financial status, ethnicity, living conditions, and region. Additionally, the form will inquire about their frequency of texting, exposure to neurodivergent individuals, mental health, and any self-reported neurodivergent status among neurodivergent participants.

During the peer review session, each evaluator is tasked with reviewing a total of 15 text message samples in a randomised order, consisting of 3 messages from neurotypical individuals, 6 from neurodivergent individuals, and 6 modified messages that were originally from neurodivergent individuals but altered by a neurotypical non-evaluator to appear more a typical of neurotypical communication. The peer review is conducted using a semi-structured interview format, in which evaluators are guided by specific questions but are also encouraged to expand beyond these structured inquiries. Additionally, follow-up questions will be formulated on the spot to probe further details during the interview. Evaluators begin by identifying any notable linguistic features within the text messages one sample at a time, focusing on elements that stand out and provide initial impressions of the communication style. Then, the evaluators are asked questions aimed to collect perceptions of both the sender and receiver, which includes their age, personality, occupation, and mental health. Evaluators are also encouraged and welcomed to offer insights on other aspects such as the language background of the senders and receiver. After that, evaluators are asked to describe their emotional reactions to the linguistic styles of the messages and articulate these feelings. Subsequently, they are prompted to characterise the writing style of both the sender and the receiver, using adjectives that best describe each. After reviewing all the text messages, evaluators are required to categorise each sample by deciding whether the messages appear to be from neurotypical or neurodivergent individuals based on their observation (Question 5).

Peer Review Session Questions:
1. Please review the text message below. Can you spot anything that stands out to you in terms of the language use? Why? How do you interpret it?
2. Based on the language use of Person A and B, can you predict or describe person A and B such as their age, occupation and personality?
3. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 as the poorest and 5 as the healthiest), can you rate the overall mental health of person A and B?
4. Can you use one adjective each to describe the writing style of person A and B?
5. From all these samples, can you please identify which ones you think, if any, came from neurodivergent people and neurotypical people?

Findings

A. Linguistic Features of Text Messages

This section answers the first research question: Do linguistic variations exist between neurodivergent and neurotypical individuals in online texting? A total of 9 neurodivergent and 8 neurotypical text messages are analysed and compared to demonstrate the linguistic variations from both groups of individuals. Based on the data collected, I discovered a total of five linguistic features or variations from both the neurodivergent and neurotypical groups in terms of non-textual language/ visual text paralanguage, abbreviated language, turn taking behavior, variation analysis on spelling and lexical choice, and syntax/ sentence structure.

1. Non-textual language/ Visual text paralanguage

Non-textual language or visual text paralanguage refers to the uses of emojis, emoticons or stickers in this context. Borst and Kosslyn (2010) indicates that textual paralanguage (TPL) or visual text paralanguage help create the imagery of gesture, sounds or facial expression in messaging that contributes to a concrete and realistic communication in the setting of SMS communications. By analysing the data, both neurodivergent and neurotypical individuals indicate a significant use of non-textual language which often serve as emotional cues or as direct responses to the messages.

1.1. Neurodivergent Communication

Based on the text samples from the neurodivergent individuals, the purposes of utilising non-textual language are expressing or emphasising emotions, and to provide a direct response without the use of textual language in SMS communication. The use of non-textual language appears in 4 out of 9 text samples and most of them demonstrates the tendency of overuse.

The above evidence is from set text 1 and 2 from the neurodivergent text sample group, there is a noticeable high frequency of non-textual language usage, which appears in various forms. These include a combination of textual and non-textual languages, as well as instances where only non-textual language is used. Primarily, the mixed usage acts as an emotional cue

that complements the textual messages, helping to convey the tone or emotions not explicitly expressed through text alone, for instance, the frog crying emoji is trying to convey the emotion of how difficult the matter might be for person A, the crying emoji is to convey the emotion of laughing excessively, and the cat crying emoji to convey humor. In both samples, the neurodivergent communicators utilize emojis, sometimes just one, but often multiple in a single message in order to emphasize the emotions. Additionally, the use of non-textual language often serves as a direct response in these samples, typically involving multiple emojis in a single message, without accompanying any text which is evident by the multiple cat laughing emoji to express and emphasise on the humor from person A.

The evidence from neurodivergent set texts 4 and 6 highlights the frequent use of non-textual language. In these examples, the neurodivergent individual, person B, extensively uses multiple stickers and crying emojis as emotional cues. Moreover, person B utilizes emoticons as direct responses to the neurotypical individual, Person A. For instance, when Person A suggests that person B needs to 'train your comprehension skills', person B simply replies with non-textual expressions such as '@-@' and ';-;' without using any textual language. Furthermore, in set text 6 from the neurodivergent sets, in the line 'I can't sleep -_-' the neurodivergent individual person B initiated their emotion of boredom or the sense of helplessness with the situation that he or she was not able to sleep with the use of both textual language and non-textual language. Thus, both samples demonstrate the overuse of non-textual language as both emotional cue or a direct response without the support of any textual language.

1.2 Neurotypical Communication

Non-text elements such as emojis are also present in the samples from neurotypical individuals, although their usage is considerably less frequent. Typically, these individuals do not employ multiple forms of non-text language within a single message and often use them to express the tone and emotion of the text. The samples indicate a moderate use of emojis without any signs of overuse in 4 out of 8 samples.

Person A: THERE OPEN TILL 3AM 😭

Person A: Henry potter??? 💀
Person A: Jessica 😭

Person A: I did?
Person A: well at least you knew it was a joke
Person A: 🤚

Person A: ik
Person A: you brought it up 😆

Person B: super

Person A: 😩

Person A: Bro 🙃 okay
Person A: Idk If I can do dinner after 8 tho let's do before
Person A: Idk what I'll do in oc all day
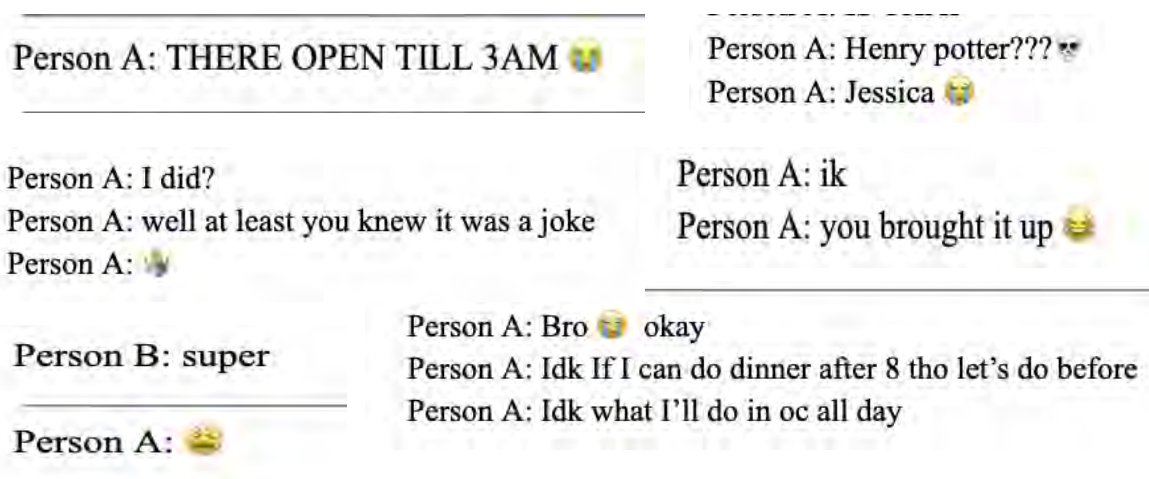
The above examples come from set text 1, 2 ,3 and 5 from the neurotypical groups indicate the use of non-textual language with only a single use in each message. In set text 1 from the neurotypical individuals group, the crying emoji in 'THERE OPEN TILL 3AM' serves as an emphasis on the emotion that is not easily predicted due to lacking previous context. As for the other lines in set text 1 in which the skeleton emoji, a very common and widely used Gen-Z expression to demonstrate a level beyond crying laughing which something is so funny that they are dying, showing that the non-textual emoji serves as a emotional cue to the textual language message 'Henry potter???'. Moreover, in set text 2 in which the line 'well at least you knew it was a joke' though followed by a emoji alone in the next line, it is not consider as a direct response to the text, yet it is a emotion cue for the textual language as 'whatever' or the feeling of 'what can I say'. In the same set text sample, the laughing emoji serves as an emotion cue to the textual language. In set text 3, the sample demonstrates the use of non-textual language as a direct response as person A only replied with a weary face emoji. Furthermore, in set text 5, person A used a crying emoji to express the emotion with also textual language.

2. Abbreviated language

Both in neurodivergent and neurotypical communication, using abbreviated language in daily texting is very common. While both groups use abbreviated language, the group of

neurodivergent communicators shows the tendency to overuse abbreviated language, as for the neurotypical group, it appears that it has only noticeable use.

2.1 Neurodivergent Communication

The samples from neurodivergent individuals show a marked tendency to overuse abbreviated language. It appears based on all samples that there are three purposes for using abbreviated language in neurodivergent communication. The primary reason for using these abbreviations seems to be to shorten word length for easier spelling, as seen with 'gonna' for 'going to' and 'lemme' for 'let me.' Additionally, some abbreviations serve to express emotions, such as 'omg' and 'LOL.' In several cases, these abbreviated forms are used to provide direct replies without further explanation. In the following, more examples from the text samples will be presented with explanation.

Set Text 1: Person B: *gg* (Direct response)
Set Text 5: Person A: *Btw* your pet thing arrived
Person A: *Imma* see
Person A: When you *gonna* dismiss today
Person A: You *wanna* go to — when I'm back ?
Set Text 6: Person B: *Idk* (Direct response)
Set Text 7: Person B: *Idk*
Set Text 9: Person A: *Ffs*

The above samples show the use of abbreviated language from the neurodivergent group with the purpose of easier spelling and also to provide a direct response without further explanation. There are two examples which show abbreviated language as both easier spelling and direct response which are 'gg' as the meaning of 'good game', and 'Idk' as 'I don't know'. As for others, they all present the purpose for easier spelling as in 'lmma' as 'I am going to', 'Btw' as 'by the way', 'gonna' as 'are going to', 'wanna' as 'want to' and 'Ffs' as 'For fuck sake'.

Set Text 2: Person A: Bro did you see it *omg*
Person B: *omg* my hard work paid off
Person A: *Omg*
Set Text 3: Person A: *LOL*
Person A: *bruh*
Person A: i mean this is also good but like we need to put the best one first *LOL*
Set Text 9: Person A: If I had written it 90% sure I would of gotten it *lol*

The samples provided illustrate the use of abbreviated language by the neurodivergent group to express emotions. The commonly used abbreviations include 'omg' for 'oh my god' and 'LOL' for 'laugh out loud'. These abbreviated languages are employed in text messages discussing humorous content to convey laughter or amusement. However, some abbreviations are also used in contexts that do not appear humorous. For example, in text set 3, person A states, 'i mean this is also good but like we need to put the best one first LOL', in which 'LOL' is used even though the context is not overtly funny, yet it can be seen as a way to soften the tone. With that, it demonstrates an overuse of abbreviated language as how it does not fit into the texting context. Overall, these abbreviations appear both as standalone expressions and as supplements to the text.

2.2 Neurotypical Communication

While there isn't a tendency to the overuse of abbreviated language in neurotypical communication, there are still noticeable instances of its use. Most of the usage is for the ease of typing which is similar to neurodivergent communication.

> Set Text 2: Person B: *ik*
> Set Text 3: Person B: *yk* what
> Person A: *ik*
> Set Text 5: Person A: i will be late for class so why i go *yk*
> Person B: *wdym*
> Person A: *Idk* If I can do dinner after 8 tho let's do before
> Person A: *Idk* what I'll do in oc all day
> Person B: what time you will be at *oc*
> Set Text 6: Person A: Wait *Ur* hair grew that fast already?
> Person B: so *fking* fast
> Person A: I *wanna* say I went to the small gym to do cardio I think I will never go again
> Person A: *Cuz* i feel like It was very proper

Based on the above examples from neurotypical communication, they showcase the purpose of easier and faster typing with the use of abbreviated language. For instance, the use of 'ik' as 'I know', 'yk' as 'you know', 'wdym' as 'what do you mean', 'Ur' as 'your', 'fking' as 'fucking', 'wanna' as 'want to', and 'Cuz' as 'cause' or 'because'. There are also instances where the abbreviated language is used as a short form for a location in set text 5 from person B 'what time you will be at *oc*', in which the 'oc' is a short form for a location.

3. Turn Taking Behaviour

Turn-taking behavior is a communication process in which individuals in real-life conversations determine who will speak first by initiating the topic (Ghilzai & Baloch, 2016).

While this behavior occurs in face-to-face interactions, it is also prevalent in digital communication, particularly in SMS text messaging where responses are instantaneous. Based on the analysis of all samples from both neurodivergent and neurotypical texts reveals that turn-taking behavior varies between the two groups.

3.1 Neurodivergent Communication

In neurodivergent communication, some samples indicate the roles of topic dominance and submissiveness. When it comes to a conversation between both neurodivergent individuals, there is not a significant difference in which the messages from both communicators are equally distributed. However,it does not apply to all cases, as in some conversations between 2 neurodivergent individuals, there is still a significant role of submissiveness and dominance. As for a conversation between a neurodivergent and neurotypical individual, there is a significant difference of who is holding the topic of the interaction as seen in this example.

Person A: look at the numbers and I have to count it one by one
Person A: They be looking at me and annoyed

Person B: LMA00000
Person B: just download a currency app
Person B: to translate between krw to hkd

Person A: You see I use cash and I fold them together in my money bag
Person A: Everytime I pay i have to unfold it

Person B: gg

The above example is from set text 1 from the neurodivergent group, in which the conversation is between two neurodivergent individuals. Based on the context, both parties do not appear to be either submissive or dominantance. As seen from the example, both communicators contributed by taking equal turns and stayed on the topic which person A initiated.

Person A: You want this or not

Person B: Any yellow one?

Person A: Btw your pet thing arrived
Person A: Imma see

Person B: Ok

Person A: You going to school ?

Person B: Yea

Person A: You need a bag back ?
Person A: Among us one
Person A: ███ driving ?

Person B: Nah
Person B: Yea

Person A: So no bag pack ok

Person B: Yea

Person A: When you gonna dismiss today

Person B: 5:00

Person B: Ok
Person A: ███ said wanna bring you

Person A: He has a car he could drive us around

Person B: Ok

In this example from set text 5 of the neurodivergent group, it is evident that Person A dominates the topics, while Person B acts submissively by responding primarily to cues from Person A. For instance, Person A initiates the conversation with 'You want this or not' in order to seek Person B's opinion. Then, Person A shifts the topic with 'Btw your pet thing arrived' and once again, Person B's replies are confined to responding to the topics introduced by Person A. Overall, Person A consistently poses questions, demonstrating dominance in topic control, while Person B provides opinions or facts, which indicate a submissive role in the conversation. This example illustrates that turn-taking behavior is not distributed in all communications among neurodivergent individuals.

Person A: I'll be home around 2

Person B: Ok

Person A: Bring Kimie hm with you have her open door and do the alarm

Person B: Ok

Person A: Don't rush her !
Person A: We have covid vaccine on Friday morning 10:30

Person B: Ok

Person A: If you can't get it at Kaiser appt

Person B: Ok

The above example showcases a conversation between a neurodivergent and a neurotypical individual, with significant topic dominance exhibited by Person A and topic submission from Person B. Based on the conversation, Person A initiates all topics through statements and requests, while Person B's responses are limited to acknowledgments such as 'ok', demonstrating that Person B's responses are only guided by the topics introduced by Person A. This example highlights the clear differences in turn-taking behavior between a neurotypical and a neurodivergent individual, in which one party clearly dominates the exchange in text messaging.

3.2 Neurotypical Communication

Person A: What time we going gym today?
Person B: Have to school half day
Person B: I think I might go dinner time

Person A: What time lemme know, so I'll come with U, will coach some too?
Person A: Cuz today is my leg day
Person A: And I want to do it properly

Person B: U can ask in group
Person B: For me
Person B: Maybe 10pm cuz I need back Yuen Long 9:00 and need dinner

Person A: 10?!!
Person A: Too late for me

Person B: Told u I need school
Person B: Find coach
Person B: He should be fine

Person B: I thought you had to be at cal state tomorrow anyways
Person B: I'll drive to cal state

Person A: no
Person A: wednesday i need
Person A: i will be late for class so why i go yk
Person A: Bro I thought you meant tuesday

Person B: wdym
Person B: we will hang out wed
Person B: after school
Person B: but let's have dinner tuesday night first

In neurotypical communication, nearly all samples show an equal amount of turn-taking between participants. The above examples from set text 5 and 7 of the neurotypical samples

which illustrate the balanced turn-taking behavior. In the text message exchange, Person A and Person B contribute equally to the conversation, focusing on planning a hangout. Both communicators participate equally in accommodating and deciding on the best plan for their outing. This highlights that in neurotypical communication, there is no significant dominance or submissiveness regarding topics, as both parties tend to focus on a single topic and contribute equally.

4. Variation Analysis

In this section, I will conduct a detailed analysis of the spelling and lexical variations observed in text messages samples from both neurodivergent and neurotypical groups. This analysis aims to identify and understand the variation of patterns in language use between these two groups, which include variations in word choice and spelling.

4.1.1 Neurodivergent Communication (Spelling Variations)

In analyzing the communication patterns of neurodivergent individuals, I observed several interesting typing errors that do not seem to be related to the placement of keys on the keyboard. For example, in Set Text 4, the word 'word' is typed as ''work,' and in Set Text 9, 'than' is typed as 'then.' Additionally, in Set Text 5, phrases like 'bag back' or 'bag pack' are used instead of the term 'backpack'. Similarly, in Set Text 7, the phrase 'It sis' appears instead of 'It's sisters', and in Set Text 3, the word 'sacrifice' is repeated as 'sacrificesacrifice'. Another variation found in Set Text 9 is 'would of gotten' instead of 'would've forgotten'. A particularly interesting case is found in Set Text 2, where 'kilt it' is used in place of 'killed it'. In the text message, 'kilt' is recognized as internet slang for 'killed'. However, the addition of 'it' raises the question whether the intent was to write 'killed it' or simply use the slang 'kilt'. This might indicate a mix-up between the phonologically similar /d/ and /t/.

These variations may also be attributed to quick and rushed typing, as evidenced by further misspellings such as 'chnage' and 'struggiing' in Set Text 3. These observations suggest that neurodivergent individuals might exhibit variation in spelling potentially due to rapid typing. Furthermore, in set text 2, the variation of 'omg' as 'Okg' and 'Img' from person A further highlight rapid texting that causes variation influenced by the keyboard placement.

4.1.2 Neurodivergent Communication (Lexical Variations)

In analyzing the lexical variations present in communications from the neurodivergent group, it becomes apparent that certain word choices can lead to misunderstandings. This phenomenon is particularly evident in text messages from Set Texts 1, 8, and 9. For instance, in Set Text 1, the neurodivergent individual person B uses the word 'mesmerise' when they mean to say 'memorise'. This substitution prompts person A to seek clarification, indicating a moment of confusion due to the unexpected lexical choice. Similarly, in Set Text 8, person B's minimalistic response of 'ok can be ambiguous, that could potentially leave the receiver being unsure whether

person B fully understands or agrees with the previous message or if further discussion is needed. Lastly, in Set Text 9, another layer of confusion is introduced when person A mentions, 'The 7-year-old just corrected my spelling/ In my defense, it was orally.' This statement with such lexical variation of 'orally' introduces potential ambiguity to the receiver of the text message.

4.2.1 Neurotypical Communication (Spelling Variations)

In neurotypical communication, as illustrated in the examples from Set Texts 1, 3, and 8 from the neurotypical samples, the omission of apostrophes and variations in spelling are observed. Commonly, apostrophes are omitted in casual texting, with 'Ill' used instead of 'I'll' and 'dont' instead of 'don't'. This simplification reflects a preference for speed over the standard form of spelling. Furthermore, other spelling variations are noticeable, for instance, the phrase 'I was a joke' used in place of 'It was a joke', and 'there' to 'they're' in which the sender missed the apostrophe and the alphabet 'y'. These instances demonstrate both the technique for quicker typing and also carelessness of rapid typing in text messaging.

4.2.2 Neurotypical Communication (Lexical Choice)

In the neurotypical communication samples, there is limited evidence of significant lexical variation. However, an interesting instance from Set Text 1 demonstrates how special lexical choices are used for humor purposes. In this text, phrases such as 'Henry Potter', 'Jessica World', and 'mommy the transgender ride' are creatively altered from their original references to 'Harry Potter', 'Jurassic World' and 'mommy and the Transformer ride' respectively. Based on the response from person A, the use of laughing emojis indicates that these intentional misnamings are perceived as humorous. This example highlights that in neurotypical interactions, such playful and inventive lexical choice often serves to entertain and amuse the conversational participants.

5. Syntax/ Sentence Structure

This section explores the syntax or sentence structure from both the neurodivergent and neurotypical communications. Based on my observation, it is evident that it is common that neurodivergent individuals adopt shorter and simplistic replies, while neurotypical individuals tend to use longer and more expressive sentences.

5.1 Neurodivergent Communications

Person A: I'll be home around 2

Person B: Ok

Person A: Bring Kimie hm with you have her open door and do the alarm

Person B: Ok

Person A: Don't rush her !
Person A: We have covid vaccine on Friday morning 10:30

Person B: Ok

Person A: If you can't get it at Kaiser appt

Person B: Ok

Person A:What you bringing back to ████

Person B: Gundam tools

Person A: For?

Person B: Build in ████

Person A:You have Gundam in ████ too?

Person B: Ye
Person B: A lot

Person A: So you should be excited
Person A: Going back ████

Person B: No

Person A: Btw your pet thing arrived
Person A: Imma see

Person B: Ok

Person A: You going to school ?

Person B: Yea

Person A: You need a bag back ?
Person A: Among us one
Person A: ████ driving ?

Person B: Nah
Person B: Yea

Person A: So no bag pack ok

Person B: Yea

Person A: You want this or not

In neurodivergent communication, as shown in the syntax examples from Set Texts 5, 7, and 8, in which individuals often use short or simplistic replies within their conversations. These replies frequently consist of single-word responses such as 'ok', 'yea', or 'nah', and are used consistently across different contexts. Such responses indicate a preference for brevity and directness in communication. Additionally, the sentence structure in neurodivergent communications commonly lacks the typical Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) format and often omits explanatory context, which can make the messages seem abrupt or incomplete. For example, from the answer of the neurodivergent individual 'Gundam tools/ Build in' which only consists of a simple and obvious lexical term that conveys the meaning without further elaboration. There is also a notable omission of auxiliary verbs in questions or statements, such as 'You want this or not' and 'You going to school?' instead of the more grammatically complete 'Do you want this or not?' or 'Are you going to school?'.

5.2 Neurotypical Communication

In neurotypical communication, individuals tend to use longer and more expressive sentences, as evidenced in examples from Set Texts 2 and 6. For instance, one message details a series of events and plans: 'because I thought it will happen at last Monday and I told my dad

that I need to be at the banquet so we will leave after the banquet but things happen and it going to be tomorrow so ye man.' This sentence packs multiple thoughts and details into a single message which demonstrate expressive and somewhat complex sentence structures. Another example from the texts is 'I went to the bigger gym to do weight training because I saw in the small one not much equipment', which also reflects a descriptive approach to communication.

Furthermore, based on neurotypical communication, it is evident that neurotypical communicators tend to not simplify the language or omit the auxiliary verbs. In Set text 5 and 6, the two samples both demonstrate the tendency of including the auxiliary verbs. For instance, in 'Idk what I'll do in oc all day' though the 'Idk' is the indication of simplifying language, the 'I'll' of including the auxiliary verb 'will' indicates a more complete sentence structure. Furthermore, in Set text 6, the text messages exchanged 'But I think I'll go later again tonight if I can to do cardio because I feel like it was very proper' also demonstrate a more complete syntax or sentence structure with the inclusion of auxiliary verbs, for instance, 'will' in 'I'll', 'can' and 'was'.

B. Perception on Neurodivergent and Neurotypical Text Messages

This section answers the second research question: How are neurodivergent individuals perceived based on their text messages? Can observers distinguish texts written by neurodivergent individuals from those written by neurotypical individuals? As mentioned in the methodology section, a total of 4 self-identified neurodivergent and 4 neurotypical individuals participated in evaluating text messages of both groups. The following tables demonstrate all background information of the evaluators.

Neurodivergent Evaluators:

	Status	Exposure to ND	Age	Occupation	Financial Status	Race/ Ethnicity	Region Living
A	Dyslexia	3	18-24	Student	5	White	US
B	ADHD, Dyslexia, Speech Disorder	3	Under 18	Student	3	Asian	HK
C	Autism	4	18-24	Student	3	Asian	HK
D	ADHD	5	18-24	Student with Part time job	4	Mixed (Hispanic & Asian)	HK

Continued:

	Living Situation	Highest Edu	Degree Pursuing	Native Language	Second Languages	Texting Language	Texting frequency	Mental Health
A	Alone (own house/ apartment/ Flat)	High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (e.g. GED/ HKDSE/ IB)	Undergraduate degree	English	NA	English	5	5
B	Live with	Some high	Currently	Cantonese	English,	English	5	3

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	family/friends without paying rent	school, no diploma	in Secondary School		Mandarin			
C	Live with family/friends without paying rent	Associate degree	Undergraduate degree	Cantonese	English	English	5	2
D	Alone (own house/ apartment/ Flat)	Bachelor's degree	Undergraduate degree	English and Spanish	Cantonese, Korean	English	5	4

Neurotypical Evaluators:

	Exposure to ND	Age	Occupation	Financial Status	Race/ Ethnicity	Region Living	Living Situation
A	3	18-24	Student	5	White	US	Live with family/friends without paying rent
B	3	Under 18	Student	3	Asian	HK	Student Housing
C	4	18-24	Student	3	Asian	HK	Alone (own house/ apartment/ Flat)
D	5	18-24	Student with Part time job	4	Mixed (Hispanic & Asian)	HK	Live with family/friends without paying rent

Continued:

	Highest Edu	Degree Pursuing	Native Language	Second Languages	Texting Language	Texting frequency	Mental Health
A	Associate degree	Undergraduate degree	Cantonese and Mandarin	English and Japanese	English	2	4
B	High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (e.g. GED/ HKDSE/ IB)	Undergraduate degree	Mandarin	English	Chinese	5	5
C	High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (e.g. GED/ HKDSE/ IB)	Undergraduate degree	Cantonese	English, Mandarin, Japanese, Spanish	English	3	2
D	High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (e.g. GED/ HKDSE/ IB)	Undergraduate degree	English	NA	English	5	3

Based on the background of the evaluators, the majority are aged between 18-24, with one evaluator being under 18. The group is ethnically diverse, including individuals who are White, Asian, and two of mixed race, specifically Black and Asian, and Hispanic and Asian. Their familiarity with neurodivergence is above average. Most evaluators are multilingual, suggesting a broad linguistic competence. They share similar educational backgrounds, and predominantly reside in the United States and Hong Kong.

1. Perception on Neurotypical Messages

The following section will demonstrate the peer review result on the neurotypical text messages. In order to not complicate the presentation of the result, the method of coding will be utilised. Overall, the perception on neurotypical messages is perceived positively. The following table showcases the overall result on the neurotypical text message samples.

Sample	Noticeable Feature	Age Prediction	Personality Prediction	Overall Feeling	Mental Health Prediction	Adjective for Writing Style
NT 1	Spelling Variations	16-25	Positive	Fine and normal	4.43	Positive
NT 2	Abbreviation / Long Expression	18-20	Negative	Understandable and fine	3.85	Positive
NT 3	Abbreviation	18-20	Positive	Fine and normal	3.69	Positive

Overall, all evaluators focus on features that consist of spelling variations and abbreviations of language. For instance, the most recognised spelling variations is 'THERE OPEN…' in NT sample 1, and abbreviations such as 'ik', 'bc' and 'cuz'. Furthermore, in NT sample 2, most of the evaluators point out the long expression in the text message. Based on these language usage, evaluator predicts all these samples are from communicators that are from the younger side.

In terms of personality prediction, NT samples 1 and 3 are viewed positively, with phrases such as 'cute', 'funny', 'optimistic', and 'enthusiastic' used to describe them. However, NT sample 2 which is characterized by its long and complex sentences, receives mostly negative feedback from evaluators. Based on the responses, it is described that the communicator as 'uncommunicative', 'annoying', and prone to 'back and forth' exchanges. Furthermore, one evaluator noted that the communicator from NT sample 2 might have lower language proficiency due to the complex and packed sentence structure.

Concerning the prediction of mental health, although the personality assessment of NT sample 2 was predominantly negative, this did not influence the overall mental health predictions. The overall results of the mental health predictions are above average on a scale of 1 to 5, with all NT samples scoring 4.43, 3.85, and 3.69, respectively. This indicates that the predictions of personality and mental health are not correlated.

Additionally, the overall sentiment of the evaluators while assessing the text messages was mostly neutral, with comments like 'fine', 'understandable', and 'normal'. The term 'normal' suggests that evaluators considered the NT samples as representative of standard text messaging practices. Furthermore, the adjectives used to describe the writing style of the NT samples were generally positive, with comments such as 'normal', 'humorous', 'funny', and 'explanatory'.

2. Perception on Neurodivergent Messages

The following section will demonstrate the peer review result on the neurodivergent text messages. Overall, the perception of neurodivergent messages is perceived negatively. The following table showcases the overall result on the neurotypical text message samples.

Sample	Noticeable Feature	Age Prediction	Personality Prediction	Overall Feeling	Mental Health Prediction	Adjective for Writing Style
ND 1	Abbreviation and emoji	15-20	Negative	Normal/ Appropriate	3.67	Negative
ND 2	Abbreviation and emoji	15-20/ Gen-Z	Neutral	Fine even with typing variations	4.21	Neutral
ND 3	Typing Variations	18-27	Negative	Understandable	3.57	Negative
ND 4	Non-textual language	10-20	Negative	Mixed attitude towards the use of non-textual language	A: 3.79 B: 2.59	Negative
ND 5	Spelling Variations	15-25	Negative	Parents to kids/ Older to younger conversation	3	Neutral
ND 6	Emoticons and Grammatical Variation	12-20	Negative	Normal	A: 3.94 B:3.43	Neutral

2.1 Neurodivergent sample 1

The most noticeable feature from this sample is the abbreviated language and the non-textual language (emoji) used as pointed out by the evaluators. For instance, the phrases 'LMA0000', which some evaluators indicate the way of using zeros in the phrase 'LMAO' is interesting, 'gg' and 'wait wtf' are frequently pointed out by the evaluators. Furthermore, the use of non-textual language which is the emoji such as the frog emoji is also highlighted by the evaluators. Based on the evaluation, there are two distinct views on the use of emoji which is the frog emoji, while one neurodivergent evaluator believes using emoji is a child move, one neurotypical evaluator believes that using emoji indicates a loud and extrovert personality. Apart

from that most of the evaluators pointed out the spelling variation in 'mesmorise', indicating it as a 'typo', which is a mistake in typing, or indicating that the person is simply not good in English.

Regarding the predictions of age and personality, the overall assessment of ND sample 1 indicates an age range of 15 to 20, with an overall negative view of personality. Evaluators believe both communicators are younger, largely due to their use of emojis. Regarding personality, evaluators negatively characterized the communicators who used the spelling variation 'mesmorise' as 'dumb', 'impatient', and 'forgetful'. This negative perception extends to comments on the writing style, where person A is described as having a confusing, introverted, and unintelligent style. Although the evaluations of the communicators' personalities are mostly negative, the overall sentiment of the conversation is perceived as normal and appropriate by most evaluators. Regarding mental health, ND sample 1 scores an average of 3.67, suggesting that the two neurodivergent communicators are perceived to have average mental health.

2.2 Neurodivergent sample 2
The most noticeable features in this sample are the abbreviated language and the non-textual elements. Many evaluators highlighted the use of abbreviations such as 'Omg', also noting typing variations like 'Okg' and 'Img' as remarkable. One evaluator specifically pointed out the abbreviation 'kilt', mentioning that its meaning was unclear to them. Regarding non-textual language, the use of a cat emoji caused confusion. While one neurodivergent evaluator found it unclear, a neurotypical evaluator described person A's use of emojis as 'more crazy'. In terms of age prediction, evaluators estimated the communicators' ages to range from 15 to 20 students, with one noting that they appear to belong to Generation Z. The overall perception of the communicators' personalities was negative, with terms such as 'careless', 'annoying', and 'cocky' used to describe them. Yet, the overall comment on the writing style is neutral which consist of both positive and negative perception equally, for instance, 'confusing', 'comedic', and 'open'.

Despite the mostly negative view on personality, the overall sentiment towards the conversation was considered fine, even with the typing variations of 'Omg' to 'Okg' and 'Img'. Additionally, the overall mental health score averaged at 4.21, suggesting that the communicators are perceived to have above average mental health.

2.3. Neurodivergent sample 3
The most notable feature from this sample is the typing variation. For instance, the phrases that received the most comments were 'chnage' and 'sacrificesacrifice'. The latter, 'sacrificesacrifice', was seen as an odd way of emphasizing, and evaluators suggested it should be separated into two words or recognized as a feature of repetition common in Cantonese. Only one evaluator noted the spelling variation of ''strugging'. Additionally, some evaluators pointed out the lack of capitalization by Person A. In terms of age, evaluators predicted that both

communicators are between 18-27 years old, likely students. The personality assessments were predominantly negative, with comments such as 'unbothered by details', 'annoying', and 'demanding'. Furthermore, Person A is perceived to have a lower educational background due to the frequent typing and spelling errors. Comments on the writing style were also negative, described as 'annoying', 'confusing', 'fluid', and fraught with errors. However, in terms of the overall sentiment towards the conversation, most evaluators stated it was still understandable and acceptable, even with the spelling variations. Some evaluators also noted that the two neurodivergent individuals appeared to be not on the same page, as seen in the text messages. Regarding mental health predictions, ND sample 3 scored an average of 3.57, suggesting that the communicators are perceived to have average mental health.

2.4. Neurodivergent sample 4

The feature most frequently highlighted by evaluators was the extensive use of non-textual language, such as emojis, stickers, and emoticons. Almost all evaluators stated that the overuse of non-textual language suggested anxiety, emotional instability, or immaturity. Additionally, most evaluators dislike the overuse of non-textual language in the conversation.

Regarding the personality prediction, evaluators perceived person A, the neurotypical communicator, as cold and unresponsive to the emotions expressed by person B, the neurodivergent individual. The age of the communicators was estimated to range from 10 to 20 years, with person A seen as older and person B as younger. In terms of occupation, person A was viewed as a mentor role, while person B was perceived as a high school student. The personality assessments were generally negative, particularly for Person B, described as 'emotional', ''avoidant', 'anxious', 'ignorant', and 'not serious'. In contrast, person A was perceived more positively as 'demanding', 'critical', and 'smart', indicating a favorable view of person A compared to person B. The comments on writing style also reflected these perceptions. person B's style was characterized as 'frantic', 'submissive', 'annoying', 'anxious', and 'naive', while opinions on person A's style were mixed, described as 'dominant', 'sharp', and 'confusing'.

Regarding mental health predictions, Person A, the neurotypical communicator, scored an average of 3.79, suggesting greater emotional stability. In contrast, Person B, the neurodivergent communicator, scored an average of 2.59, indicating lower perceived emotional stability. This suggests that evaluators found the neurotypical communicator to be more emotionally balanced than the neurodivergent communicator.

2.5. Neurodivergent sample 5

In this sample, two evaluators noted that the text messages lack any particularly notable or special features. However, the most prominent aspect identified was the spelling variations by person A, specifically the phrase 'bag back'. Additionally, some evaluators commented on the

disorganized topic flow of the conversation, noting frequent topic jumps that led to confusion and difficulty understanding the context. Regarding age, the communicators are perceived to range from 15 to 25 years old, with person A likely being the older individual, possibly a university student, and person B the younger, likely a high school student. One evaluator noted that the conversation resembles one between an older sibling and a younger sibling or between a parent and child, with person B appearing to be the one needing guidance. An evaluator also related the interaction to personal experience, noting a similarity to how she communicates with her brother, observing that girls tend to be more expressive while boys are not, suggesting the possibility that person A is a girl while person B is a boy. Regarding personality prediction, assessments are generally negative, with descriptions such as 'not talkative', 'cold', and 'naive'. Moving on to the comments on the writing style, the overall results are more neutral, with terms like 'dismissive', 'direct', 'energetic', 'monotone', ''cold', and 'invested'. Regarding mental health, the overall average score was 3, indicating that the communicators are perceived to have average mental health.

2.6. Neurodivergent sample 6

In this sample, the most noticeable feature is the use of non-textual language, such as the emoticon '-_-', which evaluators noted adds more emotion to the text and introduces a humorous element. Furthermore, evaluators highlighted grammatical variations in the text messages, such as the phrase 'I wait for you guy to play gta' from person B. Some evaluators also mentioned that person A's responses are confusing, appearing not to directly address person B's comments, with replies like 'You got it' and 'Idk' leading to confusion. The overall sentiment of the conversation, according to the evaluators, is that it is generally understandable, okay, and normal. Regarding age, both person A and person B are perceived to be between 12 and 20 years old. As for the predictions about their occupations, they vary in middle school student, senior high school student, and university student. Moving on to personality predictions, the results are generally negative, describing the communicators as 'easily affected or persuaded', 'dependent on others', 'submissive', and 'lacking confidence'. As for the comments on the writing style , the results are overall neutral, with descriptions such as 'casual', 'easy', 'jumbled and messy', and 'confusing'. In terms of mental health ratings, person A the neurotypical individual, scored an average of 3.94, while person B the neurodivergent individual scored an average of 3.43, indicating a lower perceived mental health compared to person A.

3. Perception on Modified Neurodivergent Messages

The following section will demonstrate the peer review result on the perception of modified neurodivergent text messages. Overall, the perception of modified neurotypical messages is perceived positively. The following table showcases the overall result on the modified neurodivergent text message samples.

Sample	Noticeable Feature	Age	Personality	Overall Feeling	Mental Health Prediction	Previous Mental Health Prediction	Adjective for Writing Style
MND 1	Abbreviation and emoji	15-25	Positive	Normal	3.65	3.67	Positive
MND 2	Abbreviation and emoji	15-24	Positive	Normal	4.22	4.21	Positive
MND 3	Typing Variations	19-22	Positive	More clear, Easier to understand	4.13	3.57	Neutral
MND 4	Non-textual language	18-25	Positive	Make sense/ Fine/ Easier to understand	A: 3.78 B: 3.5	A: 3.79 B: 2.59	Neutral
MND 5	Spelling Variations	14-19	Negative	Better for understanding	4.07	3	Positive
MND 6	Abbreviation	12-20	Negative (+1 Positive)	Understandable	A: 4.11 B: 3.13	A: 3.94 B:3.43	Neutral (no changes)

3.1 Modified Neurodivergent sample 1

The features noted are consistent with those observed in the original neurodivergent sample 1. However, the predicted age range has increased to 15-25 years. The personality prediction for this sample is notably positive, with descriptors such as 'expressive', 'loud', 'wise', 'cool', and 'humorous'. Moving on, evaluators view the overall sentiment of the conversation as normal, casual, and typical of a discussion between friends. Comments on the writing style are also positive, highlighting it as 'detailed', 'neat', 'adorable', 'understanding', and 'expressive'. Regarding mental health, the average rating is 3.65, which remains nearly unchanged from the previous unmodified neurodivergent sample.

3.2 Modified Neurodivergent sample 2

Based on this sample, the result for noticeable features and the prediction of age remain the same. Based on the personality prediction, the overall comment is positive, with descriptions

such as 'supportive', 'talkative' and 'hardworking'. As for the overall sentiment for the conversation, evaluators state that it appears to be normal, appropriate, fine, and a conversation between friends. The overall comment on writing style is positive, for instance, 'conciseness', 'supportive', 'agreeing' and 'thankful' are described. Regarding the mental health rating, the average scoring is 4.22, which remains unchanged from the previous unmodified neurodivergent sample.

3.3 Modified Neurodivergent sample 3

The noticeable feature in this sample is the better expression of 'sacraficesacrifice', in which it is presented in a format that is better in wording as 'sacarfice considering the time limit'. The age prediction remains the same as the original neurodivergent sample. Regarding the prediction of personality, the overall comment is neutral, for instance, comments like 'normal', 'wants to have fun', 'difficult' and 'messy'. As for the overall sentiment expressed by the evaluators, it is stated that the conversation makes more sense, appears to be fine and easier to understand. In terms of the comment on writing style, the result is mostly positive, with examples such as 'talkative', 'concise', 'normal' and 'careful'. The average mental health rating increased to 4.13, demonstrating a better perception of mental health of the communicators.

3.4 Modified Neurodivergent sample 4

The overall features noticed are almost the same as the original neurodivergent sample evaluation. A new feature noticed is the typing variation produced by person A in the phrase 'thie' and 'wil', in which evaluators consider this a quick typing or an indication of strong emotion. In terms of age prediction, there is no remarkable change. As for the personality prediction, the overall comment is mostly neutral, with comments like 'talkative', 'submissive', 'careless to details', and 'concise'. The overall sentiment for this conversation stated by the evaluators is that it is easier to understand, makes more sense, and appears to be fine. Regarding the mental health rating, the average scoring of person B the neurodivergent individual increased from 2.59 to 3.50, as for person A the neurotypical individual, it remains almost the same with the average scoring of 3.78. In sum, the neurodivergent individual in this sample is perceived to be more mentally healthy.

3.5 Modified Neurodivergent sample 5

The noticeable feature in this is the spelling variation, in which one evaluator spotted the variation 'backpack' differs with the original neurodivergent sample. As for other noticeable features discussed, the comment remains the same, in which the conversation appears to be jumbled and confusing. Regarding the prediction of age, there are no significant changes in which the result remains the same. In terms of personality prediction, the overall comment is negative, with descriptions such as 'expressive', 'talkative' and 'confident'. As for the overall feeling towards the conversation, evaluators comment how it appears to be better for understanding, more fluent, and a typical friend conversation with warmer response. The

comment on the writing style is also similar, in which comments such as 'lively', 'more fluent' and 'more information' are given. In terms of the mental health rating, the average score increased to 4.07, indicating a better mental health within the modified neurodivergent sample.

3.6 Modified Neurodivergent sample 6

Based on this sample, the noticeable feature shifted to the abbreviated language used instead of the non-textual language, in which features such as 'Dw', 'rn', 'btw' and 'Idk' are highlighted. As for the age prediction, the overall age appears to be younger ranging from 12-20. Furthermore, the overall personality prediction remains almost the same, yet one evaluator positively commented on how person B appears to be a more social person, adding one positive comment regarding the personality. In terms of the writing style, it also appears to have no changes with the overall comments being neutral, for instance, 'messy', 'chill', 'matter of fact' and 'normal'. Overall, the sentiment towards the conversation is perceived as normal and understandable, while one evaluator pointed out that it is visually absent, boring and plain. Moving on to mental health rating, the average rating for person B the neurodivergent individual is 3.13, lower than the previous result. As for person A the neurotypical individual, the average score increases to 4.11.

4. Additional Findings from Neurodivergent Evaluators

When Neurodivergent evaluators reviewed text messages coming from neurodivergent communications, they displayed more understanding of the linguistic variations observed, focusing particularly on sentence production. Also, they identified similarities in the samples and compared these to their own texting styles, aiming to predict possible neurodivergent symptoms in the communicators, such as topic jumping, which may suggest ADHD. These evaluators also showed more empathy towards neurodivergent text messages. One evaluator noted when commenting on sample 5 during the peer review session, 'If I were texting with B [neurodivergent sender], I would try not to avoid or ignore B by testing the water.', indicating a significant effort to engage more inclusively and sensitively with the neurodivergent communicator. Thus, this finding reflects a deeper appreciation and understanding of the communication challenges faced by individuals with neurodivergence.

6. Classification Task Accuracy

This section highlights the accuracy with which evaluators classify text messages as either neurodivergent or neurotypical. The overall accuracy rate for correctly identifying texts is 58.33%, indicating that the majority of evaluators from both groups can accurately determine whether text messages originate from neurodivergent or neurotypical communicators. Notably, neurodivergent texts are more easily identified by both neurodivergent and neurotypical evaluators, achieving an accuracy rate of 81%. This higher rate suggests that neurodivergent texts are more distinctive and identifiable compared to their neurotypical counterparts. Furthermore, neurotypical evaluators are more sensitive at recognizing texts from neurotypical

communicators, suggesting how they are familiar with their own style of texting habits. Whereas neurodivergent evaluators exhibit greater proficiency in identifying changes in modified neurodivergent texts, demonstrating that neurodivergent evaluators are particularly sensitive to details and habits in texts that somewhat shows differences and similarities with their own experiences.
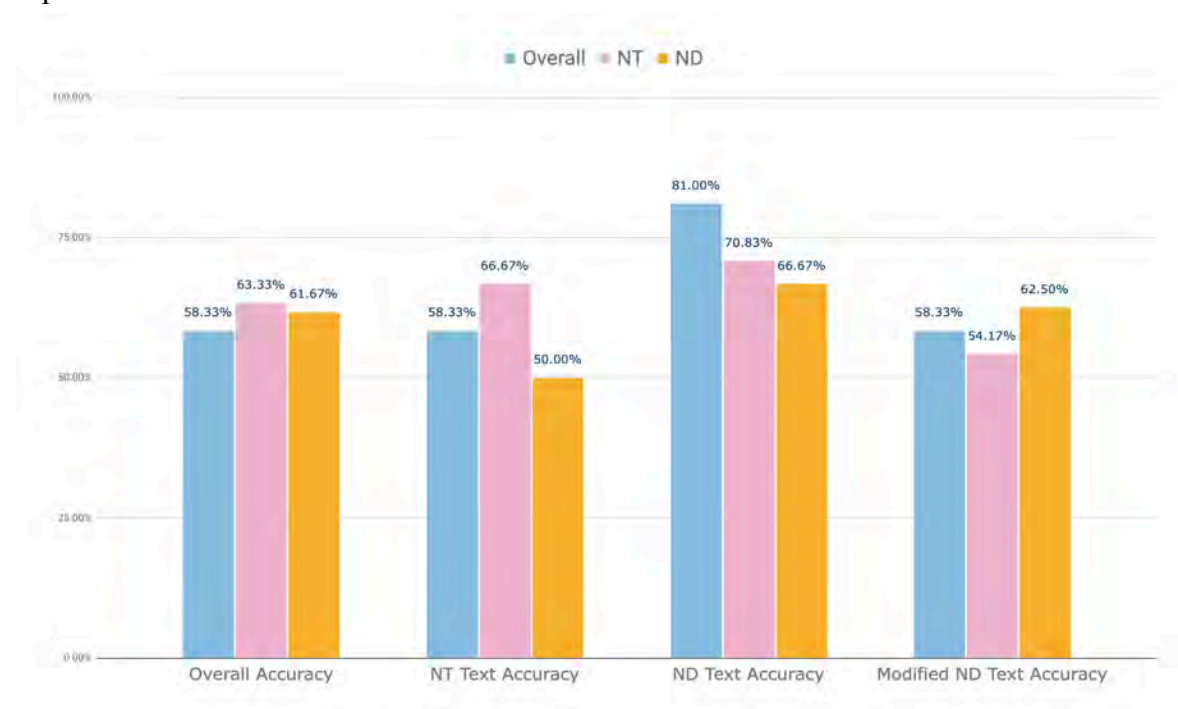
8. Overall Conclusion

Based on the results from the peer review session, the general sentiment towards neurodivergent text messages is neutral, as most evaluators focused primarily on the content and meaning of the messages. However, perceptions towards individuals who are neurodivergent were mostly negative, with evaluators using descriptors such as 'dumb', 'cold', 'submissive', and 'naive'. Additionally, the overall mental health rating for the neurodivergent sample was the lowest compared to other groups, according to the provided graph below.
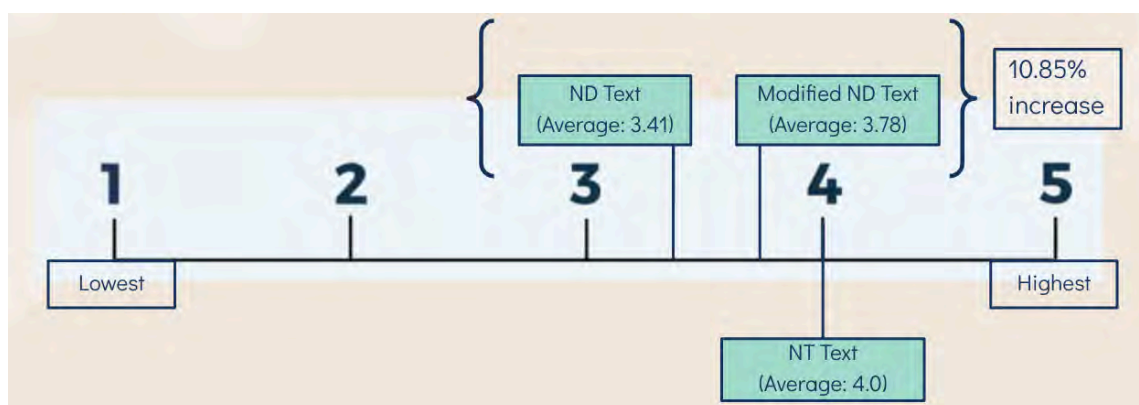
When evaluators commented on modified neurodivergent text, the feedback was significantly more positive compared to the original neurodivergent text samples. This shift highlights a contrast in perception based solely on text modifications, suggesting underlying biases. Despite evaluators being neutral in their assessment of the message content, their negative perceptions of neurodivergent individuals indicate a prevailing prejudice within the community. Furthermore, the high accuracy in identifying neurodivergent texts points to distinct linguistic variations between the texting habits of the neurodivergent and neurotypical communities. This suggests that neurodivergent communication styles are more distinctive compared to typical texting conversations, highlighting unique patterns and confirming the linguistic variation among neurodivergent and neurotypical texting habits.

Discussion

This section integrates the previous findings of linguistic variations and perception on neurodivergent and neurotypical text messages to explain the reason and influential factor of neurodivergent individuals utilising unique texting habits in SMS digital communication. Also, this section answers the third research question: What factors contribute to the linguistic differences observed in the texting habits of neurodivergent individuals?

1. Cognitive Development

1.1 Phonological Processing

Neurodivergent individuals with dyslexia often demonstrate a high and explicit awareness of the sounds of language, considered as a critical factor in the process of linguistic input (International Dyslexia Association, 2020). This means that during the language input phase, these individuals typically utilize sounds and pronunciations mentally to aid in the processing of spelling and language production. However, this method can sometimes lead to spelling variation, as seen in various examples from the collected data in the findings.

The mix-up between 'than' and 'then' in set text 8 from the neurodivergent message samples demonstrates a typical phonological challenge encountered by individuals with dyslexia. The confusion arises because the vowel sounds /ə/ and /e/ are phonetically similar, making it difficult for those with dyslexia to distinguish and correctly apply them in context. This issue is not just about recognizing the sounds, but also involves the ability to link these sounds with their appropriate spellings and meanings. Additionally, the phrase 'would of gotten' as 'would've of forgotten' showcases spelling variation. This spelling variation primarily stems from the phonetic similarity between 'would've' and 'would of', in which the ending sounds are nearly indistinguishable in casual speech. Moreover, in casual speech, the element of connected speech will be performed, thus linking the /f/ sound from 'would've' and 'forgotten' together, resulting

in the spelling variation. With that, during the process of language output individuals with dyslexia rely on these auditory cues, leading to common grammatical mistakes.

The research sample includes neurodivergent individuals with dyslexia as well as individuals with speech disorders, characterized by challenges in the articulation of speech sounds, fluency, or voice. Analysis of the text messages from these individuals reveals that both groups often rely on internal sound pronunciation when attempting to translate their thoughts into written text. This process is evident in several instances of spelling variation that likely stem from articulatory similarities and challenges. For example, in Set text 4, the phrase 'word' is spelled as 'work', possibly due to the similar articulation of the /d/ and /k/ sounds, in which both are plosives. Plosives require a complete stop of airflow in the vocal tract, followed by a burst of air upon release. The close manner of articulation for /d/ and /k/ might lead to confusion during the rapid internal language processing of sounds when writing, particularly for individuals with speech disorders. Furthermore, in set texts 6 and 7, I observed the spelling variations of 'guy' without the plural 's' and 'It sis' that maybe 'it's sis'. These variations are most likely due to the voiceless nature of the /s/ sound, which might not be fully processed, noticed or articulated by individuals with speech disorders, thus causing the spelling variation in neurodivergent text messages.

1.2 Language Input and Output Processing

A study published in the International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders highlights that individuals with Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) do not process linguistic input or output in the same manner as the neurotypical majority:

> a person with DLD [Developmental Language Disorder] will never process linguistic input or use expressive language in a way that is comparable to the neuro-majority. In much the same way, an autistic person will be autistic for their entire lives. (Hobson, Toseeb, & Gibson, 2024, p. 1511)

Furthermore, insights from a blog authored by a Speech-Language Pathologist diagnosed with autism suggest that additional processing time can significantly enhance communication effectiveness for neurodivergent individuals.

> Without processing time, I struggle to consider how much the listener wants to know and what their knowledge of the topic is. But, when given time to process a question, I can formulate scripts which help me to give all the information that I need and want to in a more concise and structured way. ("Neurodivergent Language Processing," 2023)

These sources both indicate that the processing of linguistic input and output may be slower for those with neurodivergent conditions. This slower processing speed can help explain the distinctive linguistic features observed in text messaging by neurodivergent individuals. Text

messaging by its nature demands quick responses and occurs at a rapid pace, which pose challenges for those who require more time to process information. In response, neurodivergent individuals often develop adaptive texting behaviors that accommodate both the fast-paced nature of texting and the expectations of neurotypical communicators.

One of the examples of adopting texting behavior that accommodates the nature of texting and the language processing pace is the linguistic variation in turn-taking behavior, where neurodivergent individuals might limit their responses. This strategy not only manages the cognitive load associated with processing incoming texts but also minimizes the linguistic output required. Additionally, neurodivergent texters frequently utilize visual text paralanguage (such as emojis and gifs) and abbreviated language. These tools help convey meaning more efficiently and reduce the need for extensive written responses, which can be particularly beneficial when processing delays are present. These adaptations are practical solutions that allow neurodivergent individuals to participate more effectively in digital communications.

2. Psycholinguistic Factor

2.1 Avoidance

In the process of second language learning, the phenomenon of error avoidance is extremely common. This occurs when learners avoid constructions in the target language that they perceive as difficult. In other words, learners specifically avoid certain expressions due to difficulties in understanding the grammatical rules of the target language. This concept can be compared to the communication strategies of neurodivergent individuals, who may adopt linguistic variations in their texting that slightly differ from what is typical in second language acquisition (SLA), termed 'error avoidance'.

As noted in the findings section of this research, there is a noticeable difference in turn-taking behavior between neurodivergent and neurotypical communicators. Neurodivergent individuals often act as topic-submissive, while neurotypical communicators tend to dominate the conversation. Furthermore, the perception findings indicate that neurodivergent individuals are often viewed negatively when they create linguistic variations that deviate from typical neurotypical texting habits. Being aware of these negative perceptions, neurodivergent individuals may become more cautious when constructing text messages in SMS texting to avoid creating any variations that appear markedly different from those of the neurotypical community. Not wanting to be perceived negatively, neurodivergent individuals might choose to conceal their neurodivergent identity by communicating less. For example, in the context of turn-taking behavior, neurodivergent individuals might attempt to be less expressive to avoid making noticeable variations. This is evident in texts 5 and 8 from the neurodivergent set, where they adopt a strategy of simply answering questions in a straightforward manner that avoids more

expressive wording or initiating new topics. This approach minimizes the risk of their texts being seen as 'atypical' or drawing negative attention.

2.2 Anxiety

Language anxiety is notably prevalent in language learning, where it can lead to both positive and negative outcomes, described as facilitative and debilitative anxiety. Debilitative anxiety refers to anxiety that negatively impacts one's performance and active engagement in language learning. This type of anxiety is evident in the neurodivergent text samples analyzed in this research, where the linguistic variations in spelling, lexical choice, and abbreviated language demonstrate how anxiety influences neurodivergent individuals' texting habits.

For instance, spelling variations in the neurodivergent text messages highlight the sense of anxiousness, which results in several spelling variations. In neurodivergent set text 3, the phrase 'sacrificesacrifice' demonstrates a spelling variation, where the word 'sacrifice' is repeated and concatenated into one word without spacing. The repetition of words may indicate a sense of anxiousness, where the sender was not even aware of such a performance error, or perhaps the sender copied and pasted the word 'sacrifice' twice by mistake as the neurodivergent individual struggled with the spelling of 'sacrifice'. This showcases how anxiety can affect the performance or language output of neurodivergent individuals. Furthermore, the result of the perception of neurodivergent individuals through text messaging shows incidents where neurodivergent individuals are considered to be less capable when making spelling variations. With these kinds of perceptions, it is no doubt that neurodivergent individuals are extremely careful with their language output, which gives a negative impact that causes them to have anxiety, which further increases the possibility of spelling variations.

Regarding lexical choice variations, an example from the neurodivergent text message sample 1 from the neurodivergent samples indicates how anxiety causes linguistic variation. In the example, it is evident that person B used 'mesmerize' when he or she meant to express the meaning 'memorise'. Based on the reaction when person A pointed out that person B should be using the term 'memorise', the reaction of person B, which is 'wait wtf', showcases their reluctance in acknowledging the 'mistake' they made. This shows that person B, who is neurodivergent, suffers from anxiety which makes him or her perform worse with the mix-up of two words that look similar, which may not be as noticeable with individuals who have dyslexia.

In terms of abbreviated language, the overuse demonstrates anxiety from neurodivergent individuals, fearing that their language expressions may cause misunderstanding. The overuse of the abbreviated language 'LOL' which means laughing out loud appears in several samples based on the neurodivergent text messaging sets. Based on the findings above, neurodivergent individuals overuse abbreviated language in contexts that do not fit, in order to soften the tone. This is evident in Set text 3, in which person A is initiating the topic of a conversation about

some information about a novel which should be a serious topic that indicates no sense of a funny element. However, person A still overused the abbreviated term in a formal context, by adding 'LOL' , showcasing that person A is anxious by adding things that do not appear to make sense as you wouldn't put a formal topic with a humorous expression together. This demonstrates that person A, the neurodivergent individual, is trying to establish a friendly tone in which he or she overthinks and is too anxious about whether his or her wording without the abbreviated language would cause conflict or miscommunication. This is a similar move mentioned by Christanti, Mardani, and Fadhila (2022) that neurodivergent communities use tone indicators on Twitter to avoid miscommunication and wrongly expressed emotion through the sole use of textual language.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. First, the sample sizes are relatively small, as the text messages were sourced from a limited number of individuals mostly from similar age group as myself due to adopting the convenience sampling method .This constrained dataset may not truly reflect the broader neurodivergent population, potentially skewing the findings and limiting their applicability. Additionally, for the peer review session of the study, data were collected from only four neurotypical and four neurodivergent individuals which mostly also comes from similar age groups and education backgrounds. Thus, it may fail to provide a comprehensive or inclusive perspective that captures the diverse thoughts and perceptions of more varied groups. The limited scope of participants undermines the robustness of the findings, consequently hindering the study's ability to draw broader and more definitive conclusions about the perceptions and communication styles within the neurodivergent and neurotypical communities.

Implications and Suggestion for Future Research

This research serves as a preliminary exploration of the linguistic variations and perceptions towards neurodivergent individuals in SMS digital communication, opening up opportunities for further investigation in this field.

Firstly, this study lays the groundwork for more detailed investigations into the communication habits of neurodivergent individuals. It aims to identify more precise and comprehensive patterns of linguistic variation performed by neurodivergent individuals. By expanding the scope of research, future studies can achieve a deeper understanding of these unique linguistic features, contributing to a more accurate representation and appreciation of neurodivergent communication styles.

Secondly, this research highlights the potential for including measures of response rates to each text message from neurodivergent communicators in future studies. Investigating the response rates can provide insights into the texting anxiety experienced by neurodivergent individuals. Due to time constraints in this project, I was unable to analyze message response

rates. However, incorporating this element in future research could significantly deepen our understanding of how neurodivergent individuals experience and manage anxiety in text messaging. Such studies would not only shed light on the challenges faced by neurodivergent communicators but also pave the way for developing strategies to support them in digital communication contexts.

Reflection

During the progress of this research, there were undoubtedly obstacles in conducting my first independent study. Given the limited amount of time, it was challenging to gather all necessary data, and I was perhaps too optimistic about covering everything. For instance, I had to reduce the number of samples reviewed during the peer review session from 24 to 15 after observing that evaluators were experiencing fatigue, in which they are repeatedly asked the same questions and eventually providing random and ineffective responses. This experience taught me more about designing various research methodologies.

Additionally, I encountered challenges when conducting interviews with neurodivergent individuals who have speech disorders. During the peer review session, the evaluator with a speech disorder struggled to comment on the text message samples, which led me to excessively guide the interview. At times, when I posed a question, the evaluator with the speech disorder was unable to provide useful responses, prompting me to offer options for the evaluator to choose from. This undoubtedly impacted the authenticity of the interview process. However, this is understandable given the neurodivergent condition of the evaluator. This experience provided me with practical insights into interviewing people with neurodiversity.

Lastly, this research has opened a door for me in the field of linguistics, which has encouraged me to pursue a Master's degree in Linguistics or in Communication disorder. This further study will allow me to deepen my understanding of linguistic knowledge and continue exploring this topic.

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Text Messages Data Samples (for both peer review and linguistic variation research):

Neurotypical Sample (Set/ Condition: A)

Set Text A1:

Person A: THERE OPEN TILL 3AM 😭

Person B: Last year I went there the line was huge

Person A: I think it'll be well worth $99
Person A: Really

Person B: Plus we can get on like normal ride too

Person A: Ooooo wait i didn't know that
Person A: We can do a lot more than i thought

Person B: Like Henry potter, Jessica world, mommy the transgender ride too

---

Person A: 😭
Person A: WHAT
Person A: IS THAT
Person A: Henry potter??? 💀
Person A: Jessica 😭

Set text A2:

Person B: have fun for the banquet tomorrow

Person A: thank youuuu
Person A: it won't be as good because you won't be there

Person B: ik
Person B: not my fault
Person B: bc i thought it will happen at last monday and i told my dad that i need to be at the banquet so we will leave after the banquet but things happen and it going to be tomorrow so ye man
Person B: It's so humid but ye

Person A: oh it's humid there
Person A: i don't like that

Person B: super

Person A: 😩

Set Text A3:

Person B: and you send me a gay club flyer

Person A: yea i just searched up random picture online as a joke
Person A: but
Person A: you've been serious

Person B: who know that's a joke
Person B: you the one started it

Person A: not at all
Person A: i did it in response to what you said
Person A: as a joke
Person A: I thought you'd know It'd be a joke
Person A: but all good

Person B: well like 3 days later

Person A: HAHAHAHA
Person A: so you knew I was a joke

Person B: ye cuz 3 days later you told me as a joke

Person A: I did?
Person A: well at least you knew it was a joke
Person A: 🙆

Person B: yk what
Person B: forget it

Person A: forget what

Person B: forget the topic
Person B: It's not normal arguing about gay

Person A: ik
Person A: you brought it up 😂

Neurodivergent Sample (Set/ Condition:B)

Set Text B1:

Person A: look at the numbers and I have to count it one by one
Person A: They be looking at me and annoyed

Person B: LMA00000
Person B: just download a currency app
Person B: to translate between krw to hkd

Person A: You see I use cash and I fold them together in my money bag
Person A: Everytime I pay i have to unfold it

Person B: gg

Person A: And recognise the zeros
Person A:
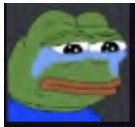
Person B: just memorise the color

Person A: You think I can mesmerise that ? 🙀
Person A: I can't even remember what I ate yesterday ahahahaahahahah

---

Person B: you mean memorise? 😭😭😭😭😭
Person B:

Person A: Wait wtf

Set Text B2:

Person A : Bro did you see it omg

Person B: omg my hard work paid off

Person A: You're amazing

Person B: i spent 2 hours looking for those damn gifs Af i was NOT letting u present w screenshots omfg fro

Person A :What gift

Person B: ██████████████████

Person A :
Person A: Okg
Person A: Img

Person B: anyway kilt it

Person A: Omg

Person B: onto the next assignment

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Set Text B3:

Person A:anyways so the fundamental chnage for ashima is how she is taken from india to uk and us?
Person A: LOL

Person B: Just read

Person A: ok so lemme see

Person B: Can tell
Person B: Cause what Ashima is experiencing is real time

Person A:my ass was strugging
Person A:bruh

Person B: How about we just say trauma of the parents instead

---

Person A: we have to sacrificesacrifice

Person B: Also in Chapter 2 where she thinks the Bengali ppl who visits her are nothing but substitutes for her family

---

Person A: i mean this is also good but like we need to put the best one first LOL

Person B: Nevermind this is better

Set text B4:

Person A: hows your English test

Person B: Dangerous mark
Person B: Not sure because I done it in last second
Person B: The reading have a lot of work that I don't know
Person B: 😭😭😭

Person B:

Person B:
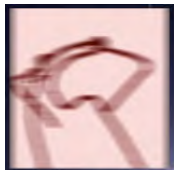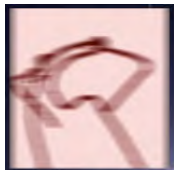
Person B:

Person B:

Person B:

↪Reply Person B: Not sure because I done it in last second
Person A: ?
Person A: stop spamming stickers

Person B: Ok
↪Reply Person A: ?
Person B: Yes

Person A: do you mean you only finished last second

Person B: I nearly don't have time to done it all

Person A: aha
Person A: you need to train your comprehension skills

Person B: @-@

Person A: the exam wil be way more difficult

↪Reply Person A: you need to train your comprehension skills
Person B: …
↪Reply Person A: you need to train your comprehension skills
Person B: ;-;

↪Reply Person B: The reading have a lot of work that I don't know
Person A: you can't slack off anymore you see how difficult thie first is to you

Set Text B5:

Person A: You want this or not

Person B: Any yellow one?

Person A: Btw your pet thing arrived
Person A: Imma see

Person B: Ok

Person A: You going to school ?

Person B: Yea

Person A: You need a bag back ?
Person A: Among us one
Person A: ▮▮▮ driving ?

Person B: Nah
Person B: Yea

Person A: So no bag pack ok

Person B: Yea

Person A: When you gonna dismiss today

Person B: 5:00

Person B: Ok
Person A: ▮▮▮ said wanna bring you

Person A: He has a car he could drive us around

Person B: Ok

Set Text B6:

Person B: I can't sleep -_-

Person A: lol
Person A: Then do you know we came back?

Person B: I wait for you guy to play gta lol
Person B: Idk

Person A: lol
Person A: Dw I brought my laptop

Person B: Then if mum left then who will take me to ▮▮▮▮?

Person A: You got it

Text Messages Data Samples (for linguistic variation research):

Neurotypical Sample (Set/ Condition: A)

Set Text A4:

Person A: He will show up outside later

Person B: Talk to him and kill some times
Person B: Go talk to him then

Person A: I rather talk to you

Person B: It sounds like you don't enjoy talk to me

Person A: No
Person A: But sometimes yes

Set Text A5:

Person A: where do you want me to meet you
Person A: cal state?

Person A: i will do the drive

Person B: I thought you had to be at cal state tomorrow anyways
Person B: I'll drive to cal state

Person A: no
Person A: wednesday i need
Person A: i will be late for class so why i go yk
Person A: Bro I thought you meant tuesday

Person B: wdym
Person B: we will hang out wed
Person B: after school
Person B: but let's have dinner tuesday night first

Person A: Bro 😭 okay
Person A: Idk If I can do dinner after 8 tho let's do before
Person A: Idk what I'll do in oc all day

Person B: what time you will be at oc

Person A: Probably like 5 or 6
Person A: We can grab food around that time tho

Person B: ye then go home first i will pick you up at home
Person B: after dinner then haircut

Set text A6:

Person A: Wait Ur hair grew that fast already?

Person B: Yes
Person B: so fking fast

Person A: Damnnnn
Person A: I wanna say I went to the small gym to do cardio I think I will never go again 💀
Person A: The moon walk is the most dangerous moon walk I have ever walked on

Person B: U haven't do weight training?

Person A: I went to the bigger gym to do weight training cuz i saw in the small one not much equipment
Person A: But I think I'll go later again tonight if i can to do cardio
Person A: Cuz i feel like It was very proper

Set Text A7:

Person A: What time we going gym today?
Person B: Have to school half day
Person B: I think I might go dinner time

Person A: What time lemme know, so I'll come with U, will coach some too?
Person A: Cuz today is my leg day
Person A: And I want to do it properly

Person B: U can ask in group
Person B: For me
Person B: Maybe 10pm cuz I need back Yuen Long 9:00 and need dinner

---

Person A: 10?!!
Person A: Too late for me

Person B: Told u I need school
Person B: Find coach
Person B: He should be fine

Person A: No I didn't go yesterday, I was walking and I fking sprained my left foot so I'm going today instead

---

Person B: Ok
Person B: If you no coach or me just do longer cardio
Person B: Cuz you actually only need cardio for now, weight training is just a support

---

Person A: Yeah i just did cardio yesterday but not too intense
Person A: Since my legs was ouchie ouchie
Person A: Okurrrr

Set Text A8:

Person B: Yeah
Person B: why not
Person B: U arrived CU at 12:30 then 1:15 go train 1:45 TKW GYM 2:45 leave 3:20 Yuen Long station
Person B: what a beautiful plan

Person A: what time u guys finish class

Person B: we simply interview right at 12:00
Person B: I assume it takes like 15-20 mins

Person A: ill try to come 1230

Person B: nice

Person A: if i dont wake up on time
Person A: ggs
Person A: the station name is university right

Person B: Yes
Person B: Train is the safest way to come
Person B: Bus is the fastest

Neurodivergent Sample (Set/ Condition:B)

Set Text B7:

Person A: What game you have in your switch

Person B: Idk
Person B: Not mine

Person A: Well it's yours
Person A: Going back to ▮▮▮▮ wo
Person A: Must happy la

Person B: It sis

Person A:What you bringing back to China

Person B: Gundam tools

Person A: For?

Person B: Build in china

Person A:You have Gundam in China too?

Person B: Ye
Person B: A lot

Person A: So you should be excited
Person A: Going back China

Person B: No

Set Text B8:

Person A: I'll be home around 2

Person B: Ok

Person A: Bring Kimie hm with you have her open door and do the alarm

Person B: Ok

Person A: Don't rush her !
Person A: We have covid vaccine on Friday morning 10:30

Person B: Ok

Person A: If you can't get it at Kaiser appt

Person B: Ok

Set Text B9:

Person A: Ffs
Person A: The 7 year old just corrected my spelling
Person A: In my defense it was orally

Person B: Sweetie!!! So sorry!

Person A: If I had written it 90% sure I would of gotten it lol
Person A: It's all good
Person A: More funny then anything

Set Text 7:

Person A: What game do you have in your switch

Person B: Idk
Person B: The switch is not mine

Person A: Well it's yours
Person A: Going back to ███ wo
Person A: Must happy la

Person B: My sister owns that switch

Person A: What you bringing back to China

Person B: Imma bring some Gundam tools

Person A: For?

Person B: Building Gundam in China coz I will have a lot of free time

---

Person A:You have Gundam in China too?

Person B: Ye
Person B: I have A LOT

Person A: So you should be excited
Person A: Going back China

Person B: Nah 😭

Set Text 8:

Person A: I'll be home around 2

Person B: Alright see you then

Person A: Bring Kimie hm with you have her open door and do the alarm

Person B: But have work to do right after

Person A: Don't rush her !
Person A: Btw we have covid vaccine on Friday morning 10:30

Person B: I might make it

Person A: If you can't get it at Kaiser appt

Person B: Okay

Set Text 9:

Person A: Ffs
Person A: A 7 yro just corrected my spelling
Person A: In my defence it was just mispronunciation

Person B: Sweetie!!! So sorry!

Person A: If I had written it, I am 90% sure I would have forgotten it
Person A: It's all good
Person A: Funnier than anything

Modified Neurodivergent Sample (Set/ Condition: C)

Set Text C7:

Person A: What game do you have in your switch

Person B: Idk
Person B: The switch is not mine

Person A: Well it's yours
Person A: Going back to ▮▮▮ wo
Person A: Must happy la

Person B: My sister owns that switch

Person A: What you bringing back to China

Person B: Imma bring some Gundam tools

Person A: For?

Person B: Building Gundam in china coz I will have a lot of free time

---

Person A:You have Gundam in China too?

Person B: Ye
Person B: I have A LOT

Person A: So you should be excited
Person A: Going back China

Person B: Nah 😭

Set Text C8:

Person A: I'll be home around 2

Person B: Alright see you then

Person A: Bring Kimie hm with you have her open door and do the alarm

Person B: But have work to do right after

Person A: Don't rush her !
Person A: Btw we have covid vaccine on Friday morning 10:30

Person B: I might make it

Person A: If you can't get it at Kaiser appt

Person B: Okay

Set Text C9:

Person A: Ffs
Person A: A 7 yro just corrected my spelling
Person A: In my defence it was just mispronunciation

Person B: Sweetie!!! So sorry!

Person A: If I had written it, I am 90% sure I would have forgotten it
Person A: It's all good
Person A: Funnier than anything

Modified Neurodivergent Sample (Set/ Condition: C)

Set Text C1:

Person A: look at the numbers and I have to count it one by one
Person A: They were looking at me and feeling annoyed

Person B: LMA00000

Person B: You can just download a currency app

Person B: to translate between krw to hkd

Person A: You see I use cash and I fold them together in my money bag

Person A: Everytime I pay i have to unfold it

Person B: gg

Person A: And recognise the zeros
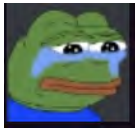
Person A:

Person B: just memorise the color

Person A: You think I can remember that ? 😹

Person A: I can't even remember what I ate yesterday haha

Person B: you mean memorise? 😭
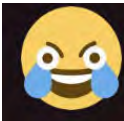
Person B:

Person A: Yesss I have bad memory

Set Text C2:

Person A : Bro did you check our grade

Person B: omg my hard work paid off

Person A: You're amazing

Person B: i spent 2 hours looking for those damn gifs Af i was NOT letting u present w screenshots omfg fro

Person A :Wdym

Person B: ████████████████

Person A : 😹
Person A: Right those gifs really helped
Person A: For sure

Person B: anyway kilt it

Person A: You sure did

Person B: onto the next assignment

Set Text C3:

Person A: the fundamental chnage for ashima being taken from india to uk and us?

Person B: Just read

Person A: ok lemme see

Person B: Can tell
Person B: Cause what Ashima is experiencing is real time

Person A: i was struggling with the plot

Person B: how about we just say trauma of the parents instead

Person A: then we have to sacrifice considering the time limit

Person B: Also in Chapter 2 where she thinks the Bengali ppl who visits her are nothing but substitutes for her family

Person A: this is good but we have rank their importance

Person B: Nevermind this is better

Set text C4:

Person A: hows your English test

Person B: Dangerous mark
Person B: Not sure as I was rushing
Person B: The reading has a lot of words that I don't recognize
Person B: 😭

Person A: do you mean you only finished last second

Person B: I almost ran out of time

Person A: aha
Person A: you need to train your comprehension skills

Person B: I did my best

Person A: the exam wil be way more difficult

↪Reply Person A: you need to train your comprehension skills
Person B: Yah I know

↪Reply Person B: The reading has a lot of words that I don't recognize
Person A: you can't slack off anymore you see how difficult thie first is to you

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Set Text C5:

Person A: Do you want this or not

Person B: Is there a yellow one?

Person A: Btw your pet thing arrived
Person A: Lemme go check

Person B: Yay thank you

Person A: Are you going to school?

Person B: Yea

Person A: Do you want a backpack
Person A: The Among us one
Person A: Is ███ driving ?

Person B: Nah I don't like the color
Person B: Yea she's driving

Person A: So I am not getting the backpack right

Person B: Yea

Person A: When you gonna dismiss today

Person B: at 5:00

Person A: You wanna go to 現時點 when I'm back ?

Person B: Yea sure
Person A: ███ said he wanna bring you

Person A: He has a car he could drive us around

Person B: Then it is way more convenient

Set Text C6:

Person B: I can't sleep

Person A: It's a bit late rn
Person A: Btw do you know we are going to come back?

Person B: I am waiting you guys to play gta with me
Person B: Idk

Person A: Dw I brought my laptop

Person B: Then if ▮▮▮ left then who will take me to ▮▮▮▮?

Person A: You got it

Peer Review Session Transcript:

Investigating the Variation in the Post-alveolar Retroflex (ʈ /ɖ) among First-Generation and Second-Generation South Asians in Hong Kong

Tayyeba

Department of English, The Chinese University of Hong Kong ENGE 4700: Individual Research Project

Supervised by Prof. Wilkinson Daniel Wong GONZALES

Abstract

This project investigates the variation in the Post-alveolar retroflex (ʈ /ɖ) among first-generation and second-generation South Asians in Hong Kong. This study was carried out in 2 sections: with a mixed method approach, a survey was sent to participants to examine their ethnic orientation, education attainment, and generation. Based on these factors they were divided into 8 groups of speakers and interviewed on Hong Kong-related topics, South Asian-related topics and neutral topics. A total of 86 South Asians filled out the survey with 40 South Asians participating in the interview and elicitation task to share their valuable insight on their linguistic identity. The study revealed an overall general variation between first-generation and second-generation South Asians in the use of Post-alveolar retroflex (ʈ /ɖ). Speakers with a stronger South Asian identity and lower education attainment in their respective home country showed higher use of the post-alveolar retroflex. Meanwhile, speakers who had a weaker South Asian identity and held struggles with their dual identity showed lower use of post-alveolar retroflex. This paper explored the nuances that come with living as an ethnic minority in Hong Kong and holds implications for future studies to include the participation of ethnic minorities in their linguistic studies. Moreover, this study hopes to shed light on the experiences of South Asians in Hong Kong as it recognizes and reveals the intricacies of growing up in Hong Kong and the Hong Kong identity.

Keywords: Ethnic minorities in Hong Kong, post-alveolar retroflex, Hong Kong English, Identity and language, dual identity

Investigating the Variation in the Post-alveolar Retroflex (ʈ /ɖ) among First-Generation and Second-Generation South Asians in Hong Kong

Ethnic minorities in Hong Kong have played a crucial role in the city's diversity. Law and Lee (2012) branded Hong Kong as "an open, tolerant and pluralistic community." However, beneath this community lies the marginalized and the segregated ethnic minority community. According to the 2021 Population Census by the Home Affairs Department, there are 619,568 non-Chinese people in Hong Kong, including Indonesian, Filipino, Indian, Pakistani, Thai, and other countries. The report further stated 8.4% of the population is often being marginalized. South Asians residing in Hong Kong can be dated back to the early colonial days during the mid-1800s with migration from South Asia occurring throughout the mid-1970s. However, a turning point for ethnic minorities in Hong Kong was post-1997, when discrimination became rampant (Lui & Chui, 2020). In the post-1997 handover of Hong Kong equality for ethnic minorities was seen as a low priority for the government, for example, in 2001, the Chief Executive regarded racial discrimination as of little concern in Hong Kong and did not implement any legislation against it (O'Conner, 2018). This was due to the fact that South Asians a few years after the post-handover were regarded as having 'internalized representations and values of their British colonizers' (Lee and Law, 2016 as cited in O'Connor, 2018). Despite the challenges and prejudices, ethnic minorities have become part of Hong Kong. With the long history of South Asians in Hong Kong, intricate linguistic systems and cultural identities have been created in contrast. The first and second generations have developed different languages and cultural contacts which create distinctive vernaculars and identities. The research takes inspiration from Hua (2020), who surveyed 260 primary and secondary students who have English as their mode of instruction (MOI). Her study found that most ethnic minority students are fluent in English and First Language (L1). EM students in Hong Kong were found to have high instrumental motivation to learn English due to the obligatory practise of English as MOI and its status as a lingua-franca which made English their linguistic repertoire. Her study further found L1s were used both socially and domestically while Cantonese was rarely used by the EMs due to their limited contact with the local Chinese speaking community. A significant observation from the study found that 1st generation and 2nd and later generation immigrant students who learn Cantonese at a younger age have higher Cantonese proficiency. Moreover, the difference in

variation between English and Cantonese proficiency can be attributed to the high status of English in South Asian countries. According to Kachru's Three Circles Model of Englishes, most South Asian Englishes are considered the outer variety of English. This can be attributed to multiple South Asian countries like India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh being British colonies. Lange (2023) argues that despite different historical and language developments, English has become a neutral language due to the lack of religious identification among South Asian immigrants. As English is spoken as a second language in South Asia, many ethnic minorities in Hong Kong are expected to be fluent in English. From personal experience, variation in proficiency and accent exist among English South Asian speakers. Due to unique and different experiences of South Asians, it results in unique linguistic landscapes worth investigating. As Hua's (2020) study found variation between the first and second generation EMs with their Cantonese proficiency, a similar phenomenon may be seen with English.

Education and shaping sociolinguistic variation and identity

One significant factor which might contribute to the variation of English and Cantonese among South Asians is their education. Similar to South Asia, teachers and students in Hong Kong prefer to have an inner variety of English as it is considered more prestigious as Hong Kong was a British colony. This puts pressure on South Asian students to excel in English as English might be seen as their mother tongue. In a study done by Hansen Edwards (2016), she found that AmE emerged as an emerging variety in a BrE norm-oriented context. In the case of Hong Kong, which was a British colony, her study found that people in Hong Kong actively and consciously choose a specific variety of English to associate themselves with particular accents. The participants in her study also avoided using features that conflicted with their identities. The idea of accents, and languages being closely related to identity in Hong Kong was further investigated by Zhang (2009). Her paper found standard varieties, like AmE and BrE, to be rated higher than the educated Hong Kong accent, while the broad Hong Kong accent was rated the lowest. Standard varieties of English from the inner circle were rated the highest by Hong Kong informants. The educated Hong Kong accent scored lower in both status and solidarity rankings, whereas the broad Hong Kong accent was always at the bottom of the ranking. Moreover, this was due to the high status of American English and British English being associated with higher English proficiency. Moreover, students with more education had more positive attitudes toward

anglophone-centric and negative attitudes towards the local variety. This shows the preferences of inner varieties of English in Hong Kong and its association between high "prestige" and instrumental value. Due to linguistic influences from schools and higher contact with local varieties of English, a linguistic variation between the older and younger generations of South Asians in Hong Kong might be seen. As Hua's (2020) study found variation between the first and second generation EMs with their Cantonese proficiency, a similar phenomenon may be seen with South Asians who acquired English in South Asia and Hong Kong. Compared to the first generation, the language contact of the younger generation differs as they have a higher level of exposure to locals and Cantonese to assimilate into Hong Kong. Hence, this research aims to find how different factors affect the degree of the South Asian identity between different generations.

Discrimination faced by South Asians in Hong Kong

Other than education, Hua (2020) found that EMs use their L1s socially and domestically, it shows how L1 might be used as an identity marker. However, Hua (2020) did not investigate how identity affected primary and secondary EM student's language proficiency. As more people of South Asian descent have the opportunity to study in local schools, learn Cantonese and assimilate into the Hong Kong culture. Many South Asians may attribute their identity as Hong Kongers, with speaking Cantonese or Hong Kong English as an identity marker, especially in places like schools and workplaces. However, ethnic minorities are often neglected in the conversation of identity in Hong Kong. Many don't regard ethnic minorities as Hong Kongers. In the study done by O'Conner (2018), he highlights the history of discrimination against South Asians in Hong Kong. In 2009, a police officer shot a mentally ill Nepali man, Dil Bahadur Limbu. Despite the severity of the incident, local media outlets headlined the news with 'Police Shot Savage' and emphasized the ethnicity of Bahadur Limbu which highlights local media's treatment of ethnic differences. Moreover, the legal proceedings were conducted in Cantonese, and as the family was Nepali, they were not able to fully understand the legal proceedings. This discrimination transfers over to the education sector where non-Chinese students will either go through the expensive international stream or government-subsidised English medium schools. O'Connor (2018) notes in his paper how ethnic minorities were asked not to compete with Chinese-speaking studies and segregated. Moreover, schools are allowed to develop their own system and criteria for the ethnic-minorities in Hong Kong. For example, the schools can control

admissions, the language of the interview (which is often done in Cantonese). This leads students to feel excluded, isolated and alienated. More recently we see how Hong Kong Unison decided to disband despite the current challenges faced by ethnic minorities in Hong Kong (Sun, 2025). This shows the lack of interest in aiding the ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. The discrimination faced by ethnic minorities in Hong Kong is multifaceted and complex, hence this study hopes to investigate how ethnic orientation shapes one's language.

Post alveolar retroflex (ʈ /ɖ) and South Asian Englishes

The investigation in the shift across generations and education levels will be done using with post-alveolar retroflex (ʈ /ɖ) among first-generation and second-generation South Asians in Hong Kong. According to Starr & Balasubramaniam (2019), they interviewed 30 Tamil Indians in Singapore and investigated the variation and change in the /r/ among them. Their study found strong evidence of the variation of /r/. First, speakers who used Tamil at home had more tapped/trilled /r/ in their English. They also found that the use of tapped/trilled /r/ increased when speakers talked about topics related to Indian culture. Moreover, bilingual speakers who had a non-English L1 had more tapped/trilled /r/. Their study noted that speakers who had a stronger Tamil identity were also more likely to have this feature to note their Indianness. This highlighted the relationship between the use of home languages and the trapped/trilled /r/. Drawing a similar methodology from Starr and Balasubramaniam (2019) paper, this paper investigates how different modes of instruction in education across different generations affected the speakers' use of post-alveolar retroflex. For this paper, as we focus on alveolar stops / ʈ ɖ /, the stop is articulated on the alveolar ridge where the tongue is retracted back (Edwards, 2023). However, in South Asian languages, the retroflex stops are used instead of alveolar stops. Retroflex is a common feature of the South Asian languages. Arsenault (2015) mentions in his paper that retroflex can be seen in Dravidian languages like Tamil and Telugu and Indo-Aryan languages like Bengali, Punjabi, Marathi, Urdu. As the post-alveolar retroflex is a key feature of South Asian languages, this study will use it as a key feature to investigate the variation between the first-generation and second-generation as a marker for their ethnic orientation.

South Asian Languages	Features	Examples
Dravidian Languages: Tamil and Telugu	Non-rhotic	NEAR [nɪiɾ] SQUARE [skweɾ]
	Consonants are generally unaspirated and voiceless, /p, t̪, k/	Stop [ˈstɔp] Night [naɪʈ] Talk [t̪ɔk/]
	Voiceless th is dentalized, [t̪]	Tooth [t̪uːt̪]
	Post-alveolar Retroflex /ʈ ɖ/ (Armstrong, 2014)	Tea [ʈiː]
Indo-Aryan languages: Bengali, Punjabi, Marathi, Urdu	Non-rhotic	ar [kɑː]
	/θ/ and /ð/ are usually replaced by /d/ and /t/	Tooth [ʈuːt] Mother [ˈmʌdə]
	central vowels are /ə/ and /ʌ/ most commonly disregarded and replaced by the vowel /a/	Sofa [ˈsoʊfa] Run [ɹan]
	Post-alveolar Retroflex /ʈ ɖ/ (Sawant, 2020)	Table /ʈeɪbl̩

This study aims to explore whether there is a shift between the post-alveolar retroflex (ʈ /ɖ) among between first-generation and second-generation South Asians in Hong Kong and how factors like age, educational level, and ethnic orientation lead to variation with the post alveolar retroflex (ʈ /ɖ) and how this shift is connected with their identity. South Asian English which are often considered as "inferior" compared to the inner variety of English like AmE and BrW. As

mentioned above South Asians might be pressured to change their accents to sound more "educated". This study hopes to remove the stigma around speaking with a South Asian accent and illustrate its importance to the South Asian Diaspora's sense of belonging and identity. This paper hopes to investigate the complex South Asian identity in Hong Kong and how language is shaped in the South Asia diaspora. This paper aims to answer the following:

1.2 Research Questions:

This study will investigate the following:

1. Is there a shift between the post-alveolar retroflex (ʈ/ɖ) among first-generation and second-generation South Asians in Hong Kong?
2. What are the factors affecting the shift? (Generational differences, educational level, ethnic orientation)
3. How does this shift connect with their ethnic orientation?

Literature review

2.1 Diasporic identity

Recent studies suggest that language use plays a crucial role in shaping the linguistic and ethnic identities of different generations. Hoffman & Walker (2010) argued that social differences reflect linguistic behavior which can be affected by social class, sex, and age. Hoffman & Walker (2010) describes ethnicity as an "involuntary group of people who share the same culture". Tódor and Degi (2016) conducted a study on Hungarian minority students in Romania and their language attitudes and language learning. It was found that their mother tongue was used as a self-expression, representing their heritage and it was used as an identity marker. When asked "Which mother tongue was the most beautiful" students with more ethnolinguistic-driven identities regarded Hungarian as the most beautiful language in the world. While students with more cultural relativism-based attitudes had more general statements about the question. This study is evident in the connection between language and ethnic orientation and how it can play a significant role in shaping one's identity and language. However, a diaspora's use of language can be distinct as it can be attributed to their hybrid identity. Nedashkivska (2018) conducted a study on language practices and attitudes of the Ukrainian diaspora in Canada where language enhanced the expression of culture and identity. As their awareness of "their marginal status

within a host society" is emphasized, the diaspora had a desire to maintain strong links to their homeland and resisted complete assimilation (Androutsopoulos, 2006, as cited in Nedashkivska, 2018). On the other hand, some struggle with their ancestral and new identity as the diasporic arrivals adopted the host cultures while mixing their own cultures, it led to "reform and reconfiguration" of a new hybrid culture or "hybrid identities'" (Chambers, 1996, as cited in Nedashkivska, 2018). However the study by Giordano (2025), Tódor and Degi (2016) and Nedashkivska (2018), did not take different generations into account and how the older and younger generation might have different use of the host (L2) languages as these studies focused on L1 use of the speakers.

2.2 South Asian Diasporic identity in Hong Kong

As seen in the South Asian diaspora in Toronto in Hoffman & Walker's (2010) paper, South Asians likewise have built a shared identity in Hong Kong, participating in shared activities around common interest, values, and religious celebrations despite their identity being complex and distinct from each other. This leads to ethnic enclaves where people can exclusively interact with first language (L1) speakers and similar ethnic backgrounds. Ethnic enclaves can be seen in Jordan with one-third of the Nepali community living there. They first arrived in Hong Kong as Gurkhas during British colonial rule (Lanyon & Lanyon, 2012). The enclaves of Indians, Pakistanis, and other South Asians can be seen in Tsim Sha Tsui from the establishment of South Asian-run businesses in the city during the 1950s and 1960s. (Giordano, 2025).

(The graph above shows the heat map of ethnic enclaves in Hong Kong supported by Giordano (2025) and personal observation)

As we see a variation in the proficiency of Cantonese of first generation and second generation in Hua's (2020) paper, similar results might be seen with English, within the enclaves. Ullah (2024) notes in his study that the South Asian diaspora, specifically the second generation, faces multifaceted struggles between their ancestral roots and the dominant culture of the host country. The interplay of two cultures leads to dissonance for second-generation immigrants and a consistent feeling of "existential dilemma of "being in-between". This phenomenon is worsened by the stereotypes and societal pressure imposed on them by the host country which can hinder the discovery of self-identity. The struggle of dual identity as mentioned in Ward's (2005) paper argues how diasporic communities lead to a "double consciousness." She mentions the "twoness" theory by W.E.B Dubois where the subordinate group always looks at themselves through the eyes of others, which leads them to form "two souls, two thoughts". The literature on South Asians in Hong Kong often focuses on local Chinese's view of South Asians, their

assimilation, and generalised the experiences of South Asians. Most importantly, there has been a lot of research done on diasporic identities like in Ullah's paper which explores the second-generation identity overseas. However, his paper lacks research on South Asians in Asia, specifically Hong Kong. Moreover, studies conducted on South Asians in Hong Kong fail to emphasize their identity. For instance, a project conducted by the Equal Opportunities Commission reported on the daily interactions between South Asians and local Chinese in Hong Kong. However, the study had limited scope as it grouped all ethnic minorities as one. Moreover, though the study reported on the racial acceptance of South Asians towards local Chinese and vice versa, it lacked research on the issue of the identity of the South Asian community and focused more on their experience. Another was conducted by the Legislative Council in Hong Kong on education and challenges faced by South Asians in Hong Kong. Similar to the study by the Equal Opportunities Commission, the study focused more on the Chinese language abilities of ethnic minorities in different schools and lacked research on how identity might have played a crucial role on ethnic minorities" language learning abilities. This shows how research or reports done on ethnic minorities often include generalization and focus on demographics with the absence of in-depth study on their experiences in Hong Kong. This study aims to fill a significant gap in understanding the struggle and identity of South Asians in Hong Kong. There are various studies on understanding the South Asian culture in Hong Kong and experiences of discrimination and prejudice. However, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive look at South Asians in Hong Kong beyond language barriers and discrimination and aims to display the diverse and complex identity of South Asians. The table below shows language variation which might be seen between first generation and second generation South Asians in Hong Kong.

	First Generation	Second Generation
Language Preferences	L1 (Mother Tongue) ● Most grew up in South Asia and feel more comfortable speaking their L1	L2 (usually English) ● Due to cultural mixing with other EMs, English is spoken as a linguistic repertoire
Identity	Higer South Asian Identity Lower South Asian Identity	Lower South Asian Identity Higher South Asian Identity
Frequency of Language use	High use of L1 as linguistic	Moderate to High L1 as

(L1)	repertoire	linguistic repertoire
Frequency of Language use (L2)	Low to Moderate of L2 as linguistic repertoire	High of L2 as linguistic repertoire
Confidence (L1) (Mother Tongue)	High	Moderate to High
Confidence (L2) (English)	Moderate to high	High
Composition of sub-ethnic groups	**Pakistanis:** Pathan, Punjabis (Chhachi) **Indians**: Punjabis, Sindhis, Tamils, Gujaratis **Nepali:** Limbu, Nalbo Chongbang	**Pakistanis:** Pathan, Punjabis (Chhachi) **Indians**: Punjabis, Sindhis, Tamils, Gujaratis **Nepali:** Limbu, Nalbo Chongbang
Views towards China	Neutral	Neutral to Negative

Despite the developments in understanding linguistic variation among generations, there is a research gap in the linguistic landscapes among South Asians and limited research on different generations of South Asians in Hong Kong. Particularly, on language transfer between first-generation and second-immigrants in Hong Kong. Furthermore, research regarding attitudes towards HKE fails to include local non-Chinese in their studies which fails to prove a comprehensive study. There is also a lack of research on the degree of ethnicity and language variation within the South Asian community of Hong Kong.

Methodology

The researcher's positionality from the marginalized EM community provides valuable insights on how the aforementioned studies by the hegemonic groups may lack insights and inadequate data on the representation of racially marginalised communities. The researcher's involvement, who is a part of the South Asian community and who have had shared similar experiences, is crucial to help bridge the research gap between the linguists and community members in Hong Kong. The experiences of a South Asian researcher, strengthens this linguistic study as it draws on the interdisciplinary academic studies, lived experiences of South Asian and English language users to provide a fuller picture of the linguistic landscape of South Asians in Hong Kong. With primary focus on language and identity, the researcher hopes to demonstrate the importance of

diasporic communities in Hong Kong who are more than just novices or demographics in previous studies.

Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-method approach, it utilizes both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect the data. These are list of materials that were used for the data collection:

1. Questionnaire
2. Interview (Semi-structured interview prose reading, wordlist)

Questionnaire (Descriptive data)

Before the interview, a Google form was sent out to participants to gather and filter out participants for the interview. The questionnaire consisted of 3 parts: Personal background, questions regarding linguistic background, and questions regarding ethnic orientation. The first part of the survey asked about the participants' age, place of birth, education level, place of education, and the generation they belonged to (first-generation/second-generation). The second section asked about their linguistic background which aimed to find the participant's linguistic background. Section 2 delves into their linguistic histories like their first language and second language, the medium of instruction in high school and tertiary education, and their attitudes towards Cantonese and their learning goals. Their third section investigates their ethnic orientation which aims to investigate their degree of ethnic orientation of being a South Asian, a Hong Konger, and Chinese. They were further asked about the definition of being a South Asian, Hong Konger, and Chinese. For each ethnicity, the participants were asked to rate their ethnic orientation on a scale of 1-7.

Selection of the interviewees

About 86 participants filled out the survey. The study used a convenient and stratified sampling method to choose specific individuals to conduct the interview. First, the study looked at the participant's degree of identifying as a Hong Konger based on question 3.1 from the survey (On the scale from 1-7, how Hong Konger are you?). Participants who chose 1-3 were regarded as displaying a lower degree of Hong Kong identity while participants who chose 4-7 were regarded to have displayed a higher degree of Hong Kong identity. This is culturally motivated

as in the previous studies, speakers with higher ethnic orientation used more for their L1 features, hence the selection hopes to investigate the correlation between language use and ethnic orientation (Starr & Balasubramaniam, 2019). Second, the 2 groups of participants were divided into first-generation and second-generation. This was based on the place of birth for their paternal and maternal relations. If the participants were born in South Asia, they would be considered first-generation South Asians. If their parents or grandparents were born in South Asia and they were born in Hong Kong, they would be considered second-generation or third-generation South Asians. (Refer to question 1.13 and question 1.14 in the survey). Third, each generation was further divided into different levels of education. Participants with highschool being their highest level of educational attainment were categorized with lower education qualifications. Participants with tertiary education being their highest level of educational attainment were categorized as having higher education qualifications. (refer to questions 1.9 - 1.12 in the survey).

Interview *(**Semi-Structured interview, Prose Reading, Wordlist)**

The interview was divided into 3 parts: semi-structured interviews, prose reading, and wordlist and was chosen to help control for stylistic or intra-speaker variation. Similar to Starr and Balasubramaniam (2019), this study aimed to investigate whether South Asians in Hong Kong used an 'ethnolinguistic repertoire' approach for identity and language by using the post-alveolar retroflex / ʈ / and / ɖ / to convey their ethnic identity in different social contexts. Hence, all three parts utilized elicitation tasks during the semi-structured interview, prose reading and wordlist. These 3 parts consisted of 3 sets of questions. Set A consisted of general questions asking the interviewer about their lives and hobbies. Set B consisted of questions related to living in Hong Kong as an ethnic minority. Set C consisted of questions related to their home country. Second, the interviewees were given 3 sets of prose reading passages. Set A consisted of neutral reading regarding books and hobbies from an excerpt in New York Times. Hong Kong-related prose reading discussed Cantopop and a local rapper Billy Choi. The readings were related to South Asian discussed Indian restaurants in Hong Kong. Lastly, in the last part of the interview, they were given 30 sets of words which were divided into 10 words relating to food in Hong Kong, 10 words relating to different places in Hong Kong and 10 words related to South Asian food or festivals. The experiment aimed to see if the interviewees shifted their accents based on the

topic. This helps us indicate their ethnic orientation and how language is tied to it. The study relied on the interview to note the recurring pattern and identify the tokens to code the words with post-alveolar retroflex ʈ/ɖ). Then the data was interpreted for research questions.

In this study, we will be referring to each group of speakers as such:

+ **HK**	Gen 1	Gen 2
Non-uni	Group 1: + Hk non-uni gen 1	Group 2: + Hk non-uni gen 2
Uni	Group 3: + Hk uni gen 1	Group 4: + Hk uni gen 2

- **HK**	Gen 1	Gen 2
Non-uni	Group 5: - Hk non-uni gen 1	Group 6: - Hk non-uni gen 2
Uni	Group 7: - Hk uni gen 1	Group 8: - Hk uni gen 2

Group 1: + Hk non-uni gen 1   Group 5: - Hk non-uni gen 1

Group 2: + Hk non-uni gen 2   Group 6: - Hk non-uni gen 2

Group 3: + Hk uni gen 1   Group 7: - Hk uni gen 1

Group 4: + Hk uni gen 2   Group 8: - Hk uni gen 2

Phase 1: Sending out surveys

Quantitative data collection
Select relevant participants for intervewees
(Dividing the interviewee in first-generation and second-generation)

Phase 2: Interview

First-generation interviewees   Second-generation interviewees

Part 1:   Part 2:   Part 3:
Discussion Questions   Prose Reading   Wordlist

Select relavant tokens of post-alveolar retroflex (ʈ /ɖ)

Phase 3: Data analysis

Catogorise the tokens with tokens of post-alveolar retroflex (ʈ /ɖ)

Education level   Ethnic orienation

Higer tokens of post-alveolar retroflex (ʈ /ɖ) --> higher South Asian orientation
Lower tokens of post-alveolar retroflex (ʈ /ɖ) --> Higher local orientation

Survey Demographics and Analysis

A total of 86 South Asians filled out the google form. The selection of the 40 speakers was done on availability (of the speakers) and willingness to participate in the interviews. The speakers chosen reflected the demographic from their group and the study tried to incorporate speakers from different South Asian communities to provide a more comprehensive data. The youngest age of the speaker was 14 and the oldest was 55. The majority of the participants were aged 18-25 with 73.3 % females and 26.7% male. Most of the speakers were Pakistani 42 (48.8%) followed by Indians (25.6%) and Nepalis 15 (17.14%). Almost half of the participants had Hong Kong citizenship while another majority were holders of citizenships of their home country with 4.6% having British citizenship. Most participants were currently pursuing their undergraduate degree in Hong Kong (58.1%) while 22.1% did in highschool. (Survey Q 1.9). Most of their High School education was done in Hong Kong (76.7%) while 17.4% had their education done in South Asia. (Survey Q 1.10). Most of their undergraduate study was done in Hong Kong (67.4%). (Survey Q 1.11). 41.9% of the participants were born in South Asia.While 46.5% were born in Hong Kong. (Survey Q 1.13 and 1.14). From the above statistics, these participants were grouped into

Group 1: + Hk non-uni gen 1

Group 2: + Hk non-uni gen 2

Group 3: + Hk uni gen 1

Group 4: + Hk uni gen 2

Group 5: - Hk non-uni gen 1

Group 6: - Hk non-uni gen 2

Group 7: - Hk uni gen 1

Group 8: - Hk uni gen 2

Majority of the speakers had their mother tongue and English as their L1(Survey Q 2.1). Moreover, the majority of the participants were trilingual, usually speaking their mother tongue, English and Cantonese. As mentioned above, the majority of the speakers had their secondary education in Hong Kong and their mode of instruction (MOI) was mainly English and Cantonese, which was picked up alongside their mother tongue. Moreover, academic goals, career goals, and cultural assimilation emerged as the 3 main factors for their acquisition of Cantonese. Most regarded Cantonese to be difficult in terms of tones, phonetics and grammar.

Analysis of Group 1: + Hk non- uni gen 1, Group 2: + Hk non-uni gen 2, Group 3: + Hk uni gen 1 , Group 4: + Hk uni gen 2

Group 1: + Hk non- uni gen 1 ethnic Orientation		
	On the scale from 1-7, how Hong Konger are you? (1 being not al all and 7 being absolutely)	Second On the scale from 1-7, how Hong Konger are you? (1 being not al all and 7 being absolutely)
Malik	7	2
Raza	5	5
Sumera	6	6
Faisal	7	7
Naieela	5	5

Group 2: + Hk non- uni gen 2 ethnic Orientation		
	On the scale from 1-7, how Hong Konger are you? (1 being not al all and 7 being absolutely)	Second On the scale from 1-7, how Hong Konger are you? (1 being not al all and 7 being absolutely)
Simran	6	5
Bavithi	6	6
Ruhan	4	6
Rimshah	5	5
Arooj	6	6

Group 3: + Hk uni gen 1 ethnic Orientation		
	On the scale from 1-7, how Hong Konger are you? (1 being not al all and 7 being absolutely)	Second On the scale from 1-7, how Hong Konger are you? (1 being not al all and 7 being absolutely)
Aisha	5	5
Chanuja	5	5
Janyani	4	4
Mariam	7	7
Sumera	7	7

Group 4: + Hk uni gen 2 ethnic Orientation		
	On the scale from 1-7, how Hong Konger are you? (1 being not al all and 7 being absolutely)	Second On the scale from 1-7, how Hong Konger are you? (1 being not al all and 7 being absolutely)
Sabiha	6	6
Shehzadi	6	2

Group 4: + Hk uni gen 2 ethnic Orientation		
Mahek	4	4
Moon	6	4
Moon	5	5

In speakers from Group 1 (+ Hk non-uni gen 1), Group 2 (+ Hk non-uni gen 2), Group 3 (+ Hk uni gen 1) and Group 4 (+ Hk uni gen 2,) educational background and ethnic orientation emerged as a key factor influencing their use of post-alveolar retroflex (ʈ /ɖ). Group 1's educational background differed the most. All speakers in this group attained their highschool education in South Asia while group 2, 3 and 4 all attained their education in Hong Kong. Speakers from group 2, 3 and 4 had lower use of post-alveolar retroflex (ʈ /ɖ). This shows that their education played an influence on their use of the feature.
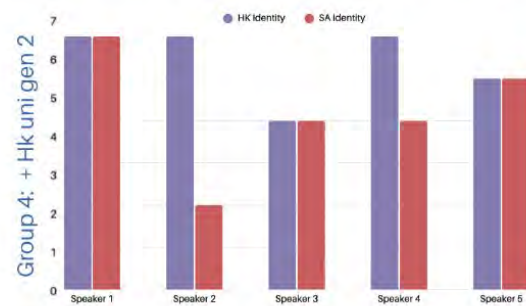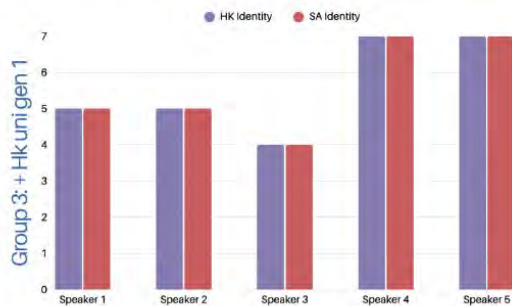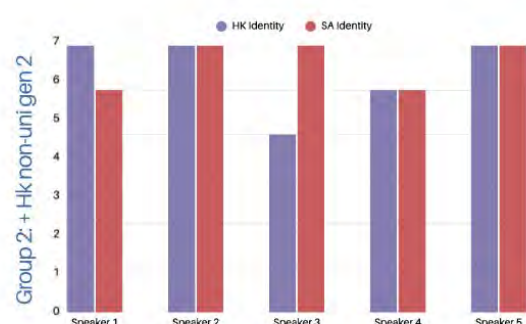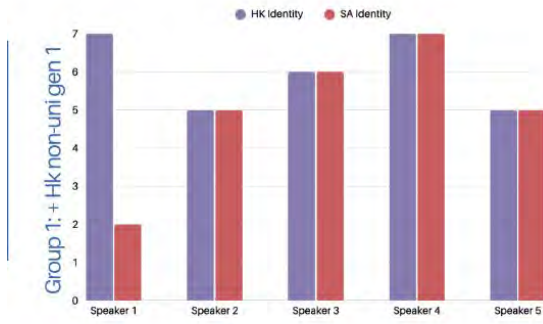
Tokens from Group 1 (+ Hk non-uni gen 1) **Table 1**

Total tokens collected:	648	Total tokens from discussion questions:	198	Total tokens from discussion questions realization:	161	81.30%
Total realization	527	Total tokens from Prose reading	300	Total tokens from Prose reading realization:	246	82%
		Total tokens from Wordlist	150	Total tokens from Wordlist realization:	135	90%
Total percentage of realization:	81.30%					

Tokens from Set A, B, C Group 1 (+ Hk non-uni gen 1) **Table 2**

	Set A	Set B	Set C
Total Token (Realization) from Discussion Questions	49 out of 61 (80.3%)	49 out of 65 (75.3%)	60 out of 74 (81%)
Total Tokens (Realization) from Prose Reading	76 out of 100 (76%)	80 out of 100 (80%)	89 out of 100 (89%)
Total Tokens (Realization) from Wordlist	41 out 50 (82%)	42 out of 50 (84%)	46 out of 50 (92%)

As seen from table 1, a total of 648 tokens were collected from Group 1 (+ Hk non-uni gen 1). In these tokens, 527 tokens produced the post-alveolar retroflex (81.30%). The feature was produced across all discussion questions, prose reading and wordlist regardless of the topic mentioned. This showed that Group 1 (+ Hk non-uni gen 1) used the feature as part of the vernacular.

Tokens from Group 2 (+ Hk non-uni gen 2) **Table 3**

Total tokens collected:	728	Total tokens from discussion questions:	278	Total tokens from discussion questions realization:	6	2.16%
Total realization	60	Total tokens from Prose reading	300	Total tokens from Prose reading realization:	23	8%
		Total tokens from Wordlist	150	Total tokens from Wordlist realization:	34	22.67%
Total percentage of realization:	8.28%					

Tokens from Set A, B, C Group 2 (+ Hk non-uni gen 2) **Table 4**

	Set A	Set B	Set C
Total Token (Realization) from Discussion Questions	1 out of 65 (1.53%)	3 out of 106 (2.8%)	2 out of 107 (1.8%)
Total Tokens (Realization) from Prose Reading	3 out of 100 (3%)	6 out of 100 (6%)	14 out of 100 (14%)
Total Tokens (Realization) from Wordlist	4 out 50 (8%)	5 out of 50 (10%)	14 out of 50 (28%)

In table 2, a total of 752 tokens were collected from Group 2 (+ Hk non-uni gen 2). In these tokens, 60 tokens produced the post-alveolar retroflex (8.28%). The feature was produced more when South Asian related topics were highlighted as seen in table 4 where set C had the highest realization of post-alveolar retroflex ($ʈ$/$ɖ$). This shows that for the first generation, the post-alveolar retroflex was a more dominant variant. The use of post-alveolar retroflex coincided with their education. For Group 1 (+ Hk non-uni gen 1), their highschool education was mainly done in South Asia while their mode of instruction (MOI) was English and L1. Group 2's (+ Hk non-uni gen 2) highschool education was done in Hong Kong, while their mode of instruction was

English and Cantonese. We can concretely observe that the MOI strongly impacted the use of post-alveolar retroflex (ʈ/ɖ) between the non-university educated South Asians in Group 1 and university educated South Asians in Group 2, which lead to a variation between the first and second generation.

Tokens from Group 3 (+ Hk uni gen 1) **Table 5**

Total tokens collected:	724	Total tokens from discussion questions:	292	Total tokens from discussion questions realization:	24	15.75%
Total realization	116	Total tokens from Prose reading	300	Total tokens from Prose reading realization:	36	12%
		Total tokens from Wordlist	150	Total tokens from Wordlist realization:	34	22.67%
Total percentage of realization:	16%					

Tokens from Set A, B, C   Group 3 (+ Hk uni gen 1) **Table 6**

	Set A	Set B	Set C
Total Token (Realization) from Discussion Questions	14 out of 80 (17.5%)	18 out of 105 (17.1%)	14 out of 66 (21.2%)
Total Tokens (Realization) from Prose Reading	7 out of 100 (7%)	10 out of 100 (10%)	19 out of 100 (19%)
Total Tokens (Realization) from Wordlist	5 out 50 (10%)	5 out of 50 (10%)	25 out of 50 (50%)

As seen from table 5, a total of 724 tokens were collected from Group 3 (+ Hk uni gen 1). In these tokens, 114 tokens produced the post-alveolar retroflex (ʈ/ɖ) (15.75%). Unlike Group 1 (+

Hk non- uni gen 1) (Table 1), Group 3 had lower use of the post-alveolar retroflex (ʈ /ɖ); the feature was prominent in topics related to South Asia. For Group 3's (+ Hk uni gen 1) education attainment was significantly different from Group 1 (+ Hk non- uni gen 1). All 5 speakers of Group 3 attained their secondary and university education in Hong Kong. This resulted in their MOI to mainly be English and Cantonese. This shows a significant impact of education on the use of the post-alveolar retroflex. Despite both generations having similar Hong Konger and South Asian identity, their difference in MOI resulted in large variation between the Group 1 (+ Hk uni gen 1) and Group 3 (+ Hk uni gen 1).

Tokens from Group 4 (+ Hk uni gen 2) **Table 7**

Total tokens collected:	726	Total tokens from discussion questions:	276	Total tokens from discussion questions realization: 4	1.44%
Total realization	41	Total tokens from Prose reading	300	Total tokens from Prose reading realization: 10	3%
		Total tokens from Wordlist	150	Total tokens from Wordlist realization: 27	18%
Total percentage of realization:	5.63%				

Tokens from Set A, B, C   Group 4 (+ Hk uni gen 1) **Table 8**

	Set A	Set B	Set C
Total Token (Realization) from Discussion Questions	0 out of 60 (-)	1 out of 117 (0.85%)	3 out of 99 (3.03%)
Total Tokens (Realization) from Prose Reading	2 out of 100 (2%)	0 out of 100 (-)	8 out of 100 (8%)

Tokens from Set A, B, C Group 4 (+ Hk uni gen 1) **Table 8**			
Total Tokens (Realization) from Wordlist	2 out 50 (4%)	1 out of 50 (2%)	24 out of 50 (48%)

As seen from table 7, a total of 726 tokens were collected from Group 4 (+ Hk uni gen 2) In these tokens, 41 tokens produced the post-alveolar retroflex (ʈ /ɖ) (5.63%). Group 4 had similar use of the post-alveolar retroflex (ʈ /ɖ) with Group 2 (+ Hk non-uni gen 2) (8.28%). Both groups have had similar upbringing and as seen from the survey data, majority of the speakers in Group 2 and 4 had strong Hong Kong and South Asian identity. Hence, their education and ethnic orientation contributed to their use of post-alveolar retroflex (ʈ /ɖ).

Analysis of Group 5: - Hk non-uni gen 1, Group 6: - Hk non-uni gen 2, Group 7: - Hk uni gen 1 And Group 8: - Hk uni gen 2 ethnic orientation

Group 5: - Hk non-uni gen 1 ethnic orientation		
	On the scale from 1-7, how Hong Konger are you? (1 being not al all and 7 being absolutely)	Second On the scale from 1-7, how Hong Konger are you? (1 being not al all and 7 being absolutely)
Yashaswi	3	5
Aastha	2	3
Fauz	3	7
Kamala Pongtha	2	6
Laiba	3	3

Group 5: - Hk non-uni gen 1 ethnic orientation		
	On the scale from 1-7, how Hong Konger are you? (1 being not al all and 7 being absolutely)	Second On the scale from 1-7, how Hong Konger are you? (1 being not al all and 7 being absolutely)
Melisa	2	2

Group 5: - Hk non-uni gen 1 ethnic orientation		
Abeera	3	7
Mute	3	3
Karandip	3	4
Joyce	3	2

Group 7: - Hk uni gen 1 ethnic orientation		
	On the scale from 1-7, how Hong Konger are you? (1 being not al all and 7 being absolutely)	Second On the scale from 1-7, how Hong Konger are you? (1 being not al all and 7 being absolutely)
Mabita	2	2
Suhani	2	7
Dhrishti	2	6
Alishba	3	6
Kushal	2	6

Group 8: - Hk uni gen 2 ethnic orientation		
	On the scale from 1-7, how Hong Konger are you? (1 being not al all and 7 being absolutely)	Second On the scale from 1-7, how Hong Konger are you? (1 being not al all and 7 being absolutely)
Prasant	2	2
Khadija	2	7
Chinmoy	2	6
Sukrithi	3	6
Alisa	2	6

These 4 groups of speakers had low Hong Kong identity. Unlike Group 1-4, their level of South Asian Identity was more varied. Group 6-8 had the lowest use of post-alveolar retroflex. During the interview, most of them exhibited negative experiences during their secondary school. Moreover, speakers from Group 5-8 regarded Hong Kong and the Chinese identity to be similar while speakers from Group 1-4 regarded Hong Kong and the Chinese identity to be different. Their ethnic orientation and education played a crucial role in their use of the post-alveolar retroflex.
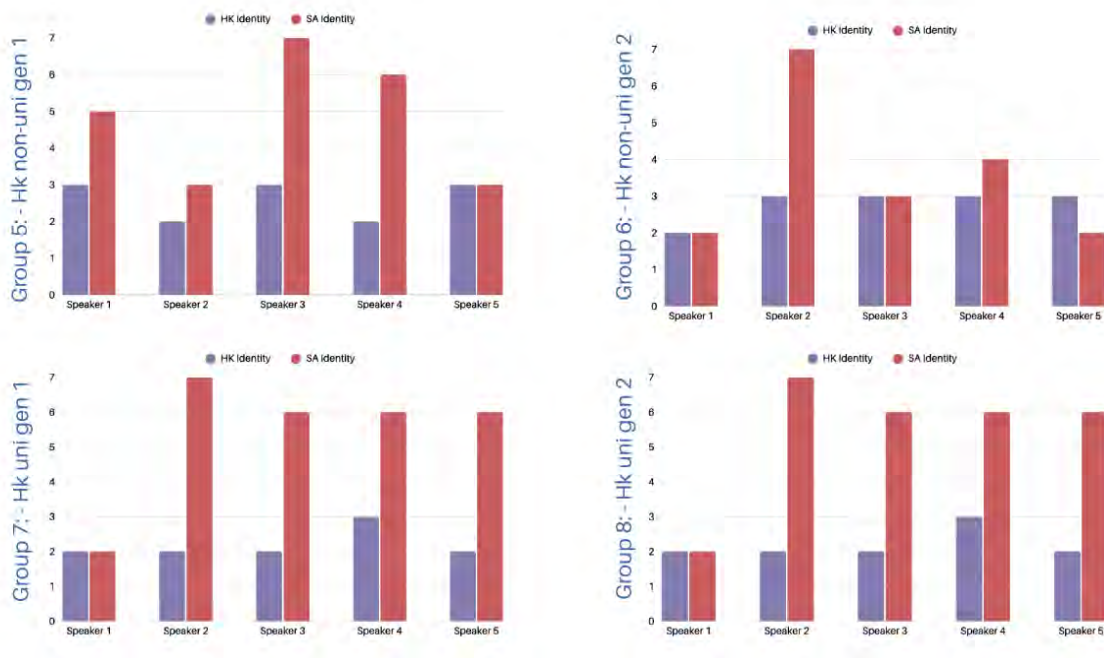
Tokens from Group 5 (+ Hk non-uni gen 1) **Table 9**					
Total tokens collected:	688	Total tokens from discussion questions:	238	Total tokens from discussion questions realization:	91	38.24%
Total realization	309	Total tokens from Prose reading	300	Total tokens from Prose reading realization:	134	45%
		Total tokens from Wordlist	150	Total tokens from Wordlist	84	956%

Tokens from Group 5 (+ Hk non-uni gen 1) **Table 9**				realization:		
Total percentage of realization: 44.39%						

Tokens from Set A, B, C Group 5 (+ Hk non-uni gen 1) **Table 10**			
	Set A	Set B	Set C
Total Token (Realization) from Discussion Questions	24 out of 63 (38%)	35 out of 117 (29.9%)	32 out of 99 (32.3%)
Total Tokens (Realization) from Prose Reading	41 out of 100 (41%)	44 out of 100 (44 %)	52 out of 100 (52%)
Total Tokens (Realization) from Wordlist	22 out 50 (44%)	19 out of 50 (38%)	34 out of 50 (68%)

In table 9, a total of 688 tokens were collected from Group 5 (- Hk non-uni gen 1). In these tokens, 309 tokens produced the post-alveolar retroflex (ʈ /ɖ) (44.39%). The feature was used across all discussion questions, prose reading and wordlist regardless of the topic mentioned. This shows that for the first generation the post-alveolar retroflex was a more dominant variant. The use of post-alveolar retroflex coincided with their education. For Group 5 (- Hk non-uni gen 1), their highschool education was mainly done in South Asia while their mode of instruction (MOI) was English and their mother tongue, similar to Group 1 (+Hk non-uni gen 1). We can concretely observe that the MOI strongly impacted the use of post-alveolar retroflex for both first generation South Asians. However, Group 5 (- Hk non-uni gen 1) had lower use of post-alveolar retroflex (ʈ /ɖ) than Group 1 (+Hk non-uni gen 1). This can be attributed to having lower South Asian identity.

Tokens fromGroup 6 (+ Hk non-uni gen 2) **Table 11**

Total tokens collected:	834	Total tokens from discussion questions:	384	Total tokens from discussion questions realization:	8	2.08%
Total realization	44	Total tokens from Prose reading	300	Total tokens from Prose reading realization:	2	1%
		Total tokens from Wordlist	150	Total tokens from Wordlist realization:	27	23%
Total percentage of realization:	5.27%					

Tokens from Set A, B, C Group 6 (+ Hk non-uni gen 2) **Table 12**

	Set A	Set B	Set C
Total Token (Realization) from Discussion Questions	5 out of 117 (4.27%)	2 out of 148 (1.35%)	1 out of 122 (0,81%)
Total Tokens (Realization) from Prose Reading	0 out of 100 (-)	0 out of 100 (-)	0 out of 100 (8%)
Total Tokens (Realization) from Wordlist	2 out 50 (4%)	3 out of 50 (6%)	26 out of 50 (52%)

Second, Group 6 (- Hk non-uni gen 2), as seen from table 11, a total of 834 tokens were collected. In these tokens, 44 tokens produced the post-alveolar retroflex (5.28%). Similar to the second generation mentioned in Group 2 (8.28%) and Group 4 (5.39%), the feature was produced more when South Asian related topics were highlighted. However, Group 6, had slightly lower use of post-alveolar retroflex than Group 2 and 4. The low use of retroflex can be a result of their low South Asian identity compared to the speakers in Group 2 and 4.

Tokens from Group 7 (- HK uni gen 1) **Table 13**

Total tokens collected:	869	Total tokens from discussion questions:	419	Total tokens from discussion questions realization:	28	6.68%
Total realization	98	Total tokens from Prose reading	300	Total tokens from Prose reading realization:	23	8%
		Total tokens from Wordlist	150	Total tokens from Wordlist realization:	47	31%
Total percentage of realization:	11.27%				

Tokens from Set A, B, C Group 7 (+ Hk non-uni gen 2) **Table 14**

	Set A	Set B	Set C
Total Token (Realization) from Discussion Questions	6 out of 104 (4.27%)	1 out of 46 (1.35%)	7 out of 162 (0,81%)
Total Tokens (Realization) from Prose Reading	7 out of 100 (7%)	4 out of 100 (4%)	14 out of 100 (14%)
Total Tokens (Realization) from Wordlist	0 out 50 (-)	2 out of 50 (4%)	27 out of 50 (54%)

For the Group 7 (- HK uni gen 1), a total of 869 tokens were collected. In these tokens, 98 tokens produced the post-alveolar retroflex (ʈ /ɖ) (11.3%). Similar to Group 3 (+ HK uni gen 1), they attained their secondary and university education in Hong Kong. This resulted in their MOI to mainly be English and Cantonese. They also showed a higher level of South Asian identity similar to that of Group 1. However, Group 7 (- HK uni gen 1) highlighted more negative experiences of racism and discrimination during their time in Hong Kong. 3 out of the 5

speakers reported having their South Asian accents mocked during their secondary school. This can contribute to their low use of post-alveolar retroflex (ʈ /ɖ).

Tokens from Group 8 (- HK uni gen 2)**Table 15**

Total tokens collected:	910	Total tokens from discussion questions:	460	Total tokens from discussion questions realization: 9	6.68%
Total realization	20	Total tokens from Prose reading	300	Total tokens from Prose reading realization: 0	8%
		Total tokens from Wordlist	150	Total tokens from Wordlist realization: 11	31%
Total percentage of realization:	2.1%				

Tokens from Set A, B, C Group 8 (- HK uni gen 2) **Table 16**

	Set A	Set B	Set C
Total Token (Realization) from Discussion Questions	0 out of 180 (-)	1 out of 232 (0.43%)	2 out of 122 (1.63%)
Total Tokens (Realization) from Prose Reading	0 out of 100 (-)	0 out of 100 (-)	0 out of 100 (-)
Total Tokens (Realization) from Wordlist	0 out 50 (-)	0 out of 50 (-)	11 out of 50 (22%)

For the Group 8 (- HK uni gen 8), a total of 910 tokens were collected. In these tokens, 20 tokens produced the post-alveolar retroflex (ʈ /ɖ) (2.1%). Group 8 had the lowest use of post-alveolar retroflex. This group also reported struggles with their dual identity. All 5 speakers

commented on not being accepted both in Hong Kong, in their home country and had their accent mocked by the locals.

Discussion

The study investigated the effects of different generations, educational attainment, and ethnic orientation by investigating the use of post-alveolar retroflex (ʈ /ɖ) among first-generation and second-generation South Asians in Hong Kong. The data provides strong evidence of a variation and change between the first-generation and second-generation South Asians using the post-alveolar retroflex (ʈ /ɖ). Educational level and ethnic identity emerged as a significant factor affecting this variation and change with higher is of post-alveolar Retroflex (ʈ /ɖ) being used by 1st generation speakers with highschool attainment and speakers with strong Hong Kong identity and South Asian identity. One significant observation showed speakers using post-alveolar retroflex (ʈ /ɖ) at higher rates when South Asian-related topics were highlighted and discussed. This phenomenon was obsessed across all generations and groups of speakers.

Ethnic Orientation and the use of post-alveolar retroflex (RQ1)

1. *Hong Kong Identity*

Ethnic Orientation played a crucial role in the use of the post-alveolar retroflex among different generations. Before discussing the role of ethnic orientation, it is worth discussing what is the "Hong Konger" identity. The case for the Hong Kong identity is complex and cannot be fully explored in this paper. But we can have a general understanding of what a "Hong Kong" identity is. The given literature, especially seen in Ping and Kin-Ming's (2014) paper, suggests a rise in the local Hong Kong identity as resistance to homogenization from the Mainland was seen as a key factor in building Hong Kong local identity. Moreover, Chan (2019) paper found code-switching between Cantonese and English reflected a Hong Kong Identity. Hong Kongers also used bilingual code-switching (Cantonese-English) to differentiate themselves from other people, mainly the Mainland Chinese. This shows how bilingualism stemming from the education system of Hong Kong is a major factor in forming the local identity. In Kai Chun's (2021) paper, he found that Cantonese was seen as a crucial part of Hong Kong culture and Cantonese was a unique part of it. In his paper "On the Mainlandisation of Cantonese: Language and Identity", it was found that the increased use of Putonghua was seen as unwelcoming in Hong Kong as it was

considered to threaten the unique cultural identity of Hong Kongers. People identifying as Hong Kongers regarded Cantonese to be its independent language while people who identified as Chinese rather than Hong Konger regard Cantonese as a dialect of Chinese culture. From the above literature, we can conclude that a Hong Kong identity consists of using Cantonese as an identity marker and is distinct from the Mainland Chinese identity. However, the above literature fails to acknowledge ethnic minorities in their studies, as Arat et al. (2022) mention the identity and understanding of ethnic minorities is confined to socio-demographic information. This is seen by the report in the Equal Opportunities Commission and Legislative Council where both the studies failed to go beyond the demographics and did not discuss the identity and values of South Asian people in Hong Kong.

Key finding 1: Strong Dual Identity's effect on language (Group 1, 2, 3, 4) (RQ1):

This study asked the speakers "What does being in Hong Kong mean to you?" As shown in the data analysis, the speakers were divided into 2 groups. The first group consisted of speakers with a stronger Hong Kong identity while the second group consisted of speakers with a weaker Hong Kong identity. Speakers in Group 2 (+ Hk non-uni gen 2), Group 3 (+ Hk uni gen 1) and Group 4 (+ Hk uni gen 2) had the lower percentages of post-alveolar retroflex. A key pattern seen from the survey data showed despite having a strong Hong Kong identity, their South Asian identity was similarly strong. Most speakers in this group were either bilingual (mother tongue/ English) or trilingual (mother tongue/ English/ Cantonese) speakers. Sung's (2018) paper found people would use their native-like accents to express their identities while some might use local accents to emphasize their lingua-cultural identities and avoid native speaker associations. This can be seen in groups 2, 3, and 4 where they used their lingua-cultural identities and avoided native speaker associations resulting in low use of the post-alveolar retroflex. Similar to Starr and Balasubramaniam (2019), where Tamil Singaporeans had stronger use of trapped/trilled /r/ when South Asian-related topics were highlighted, all speakers in Group 2 (+ Hk non-uni gen 2), Group 3 (+ Hk uni gen 1) and Group 4 (+ Hk uni gen 2) had an increase in the use of post-alveolar retroflex (ʈ /ɖ) when South Asian-related topics were highlighted. It shows how features of South Asian English remain an ethnolinguistic repertoire for South Asians in Hong Kong as it serves as a marker for their South Asianess and dual identity ***(RQ1)***. When asked to define what the Hong Konger and South Asian identity is. Most considered their Hong Kong identity to be their "home","culture" and "Cantonese". Moreover, in the interview, speakers of the group

emphasized their experiences of growing up with the local Chinese in Hong Kong. One speaker from Group 4 mentioned her experience with assimilating into Hong Kong through her local friends made her feel accepted in Hong Kong. However, it is important to note that speakers from this group still experienced racism, discrimination, and prejudice while growing up in Hong Kong. This discrimination led her to switch the accents during interviews to avoid prejudice *(RQ1)*.

2025 March, Sabiha, Elicitation, Pakistani, generation 1, PID 69:

"So most of the time when they do an interview, … the first thing they scan (is) CV, so I purposely don't add my face or my image in it because they would reject (me) right away, even though I know Cantonese.…Second, … they call you and try to talk to you in Cantonese, (to) make sure that you know, And then I sound ….. like a local. So most of the time they wouldn't know that …. I'm an ethnic minority. So when they asked me to come to a face to face interview, that's when they're shocked….. And then they would just give me very weird looks and they would directly say it (to) my face. …. we don't wanna accept you because you're wearing a hijab."

2025 March, Moon, Elicitation, Bangladeshi, generation 1, PID 54:

"Definitely like prejudice and racism, language barriers. But you know, racism was very prevalent when I was young. … And honestly, the reputation that we had growing up wasn't the best either because we were called (like) dirty, thieves, (like) loud, annoying and all that stuff. So, you know, I've had, like, racist incidents where people will, you know, talk behind my back in Cantonese. But like, they would, you know, not sit next to me in a public transport. But the moment I start speaking Canto, they're suddenly so comfortable around me."

This sentiment was shared with a few speakers from Group 2 (+ Hk non-uni gen 2), Group 3 (+ Hk uni gen 1) and Group 4 (+ Hk uni gen 2). But when asked if the representation and treatment of South Asians has improved over the past few years, participants noted that despite efforts

from the government to improve the treatment of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong, efforts have been slow and preformative without any real results.

2025 March, Sabiha, Elicitation, Pakistani , generation 1, PID 69:

> *"So I feel like they are now purposely trying to add ethnic minorities in every sector. Like if you talk about like that's a firefighters, even when I go to like….. they always have like a trial thing for us. And what they are trying to do ....trying to get someone, the first ever EM woman to become a firefighter."*

This shows an important aspect of the identity of South Asians. Despite the negative experiences and lack of effort from the government, they still considered themselves Hong Kongers. They had a very strong dual identity and often referred to themselves as local. This "local South Asian" identity was evident across Speakers in Group 2-4 . Group 1 (+Hk non-uni gen 1) had a similar rating to their identity. Despite being born and raised in their home country, they expressed dual identity and they rated both Hong Kong and South Asian identity from 5-7 in the survey.

2025 March, Raza, Elicitation, Pakistani, generation 1, PID 64:

> *"It actually has gotten better after the pandemic. I think delivery services like FoodPanda and Deliveroo gave more exposure to South Asians to the locals. It made the locals realize that we existed and lived alongside them. I remember how in the beginning there was a lot of racism towards South Asian delivery people. But nowadays it's very normal."*

Key finding 2: Weak Dual Identity's effect on language (Group 6, 7, 8, 9) (RQ1):
Their strong dual identity can be attributed to them holding HKSAR citizenship which was absent from Group 5 (- Hk non-uni gen 1), where none of the participants had HKSAR citizenship. One other factor attributing to their strong dual identity is cultural values. Most speakers of this group mentioned that celebrating their traditional festivals, wearing traditional

food, and having a tight-knit South Asian community, contributed to strong cultural ties. This shows how being able to embrace and celebrate their culture within the Hong Kong context resulted in their dual identity and an higher use of post- alveolar retroflex (ʈ /ɖ).

As mentioned earlier, the second group of participants were grouped into

Group 5 (- Hk non-uni gen 1), Group 6 (- Hk non-uni gen 2), Group 7 (- Hk uni gen 1) and Group 8 (- Hk uni gen 2). From the data analysis, they rated their Hong Kong identity on a scale from 0-3 in the survey while their South Asian identity was rated to be 2-7 in the survey. Group 5 (- Hk non-uni gen 1) had a similar upbringing with Group 1 (+ Hk non-uni gen 1). Both groups were born and raised in South Asia. Their main education was done in South Asia and immigrated to Hong Kong later in life. One key difference in the Group 5 (- Hk non-uni gen 1) from the Group 1 (+ Hk non-uni gen 1) was their years of residing in Hong Kong. Group 1 has been resigning in Hong Kong for more than 15 years and all speakers have raised their children in Hong Kong. But Group 5 (- HK non-uni gen 1) had only been residing in Hong Kong for around 5-10 years. Due to fewer years spent in Hong Kong, they hold on to their South Asian identity. Moreover, all speakers in Group 5 (- HK non-uni gen 1) did not speak Cantonese, which contributed to their lack of Hong Kong identity.

Group 7 (- HK uni gen 1)'s lack of Hong Kong identity stemmed from education and the lack of integration in secondary school which will be discussed later. Group 6 (- Hk non-uni gen 2), and Group 8 (- Hk uni gen 2) had similar upbringing. Speakers in these 2 groups exhibited low use of the post-alveolar retroflex. The second generation in Group 6 and 8 also showed more variation in their rating of their South Asian identity. While some had stronger South Asian identity and had used more post-alveolar retroflex it was comparatively lower than the second generation speakers in Group 2 and 4 with a strong dual identity. Speakers with both weak Hong Kong and South Asian identities exhibited low use of post-alveolar retroflex.

This can be the result of these groups not holding HKSAR citizenship and not speaking Cantonese. Most of the speakers did not describe Hong Kong to be their "home" or not having any cultural relevance to them. Overall speakers from the first generation Group 5 (- Hk non-uni gen 1) and Group 7 (- Hk uni gen 1) had more use of post-alveolar retroflex than the second generation Group 6 (- Hk non-uni gen 2) and Group 8 (- Hk uni gen 2).

However, despite a generally weaker identity in these 4 groups, there were some nuances between the speakers exhibiting a lack of South Asian and Hong Kong identity. One Nepali

speaker who has been residing in Hong Kong for more than 15 years, had an HKSAR citizenship and learned Cantonese, still rated 2 for her Hong Kong identity. This can be attributed to her definition of a Hong Konger which she described to be "a place of work". While she defined her South Asian identity to be "homeland". In Starr and Balasubramaniam (2019), they noted how home language played a crucial role in the higher use of tapped/trilled /r/ in Tamil Singaporean. A similar cause was found in this study when the Nepali woman from Group 5 (- Hk non-uni gen 1)'s children had low Hong Kong identity and low South Asian identity. Her younger daughter in Group 6 (- HK non-uni gen 2) and her elder daughter in Group 7 (- HK uni gen 1), had rated their Hong Kong identity and South Asian identity low as well. This shows that other than ethnic orientation and education, factors like L1 and home languages can affect the identity and the use of post-alveolar retroflex.

The effects of education on the use of Post-alveolar Retroflex (ʈ /ɖ) (RQ2)

Key finding 3: MOI and its effect on language Group 1(+ Hk non-uni gen 1) and Group 5 (- Hk non-uni gen 1) (RQ2):

One significant finding of this study is the variation between the non-university educated and university educated South Asians. The first generation in Group 1 (+ Hk non-uni gen 1) had their education in South Asia. According to the interview, all 5 speakers moved to Hong Kong during their 20s. Most of them highlighted the lack of interaction with the locals and language barriers. Group 5 (- Hk non-uni gen 1) had similar cause with Group 1 (+ Hk non-uni gen 1) as they attained their secondary education in their home country. Most speakers from this group had only been residing in Hong Kong for 5-10 years. Hence, both groups had minimal exposure to local varieties of Englishes in Hong Kong and had language acquisition done in South Asia, resulting in high use of post-alveolar retroflex **(RQ2)**.

Key finding 4: MOI and its effect on language Group 3 (+ Hk uni gen 1) and Group 7 (- Hk uni gen 1) (RQ2):

For the second generation, in Group 3 (+ Hk uni gen 1), all five speakers were educated in Hong Kong. Having been exposed to more local varieties of English, especially Hong Kong English where the post-alveolar feature is absent, exposure to the feature was minimal. This resulted in their accents being influenced by exonormative languages in Hong Kong like Cantonese,

Mandarin, and different varieties of English. Group 7 (- Hk uni gen 1) as previously mentioned had minimal interaction with the locals in their EMI schools. Despite university education, most speakers of this group emphasised their active engagement with the EMs in Hong Kong. During the interview, preference for AmE was seen as most speakers had AmE features in their English. This is evident in Chui's (2025) study, where EMI students regarded American and British English significantly higher than other accents like Hong Kong English. Moreover, as previously mentioned in the study by Zhang (2009), she found in her paper how most local Hong Kongers ranked the educated accent higher than the broad Hong Kong accent. Hansen Edwards's (2016) paper also found the preferability of inner variety of English in Hong Kong. With the preference in AmE and BrE in the EM community and influenced by the exonormative norms in the Hong Kong education system, both group 3 and 7 have minimal exposure to post-alveolar retroflex and lower use of the feature **(RQ2)**.

Key finding 5: Group 2 (+Hk non-uni gen 2) / Group 4 (+Hk uni gen 2) and Group 6 (- Hk non-uni gen 2) / Group 8 (- Hk uni gen 2) (RQ2):
The impact of education in the use of post-alveolar retroflex is especially evident in all second generation groups Group 2 (+Hk non-uni gen 2) , Group 4 (+Hk uni gen 2) and Group 6 (- Hk non-uni gen 2), Group 8 (- Hk uni gen 2). Despite Group 2 (+Hk non-uni gen 2) and Group 6 (- Hk non-uni gen 2) not attaining a university education, both groups had low use of post-alveolar retroflex **(RQ2)**. This can be attributed to similar modes of instruction in their secondary education with the university educated groups. Similar results were seen in Edwards (2018), who found that speakers of HKE who had low and high Intermediate proficiency had lower use of TH variation with pronouncing TH as [f] while speakers of Advanced proficiency had more categorical use of [θ]. The study further found that the realization of TH as [f] may happen at the early stages of acquisition change to TH as [s] at a later stage. As all of the speakers of the second generation had English or Cantonese as their main mode of instruction in Hong Kong at the early stages of acquisition, the lack of exposure to the post-alveolar retroflex led both second generation groups to form similar linguistic patterns despite difference in education level. This can be further attributed to a wider gap between the first generation and second generation. Group 6 (- Hk non-uni gen 2) and Group 8's (- Hk uni gen 2) Hong Kong and South Asian identity is shaped by their education. As mentioned above, despite both groups being raised in

Hong Kong, there was a weaker Hong Kong identity found. One of the participants in Group 6 (-Hk non-uni gen 2) mentioned how the schools she went to had majority ethnic minority students. which resulted in the lack of interaction with the local Chinese. Due to this, most of the speakers in the group were not able to be fluent in Cantonese. This shows how lower interaction between the ethnic minorities and locals during their secondary school resulted in lower Hong Kong identity. But as mentioned above, due to EMI's preferences for AmE and BrE, further contributed to lower use of post-alveolar retroflex **(RQ2)**. However, within Group 6 (- Hk non-uni gen 2) and Group 8 (- Hk uni gen 2) there were variton found. Speakers with low dual identity had lower use of post-alveolar retroflex. However, the majority of the words pronounced with the post-alveolar retroflex were South-Asian related. Though their South Asian identity was low, they still used South Asian English as an ethnolinguistic repertoire. Their low South Asian identity stemmed from not being accepted by people in their home country and in Hong Kong **(RQ3)**.

2025 March, Prasant, Elicitation, Nepali, generation 2, PID 62:

> *"I don't make too much effort to actually stay connected to Nepal in the sense, I've never found a very deep attachment. I did spend 8 years in Nepal but to me I never wanted to be there for the rest of my life. So I've struggled to view Nepal as my home destination. "*

Moreover, this lack of dual identity can be attributed to lack of acceptance of immigrants in their home country as well.

2025 March, Laiba , Speaker 35, Elicitation, Pakistan, generation 1, PID 32:

> *"But when I was (in Pakistan), they probably thought of me as someone else. They thought of me as a tourist."*

> *"My teacher thinks that I'm lower than local people, which is very wrong. And he has that mindset that Pakistanis get married at like 18 years old and they can't get out of their house and they have to be fully covered."*

This sentiment of feeling "in-between" cultures can be seen in other second generation immigrants as well. Brocket (2018) discussed the identity of Palestinian-Americans immigrants in America stating how her participants were "too American for the Palestinians and too Palestinian for the Americans"and "not Arab enough for the Arabs and not American enough for the Americans". Her paper argued that the exclusion by their own discourses and being seen as the "other" in American contributed to their sense of "in-betweenness'. Moreover, in the study done by Paek (2025), which investigated the hybridity of 1.5 (Koreans who moved to Canada at a young age) Korean immigrants in Canada, argued how their identity was heterogeneous as it is influenced by co-ethnic and racial interactions, media exposure, and experiences of racial discrimination (Paek, 2025). All these factors shaped their senses of in-betweenness and the interplay between their Korean heritage and Canadian experiences. Similar to Brocket (2018) and Paek's (2025), the second generation South Asians in Hong Kong struggle between connecting with their South Asian heritage and acceptance from locals. This can contribute to their low use of post-alveolar retroflex **(RQ3)**. Another important observation from the interview showed that most speakers from group 5-8 were mocked for their native-like accent. Many of the speakers of this group shared the experiences of local students ridiculing and mocking their native like accents. This shows similar results for Group 2 (+ Hk non-uni gen 2), Group 3 (+ Hk uni gen 1) and Group 4 (+ Hk uni gen 2) who emphasised their lingua-cultural identities and avoided native speaker associations (Sung, 2018).

Follow-up Interviews

Follow up interviews were conducted to investigate the speaker's use of post-alveolar retroflex and their use of Hong Kong English. Each speaker was given 2 audio clips of their interview (one with retroflex and one without retroflex). When asked "What are some reasons for why they sound like (retroflex clip) and not (non-retroflex clip). The speakers noted that the pronunciation (retroflex) was employed due to their prior knowledge of the language. All 4 speakers mentioned the phonological representation of the South Asian-related words comes from their initial exposure to the South Asian accent at home. The switch between the word with the post-alveolar retroflex and the ones without the retroflex was unintentional as the speakers pronounced them with the retroflex most of the time. One of the speaker noted:

2025 March, Moon, Speaker 13, Follow-up Interview , Bangladeshi, generation 2, PID 32:

"I think again, like knowing the language, like knowing how it's supposed to be pronounced in its native tongue, ….tandoori, itli are like from Hindi … that's how you're supposed to pronounce it. So that's why whenever I see the word, I kind of like to use the proper South Asian pronunciation instead of like the Western (one)."

2025 March, Rimshah, Speaker 18, Follow-up interview, Pakistan, generation 2, PID 65:

"I think that's how I just say dosa when I hear it cause … like that's how you say it. There's not a "whitewash" way to say it."

2025 March, Bavithi, Speaker 11, Follow-up Interview , Sri Lankan, generation 2, PID 18:

"I was like growing up, I used to pronounce those more South Asian words, like in a more South Asian accent because I don't know, it's just like my surroundings.…. So we'd also say it that (South Asian) way."

2025 March, Aisha, Speaker 4, Follow-up Interview , Pakistani, generation 1, PID 6:

"I think maybe the first clip is a little bit different than the second one because in the second one I had to pronounce it more South Asian or like a traditional way that is used in my household."

When asked about the use of Hong Kong English, they mentioned how HKE was mainly used with their local friends as an identity marker

2025 March, Moon, Speaker 13, Follow-up Interview , Bangladeshi, generation 2, PID 32:

"I mean, for me, I learned Hong Kong English because for me Hong Kong English is just considered like Hong Kong slang, you know? And it's mainly used for me in school environments, like when I was in primary school or secondary school."

2025 March, Bavithi, Speaker 11, Follow-up Interview , Sri Lankan, generation 2, PID 6:

"I feel like, … it's usually not intentional. It just kind of changes depending on who I'm talking to because some locals would respond to a Hong Kong accent better instead of a more internationally mixed accent."

2025 March, Aisha, Speaker 4, Follow-up Interview , Pakistani, generation 1, PID 6:

"I think I do use it, but like …. It's more like when I'm talking to my local friends."

One speaker noted how due to their minimum exposure to locals in highschool, it led her to use more "whitewashed" English as an identity marker within the South Asian community.

2025 March, Rimshah, Speaker 18, Follow-up interview, Pakistan, generation 2, PID 65:

"I think I grew up in my high school like my classmates were mostly …. They don't know Chinese. So we use English with them. So I think my English is not like Hong Kong English. If you went to a local school and you speak with the locals in English, they will have the Hong Kong accent."

This is reflected in Hua's (2020) paper where she noted the use of English as an linguistic repertoire and Edwards (2013) who noted the use of inner variety of Englishes in local schools. Moreover, as mentioned in Sung's (2018), native-like accents were used to express their identities while speakers used their local accents to emphasize their lingua-cultural identities and avoided native speaker associations. The follow-up interviews revealed how the South Asians might switch their English whenever they are talking to different groups of people as an identity marker. As the interviewee was a South Asian, the shared identity might have led to a more relaxed atmosphere for the speakers to use their South Asian accent. We also see how the speakers attempt to maintain their L1 cultural roots by using the retroflex.

The Chinese identity

One significant finding was how South Asians regarded the "Chinese" national identity separate from the Hong Kong identity. Most rated their Hong Kong identity to be low (rated 1-3 in the

questionnaire) while a few rated high (rated 4-6) in the questionnaire. However, these speakers did not have a significant difference in their use of post-alveolar retroflex.

Group 1: - Hk uni gen 1 ethnic orientation		
	On the scale from 1-7, how Chinese are you? (1 being not al all and 7 being absolutely)	Total Tokens of post-alveolar retroflex
Malik	4	78.5% (99/126)
Raza	1	81.2% (108/133)
Sumera	1	81% (107/132)
Faisal	2	82% (112/136)
Naieela	1	91.7% (111/121)

This is a significant factor as mentioned in the above paper by Ping and Kin-Ming's (2014), Chan's (2019) and Kai Chun's (2021) paper, found the local Hong Kong identity and the broad "chinese identity" to be distinct. By sharing the socio-political sentiments of the local Hong Kong, we see the attempt to not only socially but politically assimilate into Hong Kong. This is contrary to views by the government of ethnic minorities being socially apathetic. The Hong Kong Unison mentions in their website:

> "Many of them are alienated from the larger social fabric of the community; they appear to be apathetic about the social issues impacting their rights and are reliant on others to solve their problems." (*Social Participation of Ethnic Minorities | Hong Kong Unison*, n.d.)

This shows a larger issue surrounding the ethnic minority community in Hong Kong. As mentioned above from interviews, the participants in this study did acknowledge the efforts by the government but saw them as ineffective in solving discrimination faced by the South Asian community. In another study done by the Hong Kong Baptist University, they interviewed an ethnic minority women who mentioned the lack of acknowledgment of local ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. The interview mentioned how the term "ethnic minorities" includes "local-born

non-Chinese to non-local non-Chinese, and also asylum seekers" (*Cultural integration and segregation in Hong Kong*, n.d.). This disregards their identity as a local person. If the South Asian regard the "Chinese" identity as separate from the Hong Kong Identity, we can see how conflicts arise where South Asian feel a sense of "in-betweenness" and lead to social segregation as felt by speakers in Group 6-8. But it is important to note that there were still people in Group 8 that considered the Hong Kong identity part of the Chinese identity. This view was more common in group Group 5 (- Hk non-uni gen 1), Group 6 (- Hk non-uni gen 2), Group 7 (- Hk uni gen 1) and Group 8 (- Hk uni gen 2) which can also explain their low Hong Kong identity.

Conclusion

This study provides a strong case and evidence in the variation between the first and second generation South Asians in Hong Kong. Their use of the feature can be attributed to their ethnic orientation and education levels. This study further revealed that discrimination in Hong Kong is still rampant especially in the socio-political context where local South Asians are not recognised. EMs who faced discrimination, had higher levels of hybrid identity which led to their lower use of the post-alveolar retroflex. Moreover, this study revealed that home language played a significant role in shaping people's identity and use of post-alveolar retroflex. Similar results were found in Starr and Balasubramaniam (2019) and this study where the use of South Asian English features coincided with South Asian identity, revealing how language plays a significant role in maintaining the intra- and inter-group South Asian diasporic identity overseas. We could see that despite the discrimination and exclusion, South Asians hold similar views on their identity with the locals. For example, they regarded speaking Cantonese as a marker of their stronger "Hong Kong" identity. The speakers also regarded the "Hong Kong" identity separate from the broad "Chinese identity" which affected the use of retroflex. This finding hopes to provide a deeper insight into the linguistic landscape of South Asians in Hong Kong who are often neglected from linguistic research and when discussing identity.

Limitations of the study

The paper surveyed 86 South Asians in Hong Kong and interviewed 40 people who were characterized into 8 groups of speakers. This study included a small sample size of data and does not fully represent the variation of the South Asian community in Hong Kong. Moreover, due to

convenience sampling, most of the participants were the same social class. A further study which acknowledges the nuances between the South Asian, which would generate a more accurate picture of the variation. Moreover, this study groups all South Asians (Pakistani, Indian, Nepali, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankans) together. A future study examining the difference within these ethnicities using post-alveolar retroflex can be conducted to achieve more clear variation between different South Asian communities.

Second, due to the interviewee and the researcher having familial and social relationships with the participants (family members, friends, colleagues, teachers, etc) as convenience sampling was done. It may not provide an accurate picture of these variations. As evident in the study by Starr and Balasubramaniam (2019) and in this study, home language can affect the use of Indian or South Asian features. As the participants and the interviewees have a shared identity, it may have contributed to the use of post-alveolar retroflex during the interview as they are more comfortable. Moreover, as the interviewees are aware of the interview, it was observed that speakers with familial and social relationships had changed their accent to cater for the interview. A few speakers, who the interviewer has talked with outside of the research context, observed more use of post-alveolar retroflex. However, speakers who tried to cater to the interview saw reluctance to use the post-alveolar retroflex.

Future Research and implications

This study hopes to encourage more research in the linguistic field on the variation seen in Hong Kong. As mentioned in the above paper, South Asians and other ethnic minorities are overlooked in the process of linguistic studies. With this study it showed that the experiences of South Asians in Hong Kong goes beyond mere demographics in government or NGO reports. The identity and experiences are much more nuanced and worth studying. This study primarily focused on South Asians, but further studies may research on the linguistic variations between other ethnicities in Hong Kong like East Asians (Japanese, koreans) or Southeast Asians (Thai, Malaysians, Indonesians, Filipinos).

Studies can also focus on the effects of AmE and BrE on local South Asian. From the interview it was observed that despite the speakers not having post-alveolar retroflex, the speakers especially with stronger Hong Kong identity did not have Hong Kong English features either. For example, none of the participants had /t/ and /d/ deletion, which is a feature of Hong Kong

English (Hansen Edwards, 2025). Moreover, it would be interesting to see variations between the speakers from local school and speakers from an international school as this study showed how education played a crucial role in forming the linguistic identity of the speakers.

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speakers, who the interviewer has talked with outside of the research context, observed more use of post-alveolar retroflex. However, speakers who tried to cater to the interview saw reluctance to use the post-alveolar retroflex.

Appendix

Links to the full research instruments:

**Data Analysis: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1x-tpDyd7kgdAyF-KIaQmVPl4_LtHYkTS/edit?usp=share_link&ouid=106368562965263559671&rtpof=true&sd=true

Google Survey Response:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1CfzsK1hGPfQSQALohfSaoNpFLKv49Hfv/edit?usp=share_link&ouid=106368562965263559671&rtpof=true&sd=true

Group 1:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1dRKVEOmslcP89cJQF7f7KTcpcCONXA0O?usp=share_link

Group 2:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1xc1BqDq8N7UfixLBqHmNopxRI9Vz_LV4?usp=share_link

Group 3:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1YOSMP2yK8haFw5E2we5nS137Iu6LElz4?usp=sharing

Group 4: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1FFZEsT-NLAvr12zg9yukf5MgyEqahLg9?usp=share_link

Group 5: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1oB3UnvhFF6x1BqNWFUPI-eW3LgQbMJjQ?usp=share_link

Group 6: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1_-SGr9qHtOi1WPcIXie4F4qc51ypNbCo?usp=share_link

Group 7: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1z1tt4FHz5ug46e59-GJOwkX87jsFa1Bv?usp=share_link

Group 8: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1yTJ-RgnJY5L3fFdTwACWkD_kVOe-AW-x?usp=sharing

Follow-up Interviews:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Mi1a1RWyco9BpRuiaKJ5hTul0K2z3NEc?usp=sharing

Investigating generational variation in post-alveolar retroflex (ʈ /ɖ) in Hong Kong

Hello! This is Tayyeba, an English major from The Chinese University of Hong Kong. I am investigating the shift between the post-alveolar retroflex (ʈ /ɖ) among between First Generation and Second Generation South Asian in Hong Hong. This survey is designed for academic research purposes only. All personal information will be kept confidential and disconnected from the analysis. The results will contribute to our understanding of language attitudes and intercultural experiences in an increasingly globalized world. Please note that you will not be conpensated for participating in the study.

Thank you for your participation and time, and feel free to contact me at *abeyyat0530@gmail.com* if you have any questions or concerns.

* Indicates required question

Personal Background

1. 1.1 First Name (This data serves tracking purpose only and will be disconnected from analysis.)

2. 1.2 Last Name (This data serves tracking purpose only and will be disconnected from analysis.)

3. 1.3 Age *

248

4.   1.4 Gender *

Mark only one oval.

⬭ Male

⬭ Female

⬭ Prefer not to say

5.   1.5 Please input your phone number. (This data serves for interview and tracking purpose only and will be disconnected from analysis.)

_____

6.   1.6 Please input your email (This data serves for interview and tracking purpose only and will be disconnected from analysis.)

_____

7.   1.7 Ethnic Origins *

Check all that apply.

☐ Afganistan
☐ Pakistan
☐ India
☐ Sri Lanka
☐ Nepal
☐ Bangladesh

☐ Other: _____

8.   1.8 Please list down the citizenships you hold. *

_____

9. 1.9 Educational level *

Mark only one oval.

- Did not complete Highschool
- Highschool
- Associate degree/Higher Diploma
- Undergraduate (Bachelor's degree)
- Postgraduate masters
- Postgraduate PhD

10. 1.10 For your **highschool**, where did you study? *

Mark only one oval.

- Hong Kong
- South Asia
- Other: _____

11. 1.11 For your **undergraduates**, where did you study? *

Mark only one oval.

- Hong Kong
- South Asia
- I did not pursue undergraduates studies.
- Other: _____

12. 1.12 For your **postgraduates Masters/PhD**, where did you study? *

Mark only one oval.

◯ Hong Kong

◯ South Asia

◯ I did not pursue postgraduates Masters/PhD studies.

◯ Other:

13. 1.13 Which statement best describe you? (Paternal) *

Mark only one oval.

◯ I was born in South Asia.

◯ My dad was born in South Asia but I was born in Hong Kong.

◯ My granddfather was born in South Asia but I was born in Hong Kong.

◯ Other:

14. 1.14 Which statement best describe you? (Maternal) *

Mark only one oval.

◯ I was born in South Asia.

◯ My mom was born in South Asia but I was born in Hong Kong.

◯ My grandmother was born in South Asia but I was born in Hong Kong.

◯ Other:

Lingustic Background

251

15.   2.1 What is your native language/ mother tongue/ L1 ? (You may choose more than one) (
      yours is not listed, please fill in the other option.)

      Check all that apply.

      ☐ English
      ☐ Hindi
      ☐ Bengali
      ☐ Urdu
      ☐ Tamil
      ☐ Nepalese
      ☐ Phusto
      ☐ Sindhi
      ☐ Sinhala
      ☐ Gujarati
      ☐ Marathi
      ☐ Telugu
      ☐ Malayalam
      ☐ Cantonese
      ☐ Mandarin
      ☐ Other: _____

252

16.   2.2 What other languages can you speak? (You may choose more than one) *

Check all that apply.

☐ English
☐ Hindi
☐ Bengali
☐ Urdu
☐ Tamil
☐ Nepalese
☐ Phusto
☐ Sindhi
☐ Sinhala
☐ Gujarati
☐ Marathi
☐ Telugu.
☐ Malayalam
☐ Cantonese
☐ Mandarin

17.   2.3 How long have you known Cantonese? (Please state the age you first started learning Cantonese)

_____

253

18.   2.4 What was the main medium of instruction in your highschool? *

Check all that apply

☐ English
☐ Hindi
☐ Bengali
☐ Urdu
☐ Tamil
☐ Nepalese
☐ Phusto
☐ Sindhi
☐ Sinhala
☐ Gujarati
☐ Marathi
☐ Telugu
☐ Malayalam
☐ Cantonese
☐ Mandarin

254

19.   2.5 What was the main medium of instruction in your tertiary education? *

Check all that apply.

☐ English

☐ Hindi

☐ Bengali

☐ Urdu

☐ Tamil

☐ Nepalese

☐ Phusto

☐ Sindhi

☐ Sinhala

☐ Gujarati

☐ Marathi

☐ Telugu.

☐ Malayalam

☐ Cantonese

☐ Mandarin

☐ Not applicable

20.   2.6 Where did you starting learn Cantonese? *

Check all that apply.

☐ At home

☐ At school

☐ Workplace

☐ Internet (self-learning from websites/ e-books)

☐ I do not know how to speak Cantonese

☐ Other: _____

21. 2.7 What were your learning goals with Cantonese? *

Check all that apply.

☐ Academic goals (learnt Cantonese for academic use)

☐ Career goals (learnt Cantonese for career advancment/ communicating with locals)

☐ Cultural Assimilation (communicating/making friends with locals, better understanding of loca culture)

☐ Other:

22. 2.8 How long have you lived in Hong Kong? (Please input the number of years) *

23. 2.9 Why did you not learn Cantonese? *

Mark only one oval.

◯ Identity (I am South Asian, not Chinese/Hong Konger)

◯ Lack of resources (time, books, classes)

◯ Difficulty in learning the language (tones, phonetics, grammar)

◯ Unfamiliarity of language (lack of motivation to learn Cantonese, reluctant to learn)

◯ Language Anxiety (fear to learn a new Language)

◯ Not applicable (I know how to speak Cantonese)

◯ Other:

Ethnic Orientation and definition

256

24. On the scale from 1-7, how Hong Konger are you? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
(Not								(Absolutely)

25. On the scale from 1-7, how South Asian are you? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
(Not								On the scale from 1-7, how South Asian are you?

26. On the scale from 1-7, how Chinese are you? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
(Not								On the scale from 1-7, how Chinese are you?

27. What does being "Hong Konger" mean to you? *

_____

28. What does being "South Asian" mean to you? *

_____

257

29. What does being "Chinese" mean to you? *

_____

Google Forms

Interview:

Part 1: Semi-Structured interview – Elicitation task

 Set A:

1. Can you introduce yourself? (name, occupation, etc)
2. What are your hobbies?
3. What is the most exciting thing you've ever done?
4. What is your favourite movie?
5. Tell me about a place that you have visited/ want to visit.

Set B:

1. Can you tell me when you came to Hong Kong? / How has it been like to grow up in Hong Kong?
2. Have you ever experienced any discrimination while living in Hong Kong? (I.e language barriers, prejudice, racism?
3. Talk about an encounter that made you feel accepted in Hong Kong? / What can the HK government do to solve these issues?
4. What does "Chineseness" mean to you?
5. Do you think there is an increase in the representation and acceptance of Ethnic minorities in Hong Kong? Why / why not?

Set C:

1. Describe and tell me where your home country is?
2. How do you stay connected to your home country?
3. Can you tell me about the time that you spend in your home country?
4. Talk about an aspect of the culture that you love
5. What are some ways you maintain your cultural Identity while living in Hong Kong?

Part 2: Prose Reading – Elicitation task

Set A: Recently, I've grown to love audiobooks, too; my husband, Rob, and I listen during road trips. I loved the evocative narrations of "James," "Circe," "Hamnet" and "Their Eyes Were Watching God,"a masterpiece that neither Rob nor I had conquered on our own. Yet I agree with Ms. Renkl: "I will always prefer a book I can hold in my hand." I like underlining the good parts, scribbling in the margins and shelving a beloved novel among favorites from other chapters of my life.

Set B:

This is the setting of "Hoi Lin Teahouse", the latest song from Hong Kong rapper Billy Choi. He named the song after his family's dim sum restaurant. The 27-year-old transformed his family's teahouse into a kung fu studio in the song's music video. Just like how kung fu masters teach their apprentices, Choi's family has been passing down the craft of running a traditional teahouse. "The [song's] inspiration comes from my desire to preserve traditions – whether it's martial arts, handmade dim sum or teahouses," the rapper said. Since debuting in 2019, Choi has been releasing tracks related to Hong Kong's culture and social issues.

Set C:

When it comes to vegetarian Indian food, Veda is at the top of the list. The fine-dining Indian restaurant offers a diverse selection of soulful vegetarian dishes that draw inspiration from traditional recipes found in many Indian households. Savour dishes that boast a unique fusion of flavours and textures that encapsulate the rich essence of Indian cuisine. The signature dish, the dosa, is a delicate South Indian-style crepe that comes with vegetable stew and coconut chutney.

Part 3: Wordlist — Elicitation task

Tiger	Jordan	Dog

Dragon Boat Festival	Door	Dish
Daal	Tamil	Mid-Autumn Festival
Tung Chung	Dumpling	Lantau Island
Buddha	Teacher	Desi
Tai Chi	Dress	Dot
Delhi	Telephone	Taj Mahal
Tandoori	Dance	Hospital
Itli	Disco	Table
Noodles	Tea	Dosa

Survey Results

1.3 Age
86 responses

1.4 Gender
86 responses

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

73.3%

26.7%
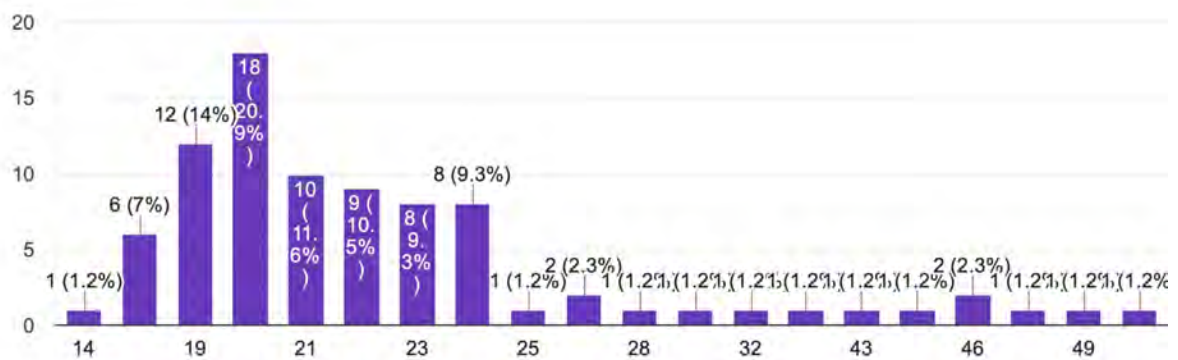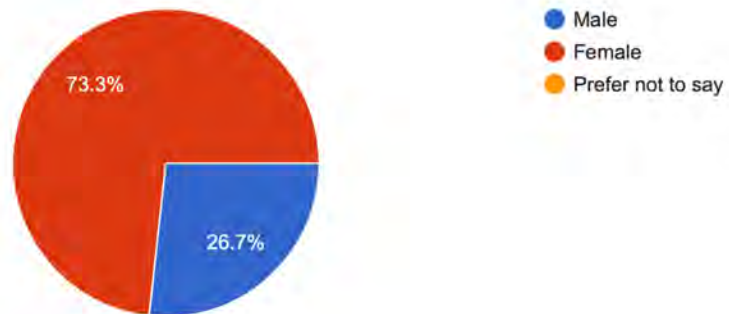
1.7 Ethnic Origins
86 responses

Ethnic Origin	Count
Afganistan	1 (1.2%)
Pakistan	42 (48.8%)
India	22 (25.6%)
Sri Lanka	2 (2.3%)
Nepal	15 (17.4%)
Bangladesh	4 (4.7%)
Filipino Japanese	1 (1.2%)
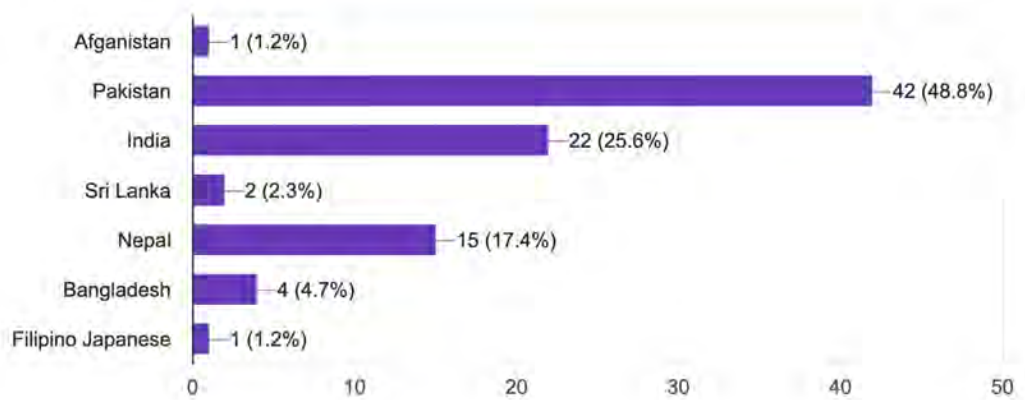
1.8 Please list down the citizenships you hold.

86 responses
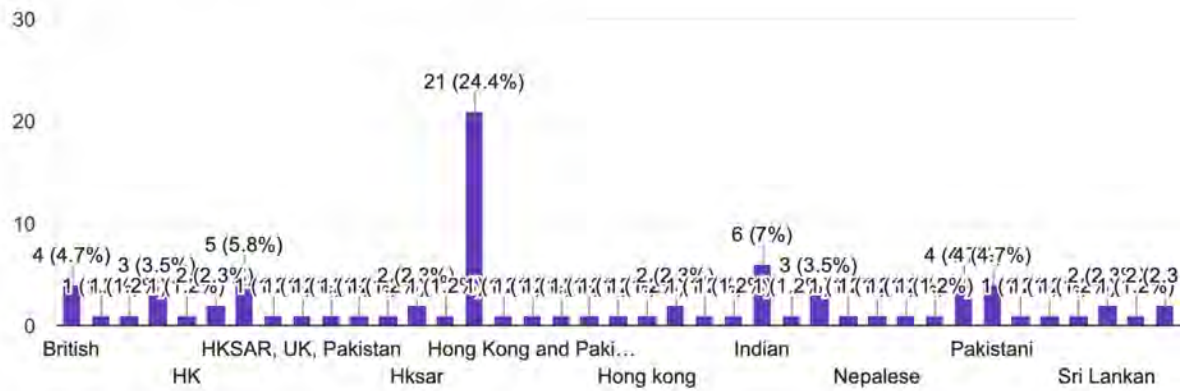
1.9 Educational level

86 responses
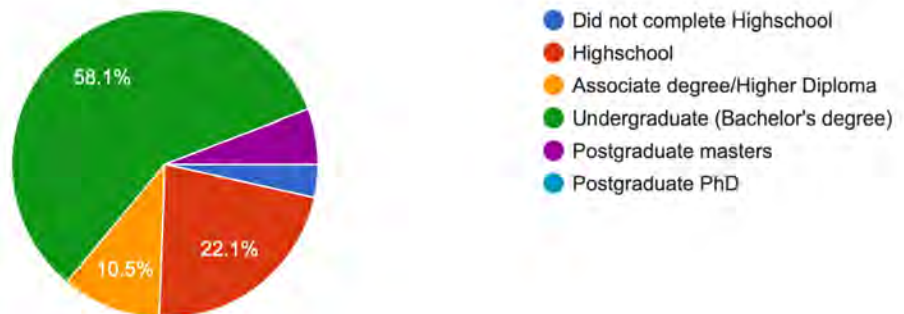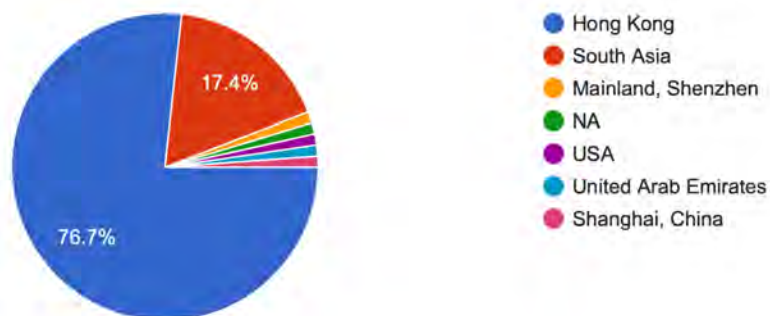
- Did not complete Highschool
- Highschool
- Associate degree/Higher Diploma
- Undergraduate (Bachelor's degree)
- Postgraduate masters
- Postgraduate PhD

1.10 For your highschool, where did you study?

86 responses

- Hong Kong
- South Asia
- Mainland, Shenzhen
- NA
- USA
- United Arab Emirates
- Shanghai, China

1.11 For your undergraduates, where did you study?
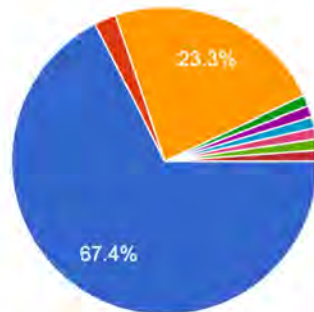
86 responses

- Hong Kong
- South Asia
- I did not pursue undergraduates studies.
- Australia
- Gap year
- Still in high school
- USA
- in Highschool
- Not yet graduated

23.3%

67.4%

1.12 For your postgraduates Masters/PhD, where did you study?
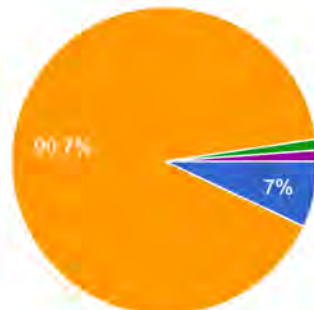
86 responses

- Hong Kong
- South Asia
- I did not pursue postgraduates Masters/ PhD studies.
- I am a bachelor student
- Not yet graduated

90.7%

7%

1.13 Which statement best describe you? (Paternal)

86 responses
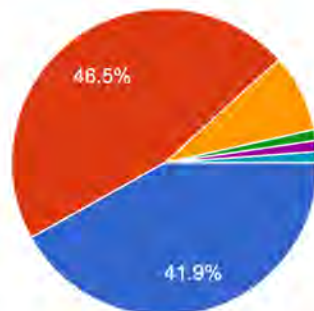
- I was born in South Asia.
- My dad was born in South Asia but I was born in Hong Kong.
- My granddfather was born in South Asia but I was born in Hong Kong.
- No dad
- My father was born in South East Asia
- My dad was born and raised in HK (able to speak fluent Cantonese) since his mother(my grandmother)is a mix from…

46.5%

41.9%

1.14 Which statement best describe you? (Maternal)

86 responses
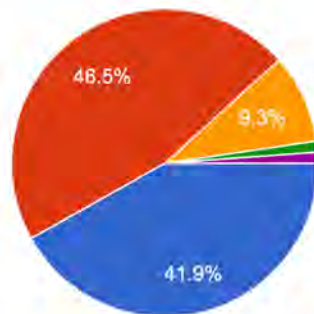
- ● I was born in South Asia.
- ● My mom was born in South Asia but I was born in Hong Kong.
- ● My grandmother was born in South Asia but I was born in Hong Kong.
- ● My mother and I were both born in Hong Kong
- ● My mother was born in North East Asia

46.5%

9.3%

41.9%

2.1 What is your native language/ mother tongue/ L1 ? (You may choose more than one) (If yours is not listed, please fill in the other option.)

86 responses

Language	Value
English	28 (32.6%)
Hindi	11 (12.8%)
Bengali	5 (5.8%)
Urdu	37 (43%)
Tamil	2 (2.3%)
Nepalese	15 (17.4%)
Phusto	2 (2.3%)
Sindhi	0 (0%)
Sinhala	0 (0%)
Gujarati	0 (0%)
Marathi	0 (0%)
Telugu	1 (1.2%)
Malayalam	0 (0%)
Cantonese	3 (3.5%)
Mandarin	0 (0%)
Punjabi	11 (12.8%)
Potwari/Mirpuri	1 (1.2%)
Tagalog and Japanese	1 (1.2%)
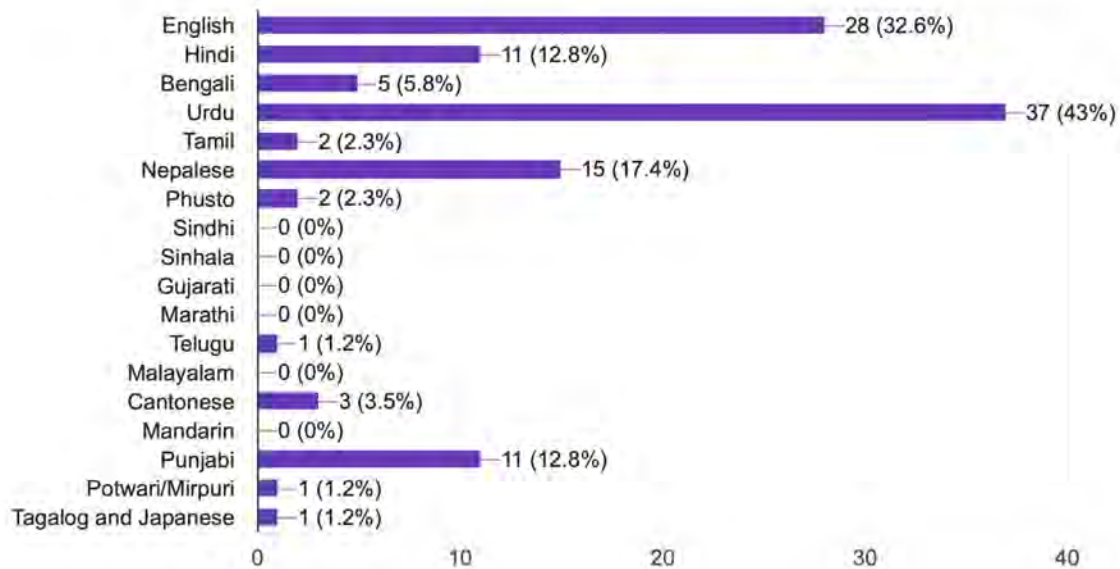
2.2 What other languages can you speak? (You may choose more than one)
86 responses

Language	Count (%)
English	59 (68.6%)
Hindi	56 (65.1%)
Bengali	2 (2.3%)
Urdu	24 (27.9%)
Tamil	0 (0%)
Nepalese	9 (10.5%)
Phusto	1 (1.2%)
Sindhi	1 (1.2%)
Sinhala	2 (2.3%)
Gujarati	1 (1.2%)
Marathi	0 (0%)
Telugu.	0 (0%)
Malayalam	0 (0%)
Cantonese	59 (68.6%)
Mandarin	14 (16.3%)
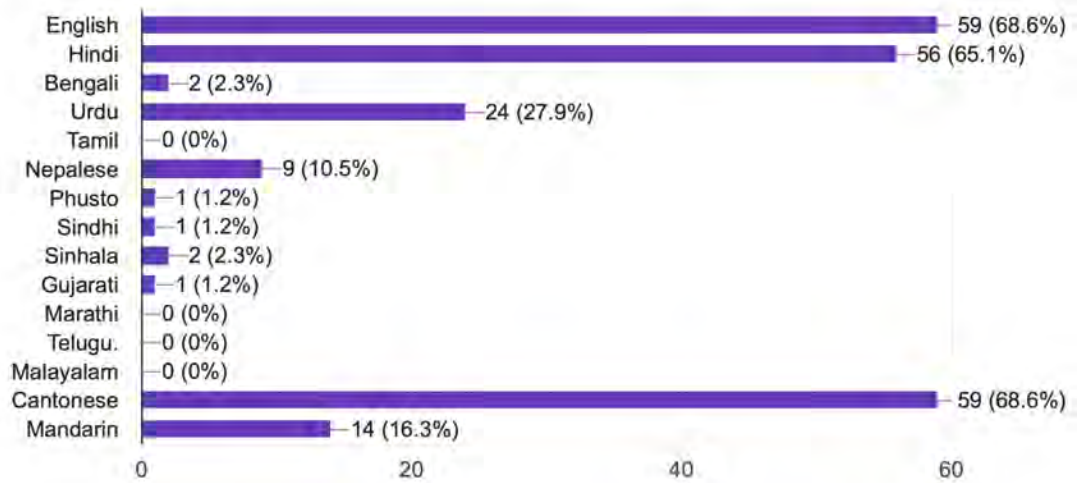
2.4 What was the main medium of instruction in your highschool?
86 responses

Language	Count (%)
English	78 (90.7%)
Hindi	1 (1.2%)
Bengali	0 (0%)
Urdu	8 (9.3%)
Tamil	0 (0%)
Nepalese	5 (5.8%)
Phusto	0 (0%)
Sindhi	1 (1.2%)
Sinhala	0 (0%)
Gujarati	0 (0%)
Marathi	0 (0%)
Telugu.	0 (0%)
Malayalam	0 (0%)
Cantonese	22 (25.6%)
Mandarin	2 (2.3%)
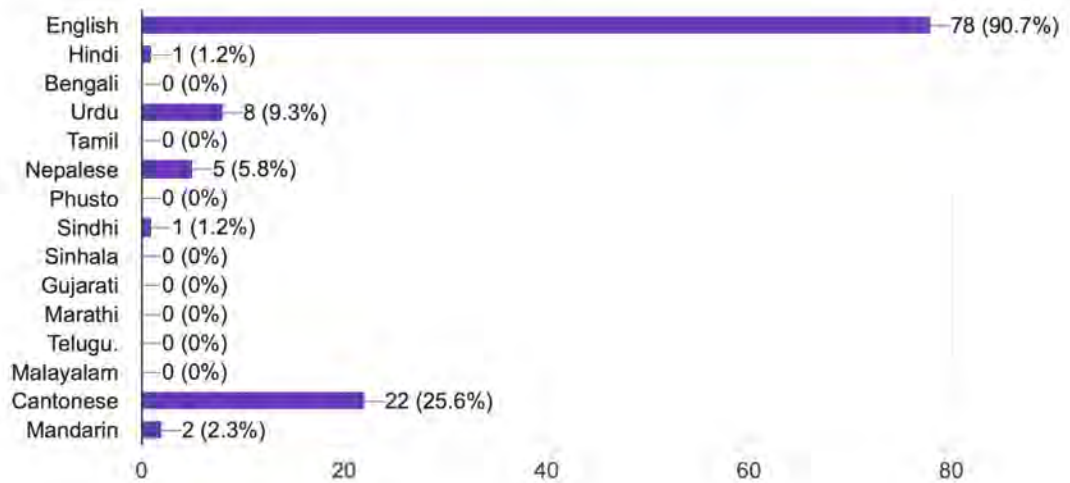
2.5 What was the main medium of instruction in your tertiary education?

86 responses
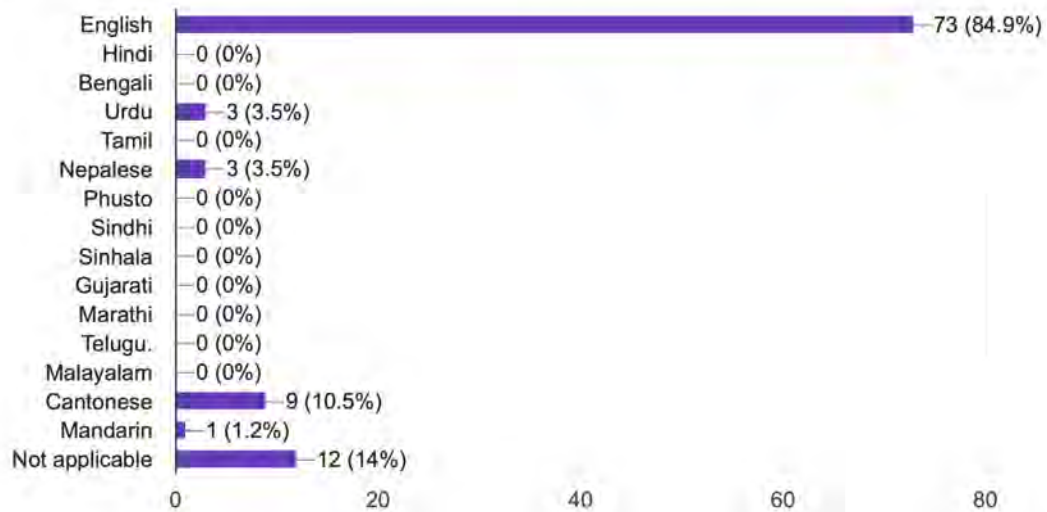
Response	Count
English	73 (84.9%)
Hindi	0 (0%)
Bengali	0 (0%)
Urdu	3 (3.5%)
Tamil	0 (0%)
Nepalese	3 (3.5%)
Phusto	0 (0%)
Sindhi	0 (0%)
Sinhala	0 (0%)
Gujarati	0 (0%)
Marathi	0 (0%)
Telugu.	0 (0%)
Malayalam	0 (0%)
Cantonese	9 (10.5%)
Mandarin	1 (1.2%)
Not applicable	12 (14%)

2.6 Where did you starting learn Cantonese?

86 responses

Response	Count
At home	11 (12.8%)
At school	59 (68.6%)
Workplace	9 (10.5%)
Internet (self-learning from web…	6 (7%)
I do not know how to speak Ca…	5 (5.8%)
Picked up from going to markets	1 (1.2%)
TV shows	1 (1.2%)
I just know how to speak some…	1 (1.2%)
University	1 (1.2%)
centre	1 (1.2%)
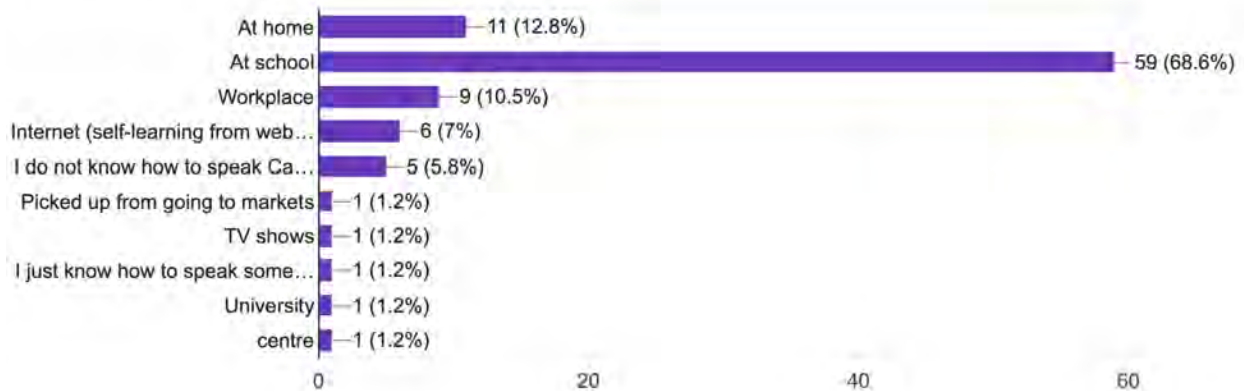
2.7 What were your learning goals with Cantonese?

86 responses

Category	Count
Academic goals (learnt Canton...	55 (64%)
Career goals (learnt Cantonese...	37 (43%)
Cultural Assimilation (communi...	41 (47.7%)
None	1 (1.2%)
For work purposes	1 (1.2%)
N/A	1 (1.2%)
I don't know Cantonese	1 (1.2%)
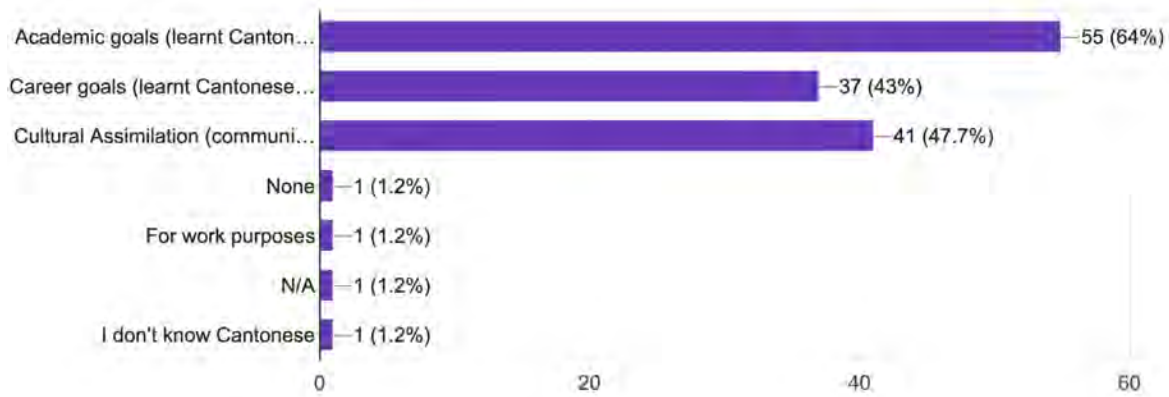
2.8 How long have you lived in Hong Kong? (Please input the number of years)

86 responses

2.9 Why did you not learn Cantonese?
86 responses

- Identity (I am South Asian, not Chinese/ Hong Konger)
- Lack of resources (time, books, classes)
- Difficulty in learning the language (tones, phonetics, grammar)
- Unfamiliarity of language (lack of motivation to learn Cantonese, relucta…
- Language Anxiety (fear to learn a new…
- Not applicable (I know how to speak…
- I went to an international school so I n…
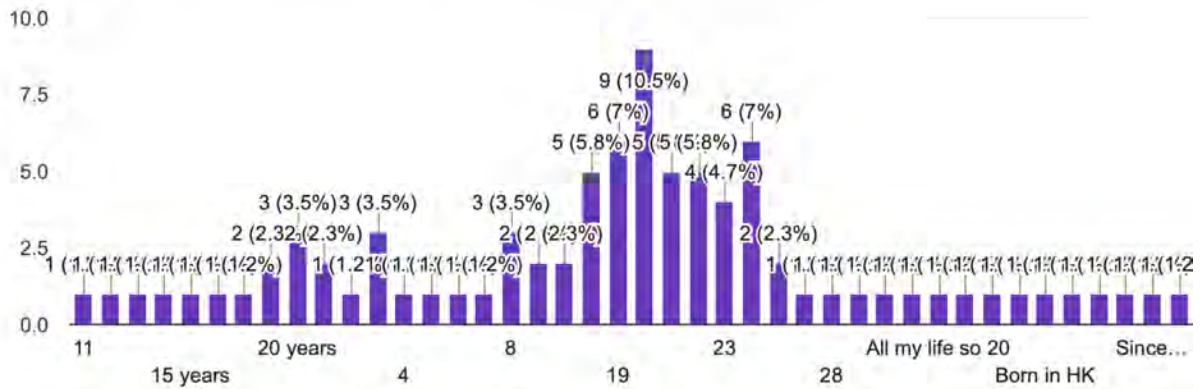
On the scale from 1-7, how Hong Konger are you?
86 responses
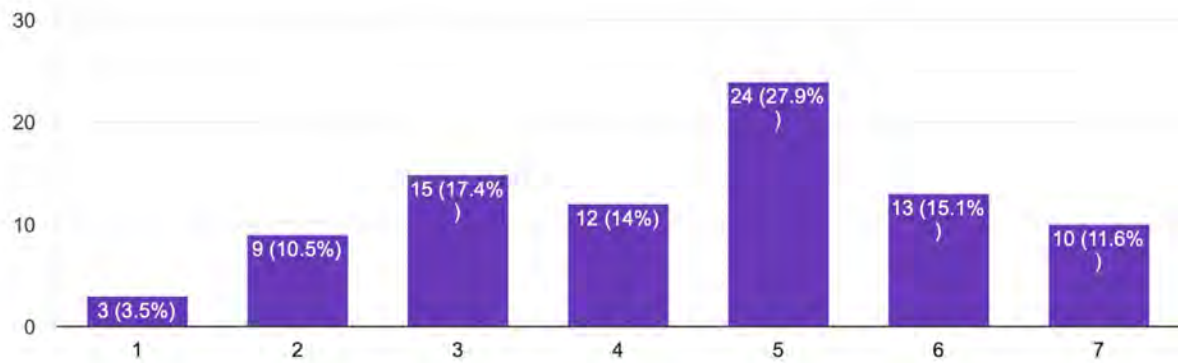
On the scale from 1-7, how South Asian are you?
86 responses
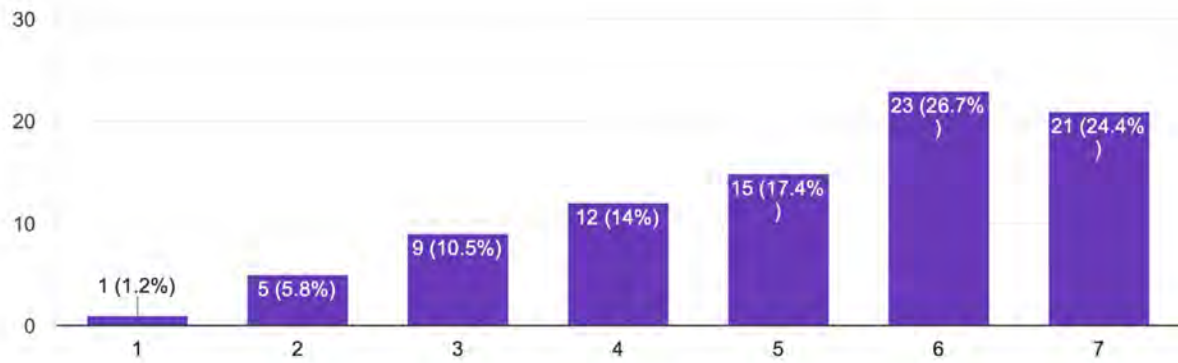
On the scale from 1-7, how Chinese are you?
86 responses
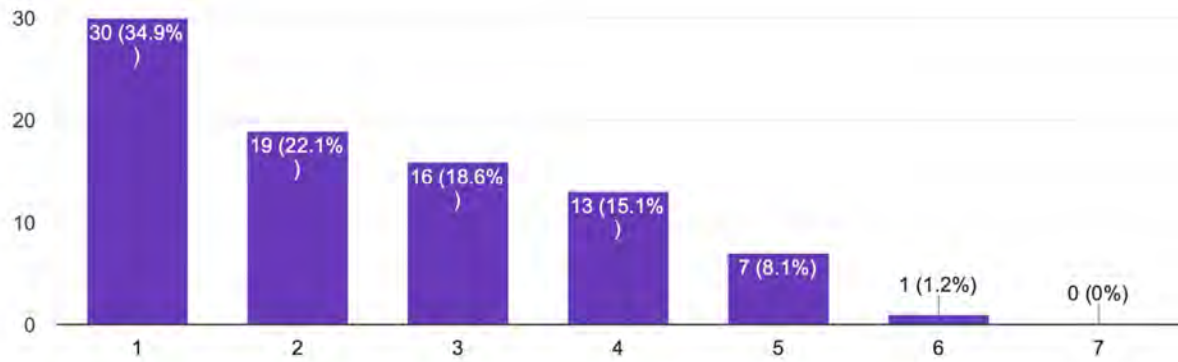
Divinely Angry: Tracing the Epic Hero through Depictions of *Mênis*

Tong Ho Yee Chloe Maggie

Supervisor: Professor Grant Hamilton

Introduction

Mênis [μῆνις], commonly translated into English as "wrath", "rage" or "anger", continues to be a subject of debate within the Classics. Even though attempts to come up with a precise definition of the concept has eluded Homeric scholars from the Hellenistic period up to today, the ambiguity surrounding its many interpretations has not diminished its literary significance, with *mênis* being the central subject of Homer's *Iliad*. With this in mind, this paper shall embark on a receptionist[1] exploration of the term *mênis*, especially with regards to how it is used as a qualifier for the epic hero. Building upon the *Iliad*, I shall attempt to trace the existence of a lineage of *mênis* used as a qualifier for the epic hero, from Virgil's *Aeneid* to four Modern (post-16th Century) Anglophone epics, written in successive centuries from the 1600s to the 1900s. In this brief exercise, I posit that the Homeric epic hero is clearly differentiated through their association with *mênis*, which provides recognisable behavioural and consequential hallmarks that are both utilised and subverted by Virgil to qualify his own notion of the epic hero. From Virgil, Anglophone writers have continued this practice, drawing on the intertext of *mênis* to

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[1] A main research influence that had inspired me to embark on a project like this are two important concepts that has greatly influenced the trajectory in the study and interpretation of the Classics, namely classical tradition and classical reception. As Broder defines, "in the classical tradition model, Graeco-Roman antiquity provides the foundation for, and influences the development of, modern Europe and Western civilisation" (505), whereas the classical reception model is defined as studying classical texts with the awareness that "individuals and societies continually reappropriate and redefine classical antiquity in an effort to assert (or, at times, to challenge) continuity with a privileged past." (Broder 505). Clear problems exist with the classical tradition model for it very easily perpetuates an Anglo-Eurocentric perspective, which is why I have based my project on the classical reception model, using the idea of reappropriation and reinterpretation as starting off points when completing close readings of the texts chosen.

subvert Homeric notions of the epic hero in order to challenge and reinvent long standing traditions of classical epic.

Preface: A Working Definition of *Mênis*

As aforementioned, *mênis* is a term that is subject to intense scholarly debate. As Muellner states, "the moral rules about the expression of anger that are built into our language may well be inappropriate to the poetic "society" of the Iliad" (1-2), implying that it is hard to qualify an emotive notion that is so deeply rooted in a poetic society that we are not familiar with. This is why I recognise the importance of coming up with a broad working definition for *mênis*, a set of parameters upon which I can refer to and draw back upon through the course of this exercise. Simultaneously, the broadness of this following definition will allow space for interpretation with respect to the various texts covered. With that said, the working definition of *mênis* is the following: *Mênis* is a prolonged state of hostile emotion that is invoked by transgressive behaviour. In a state of *mênis,* one is socially isolate and suffers as a result. *Mênis* is only resolved through punitive or retaliatory measures upon the transgressive actor, but the retaliation will sometimes affect the entire social group in which the actor belongs to.

1. *Mênis* as a Viable Qualifier for the Homeric Hero in the *Iliad*

With the working definition in mind, the first order of business is to examine how this definition of *mênis* could be used as a legitimate qualifier for the Homeric hero through its application to the *Iliad.* Nagy, in discussing definitions for an epic hero, stipulates that the "epic heroes of [Homeric] poetry can be defined as mortals […] who are endowed with superhuman powers because they are descended from the immortal gods themselves" (24). In other words, a

Homeric hero is qualified as such because of their proximity to the divine. Particularly, this is made explicit within the *Iliad* through their association with *mênis*, as the word is irrevocably correlated with the Iliadic gods. In his commentary for *Iliad* 1, Pulleyn offers the following: 'There are several words for anger in Homer [..but] commentators have rightly pointed out that the noun μῆνις [*mênis*] is used exclusively in Homer to mean either divine wrath or the wrath of Achilles' (116). In most instances where the word *mênis* is used in the *Iliad*, it is used to refer to the wrath of the gods. An example of this is from *Iliad* 5, when the goddess Athena warns the god Ares about incurring the *mênis* of Zeus:

"And flashing-eyed Athene took furious Ares by the hand and spake to him, saying: "Ares, Ares [...] shall we not now leave the Trojans and Achaeans to fight, to whichsoever of the two it be that father Zeus shall vouchsafe glory? But for us twain, let us give place, and avoid the wrath [μῆνιν] of Zeus." (*Il.* 5.29-34)

As established in the proem of the *Iliad*, the unfolding of the Trojan War is part of the "plan of Zeus" (*Il.* 1.5), and this idea is further reinforced in this example through Athena, for she says it is only Zeus who can "vouchsafe glory" for one of the fighting sides, meaning that only he can decide the outcome of the battle. For the other gods to interfere with the outcome of a battle such as the one Athena and Ares are involved in here during Book 5, could be interpreted as disobeying Zeus. Referring back to my working definition of *mênis*, if Athena and Ares continue to involve themselves in the ongoing battle, it will be seen as a type of transgressive behaviour that incurs Zeus' *mênis*, of which Athena is wary of in line 34. In this instance, Athena does not mention the consequence of incurring the *mênis* of Zeus, but she does so when she tries to restrain Ares from interfering with the battle again in Book 15, where she says Zeus will "will hie him to Olympus to set us all in tumult, and will lay hands upon each in turn, the guilty alike

and him in whom is no guilt" (*Il.* 15.137-8). From this, the consequences of incurring Zeus'

mênis is clear, as Muellner puts: "the *mênis* of Zeus will result in […] the indiscriminate

punishment of the whole community of gods, regardless of their complicity" (7) in order to

preserve the integrity of his authority. Athena's pleas with Ares in these two instances exemplify

the working definition of *mênis* as wrath that is incurred by transgressive behaviour, and incites

punishment upon the entire social group. These two examples also prove how *mênis* is primarily

linked to the gods.

As aforementioned, the noun *mênis* is used exclusively to mean either "divine wrath or

the wrath of Achilles" (Pulleyn 116). With the relationship between *mênis* and the gods

established, I will now turn to look at the latter, namely, the links between *mênis* and the

Homeric hero. The use of the term 'Homeric hero' here is deliberate, employed in order to

highlight the difference between the Homeric definition of the hero and contemporary notion of

the hero. The Homeric Greek *hērōs* [ἥρως] is categorically not a character archetype but a

functioning societal role. The Homeric *hērōs* is a professional warrior within society who fights

as their primary occupation, pursuing personal *kléos* [κλέος], or glory. *Kléos* is integral to the

identity of the Homeric *hērōs*, as Nagy puts, '*kléos* designates […] the glory of the hero […and]

the major goal of the hero [is for] his identity [to be] put on permanent record through *kléos*'

(35). It is through this fervent pursuit of glory, then, that the Homeric hero is associated with

mênis, and thus their proximity to the divine.

For one, only the anger of the Iliadic heroes is depicted through the usage of the word

mênis. Achilles is the most obvious example of this, as highlighted in the first line of the epic:

"The wrath [μῆνιν] sing, goddess, of Peleus' son, Achilles" (*Il.* 1.1). Not only is the *mênis* of

Achilles the subject, but we are also immediately reminded of its consequences: "that destructive

wrath which brought countless woes upon the Achaeans" (*Il.* 1.2). The quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon as detailed in *Iliad* 1 resulted in Agamemnon taking away Briseis, Achilles' *géras* [γέρας, war prize]. As mentioned, the main pursuit of a hero like Achilles is *kléos*, and a war prize like Briseis is a concrete representation of his glory in battle. As Muellner says, Agamemnon is "taking back a prize that his society gave to one of its members" (114). This is seen as a major act of dishonour with the poetic society of the *Iliad*. Once again, the working definition of *mênis* comes into play: like the *mênis* of Zeus, the *mênis* of Achilles is incurred by a transgressive act, i.e. Agamemnon's confiscation of a war prize fairly allotted to him by society, and it has brought about retaliation (referring to Achilles' withdrawal from battle, which I will discuss shortly) that affects not only Agamemnon, but the entirety of the social group, the Achaeans. Building upon this, Achilles' form of retaliation is also of note here. His choice to withdraw from battle is described by his mother Thetis in this manner, "remain by your swift, sea-faring ships, and continue your wrath [μῆνιν] against the Achaeans, and refrain utterly from battle" (*Il.* 1.421-2). The use of *mênis* here is significant, for it is the cause of two actions: remaining within his own camp by his ships, and withdrawing from battle. Achilles' withdrawal from battle as retaliation brings clear consequences: Thetis manages to get Zeus to "give might to the Trojans until the Achaeans do honour to [Achilles]" (*Il.* 1.509), and the Achaeans are defeated countless times in battle as a result of this. His act of remaining by his ships is representative of another aspect of *mênis*: as a hostile emotion which socially isolates. Because of Agamemnon's slight against him, Achilles has withdrawn himself from the participating with Achaean society by remaining within his personal space (his ships). Furthermore, his act of withdrawing from battle is also seen as social isolation. *Hērōs*, as established before, is a societal role, and therefore Achilles' refusal to fight is a rejection of his societal duties and in extension,

society itself. Achilles' *mênis* clearly presents how heroic *mênis* is depicted in a manner that closely aligns with the depictions of divine *mênis*, and thus presents these mortal heroes as comparable to the gods.

Conversely, the Homeric hero is also closely associated with *mênis* through being the only group of mortals who are most frequently on the verge of incurring the *mênis* of the gods. As Muellner stipulates, "Antagonism and, paradoxically, heroic glory itself arise when the hero tries to reach and surpass the god with whom he identifies and against whom he struggles" (12). This is clearly seen in the case of Diomedes in *Iliad* 5 during his *aristeia,* which is a conventional scene in epic poetry where a hero displays his greatest prowess in battle. Diomedes has the ability to challenge the gods at his finest, and even manages to wound the goddess Aphrodite (*Il.* 5.335-6). Interestingly, as the Trojan hero Aeneas prepares to fight back, he compares Diomedes as "some god that is wroth [μηνίσας] with the Trojans" (*Il.* 5.177-8). The use of "μηνίσας" is significant here, for it is the participle form of the verb *menío* [μηνίω], defined as 'to be wroth against'. The verb *menío* should look familiar, as it is derived from the noun *mênis*. So Aeneas has basically compared Diomedes' prowess in battle to a god's wrath, further exemplifying how Homeric heroes are comparable to the divine through associations with *mênis*. After wounding Aphrodite, Diomedes then attempts fervently to slay Aeneas, who is also the son of Aphrodite. However, he was beaten back by the god the three times that he tried to attack Aeneas (*Il.* 5.436-7). When Diomedes attacks the fourth time, Apollo warns him to back off, and only then does Diomedes "gave ground a scant space backward, avoiding the wrath [μῆνιν] of Apollo that smiteth afar" (*Il.* 5.443-4). Like Athena and Ares withdrawing in the opening of Book 5 to avoid the *mênis* of Zeus, Diomedes does the same here in order to void the *mênis* of Apollo. This exchange between Diomedes and Apollo fully reveals the inevitability of

Muellner's statement, where the hero will inevitably step on the boundary between mortal and god. As a Homeric hero, Diomedes successfully garners multitudes of glory during his *aristeia* through his prowess in battle, but in doing so, also teeters dangerously towards that transgressive line of surpassing the gods. In this case, Diomedes heeds Apollo's warning and does not overstep and thus, *mênis* is not incurred. As such, Homeric heroes are the only class of mortals within the *Iliad* closely associated with *mênis*, whether it be in the depiction of their anger or their proximity to incurring divine wrath as a result of the pursuit of glory. Within the *Iliad*, "the heroic potential is programmed by divine genes" (Nagy 25), and this is clearly established through Homeric hero's association with *mênis*, ushering them into a state of semi-divinity and making them unique amongst mortals. From this, we can conclude that *mênis* and its implications can be utilised as a qualifier for the Homeric hero.

2. Usage and Subversion of *Mênis* as a Qualifier for the Epic Hero in Virgil's *Aeneid*

With *mênis* established as a legitimate qualifier for the Homeric hero, the next question to ask is whether Iliadic *mênis* survives as such a qualifier for heroes in later epics. This is perhaps a good juncture to digress from the discussion at hand and highlight the difficulties in tracing a lineage of a literary theme like *mênis*. *Mênis*, as established above, is a concept that is deeply rooted in the poetic society of the *Iliad.* It is impossible for *mênis* to be replicated when it is detached from its original societal context. However, this does not mean that the attempt to trace a lineage is futile. Literary themes are supposed to be adaptable, and concepts become universal through the constant interplay of interpretation and reinterpretation by writers of different periods and backgrounds. That is to say moving forward, the act of tracing *mênis* as a qualifier for the hero would not be the search for a word for word replication of the examples illustrated

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within the *Iliad*, but an exploration of how the definition of *mênis* has changed (or not) as a qualifier in conjunction with the heroes that are being depicted in post-Homeric epics.

Naturally, the next choice text to examine this question with is Virgil's *Aeneid*, arguably one of the most famous pre-Anglophone epics with clear intertextual links to Homer's *Iliad*. Virgil relies on intertextuality and utilises the implications of Iliadic *mênis* to qualify a new type of hero within the *Aeneid*. From the onset, it is clear that Achilles is used as a heroic model for both Aeneas and Turnus in the *Aeneid.* The case for Aeneas is quite obvious. Looking at the broad narrative strokes of *Aeneid* 10-12, it very clearly follows the sequence of events of *Iliad* 16-22, where the *aristeia* and subsequent death of Pallas motivates Aeneas to enact revenge in the same way as the *aristeia* and death of Patroclus motivates Achilles. Aeneas also hit a lot of character beats that Achilles does within the *Iliad*, a clear example being him receiving divine armour made by Vulcan in *Aeneid* 8, equivalent to Achilles receiving divine armour made by Hephaestus (Vulcan's Greek counterpart) in *Iliad* 18. These broad narrative similarities are not superficial by any means, they are put in place by Virgil for audiences to associate Aeneas with Achilles, the famed hero of Homer, and effectively hinting that Aeneas is a hero like Achilles. The same could be said for Turnus. In *Aeneid* 6, the Sibyl of Cumae tells Aeneas: "A second Achilles is already born in Latium" (*Ae.* 6.89), clearly referring to Rutulian Turnus. The explicit allusion to Achilles is significant here, for like Aeneas, Virgil's mention of the name Achilles immediately taps into a rich Homeric intertext of stories associated with the name, and by calling Turnus 'second Achilles', immediately allows audiences to automatically classify him as a fierce warrior and hero.

Virgil's choice to utilise Achilles to classify both Aeneas and Turnus as heroes is a deliberate one, especially considering the fact that they bear a highly antagonistic relationship

toward each other. Interestingly, the choice to do so may very well be linked to Virgil's attempt in qualifying a new type of hero. In the *Aeneid*, Iliadic *mênis* is reinterpreted into the notion of *furor,* defined as "self-destructive behaviour […and] an utter loss of self-control, and a refusal to accept the demands of fate and the higher powers" (Muellner). Turnus, being the 'second Achilles', embodies *furor* in the *Aeneid.* From Turnus' initial appearance in Book 7, Turnus is presented as someone intense and emotional, for he flies into a "frenzy of rage [ira]" (*Ae.* 7.460-62). In this instance, i*ra* could be taken as a synonym of *furor.* Furthermore, Turnus is also shown to be driven "by a preoccupation with personal honour and fame akin to that of the Homeric hero" (van Nortwick 307). In *Aeneid* 10, after realising that he had been lured away from the heat of battle by a phantom of Aeneas, he feels humiliated and even contemplates suicide (*Ae.* 10.680-4), casting him as a hyperbolic Homeric hero who is purely self-absorbed in the pursuit of glory, and would even be willing to take his own life so that "no word of [his] shame can follow [him]" (*Ae.* 10.679). This extremified version of the Homeric hero is clearly rejected in Virgil's epic. At the end of the *Aeneid,* Jupiter sends the Dira (the Furies) to indicate to Turnus' sister Juturna to cease helping her brother, for his death at the hands of Aeneas is inevitable: "His sister Juturna recognised the Dira from a long way off by the whirring of her wings, and grieved" (*Ae.* 12.870). The choice of Virgil to use "the Dira" is significant here, for the etymology of Dira is: *deum ira*, translated to mean 'the wrath of the gods' (Galinsky 344). This indirectly indicates that Turnus, through his embodiment of *furor*, has actually incurred the wrath of the gods and is to be punished. Instead of being a response to transgressive behaviour as *mênis* is in the *Iliad*, *furor* has become the transgressive behaviour itself in the *Aeneid*.

Simultaneously, Iliadic *mênis* is subverted by Virgil in order to qualify Aeneas as the new Roman hero. Unlike Achilles and the definition of *mênis* as an emotion that socially alienates,

Aeneas actually socially assimilates through acting out his *mênis* and killing Turnus. As Galinsky states, "So far from being at the fringes of his society, Aeneas is at its very center" (343). On the surface, the wrath of Aeneas seems similar to the *mênis* of Achilles: "Aeneas feasted his eyes on the sight of [Pallas' baldric…] then burning with mad passion and terrible in his wrath [*ira*]" (*Ae.* 12.944-5), and in this case, unlike Turnus, Aeneas' *ira* (taken as the proxy for *mênis*) is wholly justified, for it was against someone who has been rejected by the gods. Aeneas' wrath aligns with the needs of the Latin society that he has been trying to assimilate with. As implied above, Turnus, as the embodiment of Homeric hero in the *Aeneid*, has incurred divine *mênis* (Dira) and can no longer rejoin the society of which Aeneas is very much trying to be a part of. Thus, Aeneas actually completes his assimilation with Latin society through submitting to his *ira* and killing Turnus. This shows that not only has Virgil fully employed the Iliadic intertext of *mênis*, but he has also subverted its definition to qualify the Roman hero.

3. Tracing the lineage *Mênis* and the Epic Hero in Modern Anglophone Literature

Our exercise continues with a big jump to the 1600s and beyond, where the Homeric and Virgilean epics has enraptured the consciousness of the Western literary canon for millennia. The four texts chosen for this study are: Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* (1713), Byron's *Don Juan* (1819-24) and Walcott's *Omeros* (1990), written in successive centuries. The rationale behind the choices of this canon was to choose texts possessing a clear literary link to Homer's *Iliad* in order for meaningful ties and links to be established. Writing in vastly different time periods and historical contexts, the Anglophone writers develop a continuing dialogue on the notion of what constitutes an epic hero, continuing the practice of Virgil to utilise the Homeric intertext to subvert and qualify different notions of the epic hero, or

even to qualify non-heroes. Through this discussion, the Anglophone writers have responded and challenged the epic genre as a whole.

1. Milton's Paradise Lost (1667)

In Milton's *Paradise Lost,* it is the antagonist Satan who is qualified as a Homeric hero through the use of Iliadic *mênis* and its implications. Milton achieves this through allusions to both Homer and Virgil, perpetuating the existence of the intertextuality of *mênis* as a qualifier for the epic hero. For example, Satan is implicitly likened to Turnus in Book 6 when he is fighting against the angel Michael: "The sword of Satan with steep force to smite/ Descending, and in half cut sheer, nor stayed" (*PL* 6.324-5). Satan's sword is broken by Michael's sword, which was forged in the armoury of God. This moment could simply be read as a momentary symbolic triumph of good over evil, for Satan is gravely wounded by this blow: "deep en'tring shared/ All his right side" (*PL* 6.326-7), but I would argue that it also references the battle between Turnus and Aeneas in *Aeneid* 12. In *Aeneid* 12, Turnus' "mortal" sword is shattered by the divine sword of Aeneas, forged by the god Vulcan (*Ae.* 12.741). This implicit allusion to the Virgilian epic associates Satan with Turnus, which allows the audience to identify Satan as the hyperbolic Homeric hero that Turnus embodies as mentioned. Satan is shown to embody the *furor* that Turnus is aligned with in *Paradise Lost*, exhibiting his destructive desire as retaliation for his defeat: "For only in destroying [Satan] find[s] ease to [his] relentless thoughts" (*PL* 9. 129-30). Furthermore, Satan clearly incurs the divine *mênis* of God through his transgressive behaviour in *Paradise Lost*, akin to what Diomedes had shunned in *Iliad* 5. In Book 1, Satan thinks himself to be "equalled the Most High" (1.40), thinking himself to be equal to the Christian God. This sentiment is articulated once again by the angel Abdiel when he confronts Satan in Book 6,"thy hope was to have reached/ The height of thy aspiring unopposed,/ The throne of God unguarded"

(*PL* 6.131-3). Like the Homeric hero in the *Iliad*, Satan is classified as a hero through his transgressive behaviour of challenging divine authority (the Christian God, in this instance), which incurs divine *mênis*. Satan, having overstepped, is then severely punished. God, described as "the angry Victor" (*PL* 1.169), has launched a "sulphurous hail" of "thunder / Winged with red lightning and impetuous rage." (*PL* 1.171-5) as retaliation to Satan and the angels who has sided with him. God's choice to use thunderbolts as a punitive measure is interesting, for it is similar to the punitive measures of Zeus in response to incurred *mênis*, as exemplified by Ares in *Iliad* 15, "struck by the thunderbolt of Zeus" (*PL* 15.117). This implicit allusion further links Iliadic *mênis* as an existing intertext employed by Milton to qualify Satan as a Homeric hero. As stipulated by Cantor, "In his Christian epic [...] the classical hero becomes a demonic figure in this new context" (391). Milton has clearly utilised the associations of *mênis* to qualify Satan as the archetypal Homeric hero. However, this qualification is made in order to be subverted, as like Virgil, Milton vehemently rejects the model of the Homeric hero which Satan embodies. Satan was never the protagonist of *Paradise Lost* but Adam, who submits to God's will. This idea of submission as the new heroic ideal is highlighted by the angel Abidel in Book 6, who maintains that his battle with Satan is not for personal glory as accused by Satan, but "servitude" (*PL* 6.178). His ability to smite Satan right after his rebuttal symbolically reinforces this as the new standard of heroism. Adam clearly embodies this new ideal as Aeneas represents the Roman hero in the *Aeneid*, for after sinning against God, he repents and says, "Therefore to [God's] great bidding I submit" (*PL* 11.314). From this, we can see that Satan's classical heroism, as qualified through Iliadic *mênis*, is utilised by Milton as a foil to underscore the true Christian heroism of Adam in his humble submission to God's will.

2. *Pope's The Rape of the Lock (1713)*

Moving on to a century later, I now turn to look at Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*, first written in 1712, then revised and published in its current version in 1713. Pope himself was no doubt a poet well-versed in the Homeric epics, as exemplified through his well celebrated translation of the *Iliad,* which was published between 1715-20. As a mock epic, *The Rape of the Lock* satirises the trivialities of contemporary London high society by elevating a minor incident of a Baron cutting and stealing a lock of hair from the beautiful Belinda into the scale of heroic epic. Pope clearly mocks the notion of the epic hero in *The Rape of the Lock* through drawing similarities between Belinda and the Homeric hero through the implications of Iliadic *mênis*. In the proem, Pope clearly sets out the criteria for *mênis* to be incurred, calling the act of stealing the lock of hair as a "dire offence" (*RL* 1.1). The divine quality of *mênis* also still remains, for Belinda is watched over by her Sylphs (a stand-in for the gods in the mock-epic), but instead of protecting her from battle, they are now helping her dress in Canto 1. Belinda's dressing up scene is also significant, for she is qualified as a "goddess" with "glittering spoil"(*RL* 1.132) preparing for battle, which further reinforces her characterisation as a "heroic" figure that aligns with the Homeric hero in the *Iliad,* who also arms himself in the search of war spoils to garner personal glory. Furthermore, Belinda's anger is likened to the *mênis* of the Achilles in the proem of *The Rape of the Lock*, as Pope writes, how "in soft bosoms dwells such mighty rage?" (*RL* 1.12). Through this question, Pope implies that "it is unnatural" (Janson 91) for women to experience such rage. As Janson theorises, "Pope is mocking not only Belinda's hyperbole but also the extravagant emotions of true epic poetry" (92). By linking Belinda with Achilles, Pope is just as much commenting on Achilles' overreaction of the personal slight of losing Briseis as he is satirising Belinda's overreaction of losing a lock of hair.

The way Belinda reacts to her lock of hair being cut off is also worth discussion, for Belinda's eyes "flashed [with] living lightning" (*RL* 3.155). Later when she attacks the Baron in retaliation for cutting of her hair, she is described as "fierce" and "with more than usual lightning in her eyes"(*RL* 5.75-6). As established before, one of the ways the *mênis* of Zeus is represented in the *Iliad* is through the god smiting those who have incurred his wrath with thunderbolts, as Milton has also referenced to in *Paradise Lost*. Thus, the use of lighting to qualify Belinda forms further links between her and *mênis*, even though her rage is incited through a very trivial transgression of a lock of her hair being cut off by the Baron. In *The Rape of the Lock*, Iliadic *mênis* has been bastardised by Pope to represent a feeling of rage toward a petty personal slight. Through this, Pope wholly mocks the notion of the epic hero, casting Belinda as the Achillean figure, likening her rage to that of the *mênis* of Achilles over the triviality of a lock of hair. As suggested, the satirisation of eighteenth-century high society through the parodying of epic poetry perhaps also reflects Pope's commentaries and observations on epic poetry. As Pope writes in the dedication of *The Rape of the Lock*, "the ancient poets […] let an action be never so trivial in itself, they always make it appear of the utmost important" (Pope 2234). This perhaps shows the emergence of a trend of conscious reflection on the relevance of epic as a genre, a vein which is very much taken up by the Romantic poets a century later.

3. Byron's Don Juan (1819-1824)

The Romantic period has transformed the epic genre, connected to the political circumstances that prevailed at the time, enormously devaluing "political life as a literary subject" (Cantor 376). Cantor further states that as traditional epic fully situates itself in the heroism of public life, the Romantics found themselves to be unable to write traditional epic, re-evaluates the notion of heroism to "something more personal" (377). Building on this idea, I now

turn to look at Lord Byron's *Don Juan* (1819-1824). As Lauber argues, *Don Juan* "differs greatly from that of neoclassic mock epic" like Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*, but an "anti-epic" (619). Juan, the protagonist of the epic, does not categorically fit into what we have previously identified in the *Iliad* or the *Aeneid* as a hero, but he is also unlike Belinda, for he is not linked to any previously established models of heroism. Juan is an anti-hero, situated within an non-epic which strives to rebel against and openly mocks all of the conventions of the epic tradition. This is clearly seen from the first line of *Don Juan*:

> "I want a hero: an uncommon want
>
> When every year and month sends forth a new one,
>
> Till, after cloying the gazettes with cant,
>
> The age discovers he is not the true one" (*DJ* 1.1-4)

Byron expresses a deep disillusionment with the archetypal hero in the first stanza. As above, he views the hero is jaded, for there is no "true hero" in his eyes. Therefore, the choice of the protagonist Juan is the very first rebellion. Don Juan, being a legendary Spanish womaniser, is as unheroic as a character goes. If Don Juan is supposed to be unheroic, it is logical that the conventional implications of Iliadic *mênis* does not qualify him, for he is the opposite of any model of the hero we have covered so far. Undeniably, Juan is wholly Byronic. However, we can still see the implications of *mênis* in the experiences of Juan. As defined by Camus, "The Byronic hero, incapable of love, or capable only of an impossible love, suffers endlessly. He is solitary, languid and his condition exhausts him. If he wants to feel alive, it must be in the terrible exaltation of a brief and destructive action" ("The Dandies' Rebellion"). This definition clearly bears some commonality with the working definition of *mênis* I have proposed, especially with regards to the sense of social isolation and suffering that *mênis* brings when one experiences

it. Coupled with the notion that Romantic poets have turned to look at the personal, I propose the idea that *mênis* has also evolved into an element of the self within *Don Juan.* With the disappearance of any divine interference in *Don Juan*, *mênis* has transformed from an emotional state that calls for punishment for transgressive behaviour into a self-regulating mechanism which allows the self to transgress and indulge in the fervent passions typical of the Byronic hero, but also exiles the self as punishment. Juan is a prime example of this mechanism at work in the epic. Juan is undoubtedly a character of isolation, for he is forced into self-exile in Canto 1 because of his personal scandal with Donna Julia: "But Donna Inez, to divert the train/ Of one of the most circulating scandals […] sent her son to be embark'd at Cadiz" (*DJ* 1.1513-20). His exile is incited by transgressive behaviour, for he was the one who participated in an extramarital affair with Donna Julia and was caught by her husband Alfonso. The same cycle happens to Juan on the Cyclades islands from Cantos 2 to 4, where his romantic entanglements with the pirate's daughter Haidee results in him being sold into slavery by Haidee's father Lambro to Constantinople. From this, one can conclude that *mênis* of the self does qualify Juan as a Byronic hero, and acts as a mechanism that perpetuates the nihilistic cycle of Juan's adventures in this anti-epic. The distinct branching out of the definition of *mênis* is also significant here, for it proves the evolution of the term and also reflects how Anglophone writers have been actively engaging and reinterpreting with the themes and concepts first proposed in Homeric epic.

4. Walcott's Omeros (1990)

Finally, I come to the most contemporary text of the chosen four: Walcott's *Omeros*. As Shullenberger puts poetically, "Homer's *Iliad* stands at the beginning of the epic tradition in western culture, and Walcott's *Omeros* is that tradition's most recent expression" (47). Walcott, like Virgil, Milton, Pope and Byron, draws on the rich intertextuality conceived from Homer's

Iliad, but yet creates an epic poem that is different from its predecessors and presents a narrative that is decidedly contemporary to the time period which Walcott is writing in. Walcott, while actively engaging with the long reception of Homeric literature in *Omeros*, simultaneously rejects the grandeur of the public and heroic narrative set up by classical epic, *Omeros* is not about the epic hero, but the mundane everyman living on the island of St. Lucia, building upon what Byron has vehemently rejected. This rejection is clearly seen in the narrative arc of Achille, who, while sharing the name as the Iliadic hero, is qualified as unheroic because of his utter mundaneness. And with Achille's mundaneness, *mênis* has also become invisible, soundlessly disappearing into the everyday life of a fisherman making his living on an island. Divine *mênis* is noticeably absent in the fabric of *Omeros*, as Walcott clearly presents from the beginning that there are no gods in *Omeros.* Achille's first appearance is a scene of him cutting down a tree, "Achille looked up at the hole the laurel had left" (*Om.* 1.1.2), and the tree that Achille chopped down was referred to as a "dead god" and Achille also prays while he hacks apart the tree that he just cut down (*Om.* 1.1.2). This is significant, for this presents the act of tree cutting as ritualistic. With the knowledge that the laurel is the sacred tree of the god Apollo in classical tradition, we can glean from the scene that Achille has symbolically killed Apollo, whose *mênis* is the catalyst for a plague that would eventually lead to the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon that ultimately incited the *mênis* of Achilles. Walcott signifies through the symbolic killing of Apollo that the Achille of *Omeros* will not incur *mênis*, nor will he experience the *mênis* of Achilles that perpetuated the narrative of the *Iliad.* The wrath of Achille is rendered into something mundane as well, Achille gets into a fight with the fisherman Hector over a bailing tin, as well as over the affections of the waitress Helen. Achille is qualified as a non-hero through the lack of *mênis* in *Omeros*, perhaps best phrased by Walcott at the anti-proem at the end of the epic: "I sang of

quiet Achille, Afolabe's son, / […]whose end, when it comes […] / […] will remain unknown / […] I sang the only slaughter / that brought him delight, and that from necessity — / of fish […]" (*Om.* 7.64.1). This passage is a clear allusion to the proem presented by Homer at the start of the *Iliad* to introduce the themes of the epic. Walcott, like Byron, diverts from epic convention and puts this passage at the end of the epic, which is why I have called it an anti-proem. Here, Achille is presented as the antithesis to wrath-filled Achilles, with "quiet" juxtaposing the "*mênin*" (*Il.* 1.1) of the *Iliad.* Unlike his Homeric counterpart, Achille the fisherman will remain ordinary and he will never partake in the mass killing that brought Achilles his personal glory, for the only thing he will ever kill is the fish that he fishes for his livelihood. Most importantly, the Achille of *Omeros* will never experience the *mênis* of the Homeric Achilles, nor will he experience the social isolation brought about by it. As Whitaker puts, there is "constant oscillation between attraction to and rejection of the Classics as an ordering principle" (100) in *Omeros*, and the purpose of this is not entirely clear in the text. Allow me to provide a potential interpretation: Walcott, through his deliberate omission of any semblance of Iliadic *mênis*, does not qualify any of the characters as a hero because he doesn't feel the need to. The interweaving narrative of *Omeros* is not supposed to be a grand narrative of public heroes and divine battles, but explores the mundane history of human experiences on an island that has experienced a long history of colonial control. There was simply no need for a hero, nor a hero's *mênis*, to tell this story.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that Homer's *Iliad* is an integral part to the Western literary canon with its universal themes, and heroism is very clearly one of them. This project initially set out to

explore the notions of heroism through *mênis*, seeing if these passionate expressions of emotions have stood the test of time and perpetuate through to contemporary Anglophone epic. What I found is something more interesting and more indicative of the literary spirit: modern Anglophone writers have not only responded to such emotions, but they have also reappropriated these notions and definitions in order to conclude their own message, challenging the epic tradition and redefining the genre. This further exemplifies the beauty of literature as a genre that is constantly received and reconceived through space and time.

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Fung Tiffany Wing Ying

ENGE 4700 Capstone Project

Supervisor: Professor Collier Nogues

Critical Reflection: Research Rationale

When I studied poems in high school, I was told by teachers that whoever the "I" is speaking cannot be the reader or the poet themself, and we were taught to think of the speaker as this vacuous voice in a poem. I thought that to be true for the longest time, until I read one of Chen Chen's poems in the Reading Poetry (ENGE 2390) course. I remember that one of the questions raised in class was "Who is speaking here? Who is this 'I'?", and I was almost surprised to find that there *is* indeed someone speaking here, not to mention that this "I" was inviting me into the poem with them. As a queer person who loves reading and writing poems, Chen Chen's poetry is the emergency contact that I call whenever I feel that everything around me is falling apart, because his words offer a glimpse into the world that I want to be in, one that I want to work towards. It made me want to share his poetic space with him, because the "I" that he writes about has so much of who I want to become. While reflecting on the formative texts that have led me to pursue literary studies (most of them by white male authors), I realised that these texts were not meant for a reader like myself when my identity was never really reflected in them, yet I was taught to enjoy them because the experiences they wrote about were thought to be a "universal representation" of the human spirit. This contradiction led me to the key questions that I wrestled with for this project: how is it possible for Chen's lyric "I", which is not me, to be capacious enough to invite me in? And how can I as a creative writer achieve the same

with my own writing practice? This hybrid capstone project is how I attempt to find answers to these questions, and I see it as a way to bridge together my research interests as a literature student and my creative endeavors as a writer.

The reason that I wanted my capstone to be a hybrid project is to demonstrate that my research and creative work inform each other, and in particular, how lyric relationality that I discussed regarding Chen's poetry could be possible in practice. For the creative piece in this project, I imported the form of Chen's poem into my own writing, which itself is inspired by the work of Bhanu Kapil. I made this decision for several reasons: I wanted to show that I am writing from a literary lineage, that my work is not just its own entity by situating it in relation to other poets. Since Chen Chen is a poet that I look up to, it was important for me to highlight that his poem that inspires me was also inspired by the poet that he admired. Moreover, I was especially drawn to the series of questions which Kapil's *The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers* is structured around. Kapil's way of asking strangers deeply personal questions was fascinating to me, as it presented a new angle to approach subject matters that we think we are familiar with. This inspired me to approach the stories that I have told many times with a set of questions, which prompted me to explore them with a fresh perspective. While the memories that I addressed in my creative writing were not easy to tell, having a set of questions to guide me through the emotional logic of the piece was helpful. My hope is that the creative component can act as a supplement to my research analysis as proof that a relational lyric subject is possible in practice.

The School of Trying Again: Chen Chen's Relational Lyric Subject and Queer Poetics of Futurity

In the epigraph to his second poetry collection *Your Emergency Contact Has Experienced An Emergency*, contemporary poet Chen Chen prefaces his work with the words of Justin Chin—"I'm an angry ethnic fag / & I'm in so much pain". The epigraph from the outset outlines Chen's lyric "I" as a queer Chinese-American writing in reaction to the prejudiced institutions of racism and homophobia that have continued to divide communities in our time. The segregation of the "other" has pervaded every aspect of our lives, including the literary community at large, whose traditions have long operated under a system of intolerance. This is an enduring reality that we cannot seem to escape from, and have left many feeling hopeless for the future and alone in their own hurt. So when many, like Chen himself, turn to poetry as "a life raft" or "an emergency contact" (Chen, "A Conversation" [*Foglifter*]) to seek solace and solidarity in these turbulent times, there is a pressing need for the conventional lyric genre to broaden the range of voices and perspectives that it represents. To put it differently, it is impossible to imagine or construct a future in poetry and in real life, where one's selfhood is made available only to histories and people of whiteness, heterosexuality, and privilege. In response to this, Chen offers us an alternative to the universal lyric subject in his series of "The School Of…" poems from *Your Emergency Contact*, wherein he seeks to interrupt such structures of power and isolation by negotiating the boundaries of lyric subjecthood. Without sacrificing the intimate affordances of the lyric tradition, Chen reconfigures the lyric poem as a collective scholastic space, where his lyric "I" is written with an awareness of its networks of kinship (Javadizadeh 477), as well as the lineages from which it emerges. By viewing Chen's "The School Of…" poems in the lens of

José Muñoz's theory of queer futurity, his lyric poetics that offer hope and a pathway for working towards a collective future is clearly illuminated.

While the word "lyric" has come to be synonymous with poetry itself, we do not seem to have a sound or unanimous understanding of what it entails. The conflation of a range of poetic expressions and the lyric, which Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins refer to as "lyricization", is in fact a relatively recent invention of twentieth century criticism (2, 7). In their attempt to trace the emergence of the "lyric" as we now know it, Jackson and Prins argue that the general association of lyric with writings of personal and subjective self-expression began in the nineteenth century, when poetry as an imagined ideal was thought to be the perfect expression of subjectivity. This was later interpreted by scholars in the twentieth century as "the given poetic genre already in circulation", a belief that continues to be taken as the normative practice of the lyric genre (4). In other words, the John Stuart Millian sense of a self-absorbed lyric subject "confessing itself to itself, in moments of solitude" (95) was only ever meant to be an ideation of what poetry could be, rather than a principle that governs lyric practice. For poetry to continue to operate under this assumption is clearly problematic, because it is unlikely for the "I" to be a solitary presence when we all emerge from some sort of lineage. This is why in recent decades, contemporary scholars have been reconsidering the historical and political implications of the conventional lyric genre and its subjecthood.

Beyond the Millian ideation of the lyric, Anthony Reed points out that oftentimes such "lyricization corresponds with the emergence of the modern, bourgeois subject" which, in the Western post-enlightenment and liberal society, is an identity afforded almost exclusively to the

privileged only ("Erotics" 25). As a result, this sustained misapprehension of the lyric genre meant that the lyric subjecthood has long been operating from an inadequate position, wherein it is often based in an assumed universality of whiteness, maleness, heterosexuality, and power. In the face of such intolerance of the lyric convention, Dorothy Wang asks how alternate identities and realities could ever situate themselves in the poetic tradition when they are excluded for being "marked as constitutively alien and unassimilable" (Wang 26). This is a question that continues to haunt any poet who finds themselves different from "the synecdoche that makes a subset of people the image of the human" (Reed, "Erotics" 26), and thereby denied a voice and personhood in the lyric space. One such example could be seen in Wang's rigorous examination of the 2006 MLA presidential address made by Marjorie Perloff, a renowned scholar and poetry critic, who expressed concern at the current state of literary studies because "the rubrics of African American, other minorities, and post-colonial" are putting the works of canonical authors like James Joyce and Virginia Woolf at stake (Perloff qtd. in Wang 5). For a reputable poetry scholar such as Perloff to make this distinction "between the literary and the writing of these racialized and postcolonial subjects who are members of 'subcultures'" (Wang 6) in a speech published in one of the most authoritative literary journals, it is not difficult to see that the hegemonic understanding of the lyric tradition, or literary studies in a broader sense, continues to exclude those who do not share in the aforementioned "universal" experience.

When the conventional lyric subjecthood fails to account for the spectrum of human experiences, and is withheld from alternate identities and histories, the lyric "I" remains a "singular, unmediated self" isolated from its shared reality with other beings (Willis 229), which contradicts the very fact that *being* is experienced in relation to others. If "poetry cannot be

understood except in relation to life" (Gourgouris 227), then the qualities of the conventional

lyric subjecthood—narrow, prejudiced and exclusionary—could hardly be seen as an adequate

expression of life. Seeing that the lyric subjecthood has always been "in a certain sense public

and intersubjective rather than private" (Reed, *Freedom Time* 99), there is an urgent need to

reconfigure the lyric subject, such that it is situated in relation to an interconnected and shared

reality. This sense of maintaining a shared connection with others, and having the awareness that

the self is always situated within a collective, is what I mean by relationality; this is a concept

central to this essay and will be revisited throughout my discussion. To that end, we need not

look further than the work of Chen Chen, whose simultaneously autobiographical and relational

lyric "I" interrupts the normative universality of the conventional lyric subject, and invites us to

think about the lyric genre differently, as well as how we might position ourselves within our

respective communities.

Contrary to the universal lyric subject, Chen's lyric "I" departs from the genre

conventions, instead sets up his autobiographical lyric subject as markedly queer, Chinese-

American, and from an immigrant background "without being reducible to or separable from any

of those identities" (Stowell 3). The manners in which these multifarious identities and histories

converge or collide are recurring themes in Chen's poetry, and he continues to explore them in

Your Emergency Contact. Without abandoning the autobiographical and confessional qualities

afforded by the lyric tradition, Chen positions his experience as a queer poet of color as being on

the margins of the conventional lyric subject, from which he writes his lyric "I" to expand the

possibilities of what lyric subjecthood could encompass, and to reclaim what is often overlooked

or erased. Furthermore, Chen's lyric "I" remains porous to its political, cultural and historical

realities, meaning that it is never a solitary voice singing to itself, but a voice that emerges from the "pockets of communities" that the "I" is a part of (Chen, "A Conversation").

With that said, Chen's insistence on maintaining relationality with his lyric subject is not just for the sake of discourse, and this is where I turn to the queer theorist José Muñoz, whose concept of queer future-building I will use as a framework to better illustrate how Chen's poetics of relationality bears significance both in poetry and in real life. Muñoz puts forth the idea of "queerness" as a way of building a future that is "relational to historically situated struggles, a collectivity that is actualized or potential" (3), one where our mode of being is centered around community-building and a general sense of togetherness. More importantly, Muñoz claims that this mode of working towards a collective future is a form of work that must be learned and "educated" together (1, 3). While Muñoz's thinking is in response to the nihilistic and anti-relational approaches to queer theory, his emphasis on understanding "queerness as collectivity" (11) echoes Chen's efforts at pushing against lyric conventions with his relational lyric subject: in Chen's poetic space, maintaining relationality of the self with others is also a persistent form of work that takes learning and redoing, and which cannot be done alone. Therefore, if, according to Muñoz, being together as a collective is a form of work that needs to be learned, then Chen suggests that poetry could be a way for us to learn to do this work. In the following discussion, I will expound on this framing in greater detail using two of Chen's works from his series of "The School Of…" poems, which explore a range of themes from found families to humors of the quotidian, even though they do not necessarily take place in an actual classroom. My overarching aim here is to show how Chen transforms poetry into a scholastic environment in which his relational lyric subject strives towards a collective future with his communities.

As opposed to the solitary and exclusionary construction of the conventional lyric subject, Chen embraces the autobiographical and subjective nature of his lyric "I", without the intention for assimilation or assuming universality in his lyric subjecthood. A quick scan through Chen's body of work would reveal that his lyric subject is always autobiographical in its being queer and Asian, experiences that the conventional lyric subject has sidelined, but which take center stage in his poem "The School of You". The poem begins with a hypothesis: "Suppose you live a long life", a life that is full of surreal but very particular things that Chen enjoys, like "blueberries" and "ice skating in the nude" (Chen, "The School of You" 1-3). Then he goes on to explain that living a long and fulfilled life is only an imagined outcome for him, because "You. / Who was told at 13 to die, that you would / soon, a silly / faggot & not even / a white one, just a brief, brief / filth" (Chen, "The School of You" 7-11). Here, Chen acknowledges the narrowness and specificity in his positioning as a gay man who grew up in a homophobic and bigoted reality, and these imaginations stem from a subjective and personal place as a way of "telling myself / what I was never told" (Chen, "The School of You" 44-45), to consider the possibility of a beautifully lived life as a queer person. Chen is aware that "I am / talking to myself" (Chen, "The School of You" 18-19), and it seems that his awareness resembles what the conventional lyric subject does—a "mind in solitary speech" speaking to itself, unable to reach beyond its own subjectivity (Brower qtd. in Jackson and Prins 2). However, Chen's use of the pronoun "you" immediately refutes this view: claiming to be confessing to himself while addressing a "you" in a poem that anyone can read is a very deliberate move; it means that Chen is not just imagining an "otherwise" on his own, he is also inviting us, the reader, to do it with him. We see Chen beginning to establish this connection when he proceeds to imagine this "long life" as a movie,

where his "audience" demand to see more of his action-packed life (Chen, "The School of You" 1, 25). This "audience" is Chen's way of addressing his readers, inviting them into his imaginations, while he puts himself out there as proof for other queer people to know that they can also dream of having a long and beautiful life. The pronoun "you" in this case refers to Chen in an autobiographical sense, as well as his readers, or anyone who needs to hear that "you" can also live "a life so long and gorgeously silly" (Chen, "The School of You" 20-21). In other words, the "you" that begins as specific and autobiographical moves towards a larger sense of a collective in who Chen addresses as a plural "you". It also redraws the boundaries of lyric subjecthood wherein the self can take on the qualities of a "you" as both a speaker and a listener, and is no longer embodied by an "I" only. Chen's lyric "I", or "you" in this case, testifies to lyric's capacity for the self and the other to converge "where the participant roles of speaker, intended hearer, and bystander melt together or away" (Waters 51).

At this juncture, it is important to note that Chen's departure from a self-bounded lyric "I" is not "delineated by an explicit anti-identity" (Lou) where he dismisses the subjective and confessional qualities of lyric subjecthood. On quite the contrary, Chen's "subtle reconfiguration of the subjective" (Lou) highlights the interiority of the lyric "I" while remaining closely connected with its "networks of kinship" (Javadizadeh 477), and at the same time opening up the lyric subject so that it is capacious enough to "invite the reader into itself" (@sinethetamag qtd. in Stowell 16). Some critics have pointed out that Chen does this to reach the universal through the particular, but this perspective overlooks the fact that Chen's lyric subject is very much specific in its political and historical positioning, and which could not be further from the universal claims made by the conventional lyric subject. To emphasize the opposition between

the universal lyric subject and Chen's relational lyric "I", my discussion will now shift to the title of the poem, "The School of You", and the reason for Chen to reconfigure his poem into a scholastic environment.

Rather than using the reader as "a surrogate self" (Reed, "Erotics" 27), Chen refuses to assimilate or claim a universality in his experience by framing his poem in the environment of a school, where both Chen's lyric subject and the reader are working to establish a common ground. To illustrate Chen's intention here, I would like to briefly consider Jacques Rancière's pedagogical theory of an "emancipated" mode of learning. In the example used by Rancière, both the teacher and the students are limited in their understanding of a subject matter, and there is no superiority or inferiority of intellect in this learning environment. The teacher, rather than assuming a position of intellectual superiority, creates the conditions for both the teacher and the student to have "a thing in common", so that learning becomes a two-way activity rather than a top-down approach (2, 9-11). I see Chen doing something similar in the "school" of his poem, where he sets up the poem as a learning environment and brings us in to find "the thing in common" (Rancière 32), so that Chen's "I" and the reader can both put in the effort to meet each other somewhere in between. The thing in common in the case of Chen's poem is the imagination and longing for a reality free from prejudice. Just like the schoolmaster who emancipates in Rancière's example, it is important to Chen that his lyric subject is always trying to establish some form of connection with his collective, that the porosity of his "I" is less of a "reified notion of the universal" (Reed, *Freedom Time* 97), and more like a bridge that provides passage for reaching out to its communities, but still maintains a comfortable distance without "the annihilation of one mind by another" (Rancière 32). Moreover, the fact that Chen compares

this process of reaching out to his "networks of kinship" (Javadizadeh 477) as going to a "school" also echoes Muñoz's theory, that establishing and maintaining relationality of the self is something to be learned and done as a collective, which Chen has demonstrated in "The School of You". Therefore, Chen's lyric subject does not represent a "free-floating, ahistorical and apolitical ideal" (Chen, "Conversation") that is universally applicable, or a solitary speaker who turns his back on the readers. Rather, his treatment of the lyric "I" insists on the fact that "the self doesn't exist in a vacuum" (Chen, "A Conversation"), reinforcing its relations with its communities and kinships without sacrificing the confessional and autobiographical qualities of the lyric tradition. Having established that Chen's poetic space is also a learning environment for his lyric subject to maintain its relationality with others, I will now examine in detail how Chen proposes that we learn to do this work in order to knit together our communities into a collective.

Placing this knitting-together function of the lyric subject in the heart of Chen's "The School Of…" poems, Chen argues that maintaining relationality of the self with others is a form of work that requires consistent endeavoring and learning as a collective, which will offer us an emergency exit out of the current alienating poetics and reality, and into a future of collectivity. As I outlined earlier, Chen opens up his lyric subject such that the "I" is simultaneously subjective and relational to its kinships and communities. But for Chen's "I" to maintain this relationality is not something that comes naturally. In fact, Chen shows us in "The School of Joy / Letter to Michelle Lin" that sustaining a shared connection with others is an undertaking that demands consistent effort and repeated attempts. To examine this idea more closely, we can look at the system of relations that Chen has built in the poem by deconstructing it as follows:

1. When Chen's student Tanya passed away in a car accident, he grieves for her, which sustains the memory of Tanya and their teacher-student relationship.

2. Then, Chen shares his grief with his friend Michelle in a letter, which brings them together so that he is not alone in his grief.

3. Finally, this letter happens to be a poem that is read by us, the reader, so that we also share in his grief, and we are brought together by it.

This is what I mean by a consistent endeavoring: Chen tries three times in order to maintain this relationality with his networks of kinship, and he is able to bring together his friend and his readers, who do not initially share a relationship with Tanya, but are now in this grief together with Chen, sharing with him the life and memory of his student. This repetition of trying is evident in Chen's use of anaphora as well: "Today I'm telling you / about Tanya", "Today I'm telling you / about Tanya's real poems", "Today I'm telling you / about losing her" (Chen, "The School of Joy" 64-65, 75-77, 95-96). With every repetition of the phrase "Today I'm telling you", Chen becomes more assertive than if he were just speaking to a friend, and the weight that this repetition carries reaches beyond the sphere of a private letter to the public realms of Chen's readership—Chen's lyric subject demands to be heard, for both his grief and his celebration of Tanya's life. The form of this poem also confirms this premise: it is an epistolary poem, an open letter that demands listeners beyond Michelle Lin. Chen could have written an elegy for Tanya, or to simply write a private letter to his friend for support in his grief. But instead, he made the decision to combine the two in a poem that is simultaneously private and public, which goes to show that Chen is not only interested in maintaining the relations in his personal life; he insists

on reaching individuals that are beyond his closest networks, and bringing them into his community as well. As evident from the poem (which itself is also an endeavor), this is no easy task, yet Chen does it nonetheless, even if it means that maintaining relationality is a kind of work that needs to be tried again and again.

Despite the effort that it takes for one to maintain a sense of connection with others, Chen assures us that this endeavoring is not one of toil, but one of joy. In the first half of the poem, Chen recalls a comment that Michelle once made about his writing: "You wrote / that I write with joy. / When really it's toward, / walking to / the school of / try again" (Chen, "The School of Joy" 9-14). This sense of "joy" that Michelle can feel is not without reason: when reminiscing about an evening of poetry reading with Michelle and his community of fellow writers, Chen writes that he finds "joy" in "sharing poems, / then prawn crackers, / then more poems" (Chen, "The School of Joy" 33-36). So, to Chen, sharing poems is one of the ways to feel joy, and to share it with others. By writing his grief into a poem that can be shared with others, Chen turns a private grief into a reason to celebrate joy, which in this case is the life of Tanya, so that grief too can become a kind of joy.

With the above in mind, Chen reminds us that joy, albeit a feeling that is familiar to us, is something that needs to be learned as a collective. In one of his craft essays, Chen explains that he started writing these "The School Of…" poems as a way to "celebrate different sources of learning, and a range of ways to learn, ways to 'go to school'" (Chen, "Telling the Truth" 43). Following this line of reasoning, Chen is suggesting that attending "the school of joy" is to learn about joy through grief. This might appear unconventional at first, but to choose joy amidst a

deep hurt is indeed a form of work that needs to be learned, because it is not something that comes naturally to most of us. To elaborate on why Chen insists on a scholastic environment in this poem about learning to feel joy, I would like to draw upon Paulo Freire's thinking on education and learning in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in which he states that "Education is thus constantly remade in the praxis. In order to be, it must become" (84). This idea of continuous practice aligns with what Chen describes as "trying again" (Chen, "The School of Joy" 14): he envisions a future where he can write out of grief, and into a life that is more complete and less punctured by loss. So he becomes the kind of joy that he wants to carry with him, starting with an endeavor to share this joy with his networks of kinship and communities, and using it to bring them together, thereby transforming his reality from one of grief and loss to one of joy and celebration.

While the preceding discussion on lyric relationality as a form of work certainly applies in a literary context, I believe that Chen's endeavoring extends beyond the poetic, and might lend itself to how we think about the significance of maintaining relationality in our real lives. When John Crowe Ransom argues that "a poem is a sign which reads: This road does not go through to action" (qtd. in Culler 296), Chen's poetics of relationality seems to disagree, because ultimately, maintaining relationality with others is not a form of work that Chen does alone, or in a poem only. In the final stanzas of "The School of Joy / Letter to Michelle Lin", Chen shares with us that upon feeling the lingering absence of Tanya in his classroom, he decides to "try again", then "picked up / the best marker" and "started to make / the letters" bit by bit, concluding the poem with "welcome" written on the board of his classroom (111-113, 115-116, 121). As much as Chen, in the poem's context, is welcoming his students in real life to enter his classroom, he is

also welcoming all of us to enter the figurative classroom, his school of joy, to learn about doing the work of being connected with each other alongside him. In the accompanying statement for "The School of Joy / Letter to Michelle Lin" published in *West Branch*, Chen remarks that "distant relations" and "distant relationality" brings to mind "a deep longing for a future" that "feels queer" to him (Chen, "Poet's Statement"). It is no surprise that Chen feels particularly drawn to this sense of relationality at a time when demographic diversity continues to be threatened in global politics and culture, with queer people of color such as Chen himself bearing the brunt of it. Our present reality has failed to make people outside of the hegemony of whiteness, maleness and heterosexuality feel that they are enough just as they are, that they can take up space in this world. This explains why Chen feels the need to "project into a future where more can appear, more actions can be free" (Chen, "Poet's Statement"). Maintaining a shared connection with others becomes the only way to escape from a reality that threatens to sever all relational ties, and this future that Chen speaks of is certainly not one where we are alone in our own struggles. While there is no tried-and-true method that tells us how we could remain connected to our communities and distant relations, Chen bears out Freire's idea of "becoming" through learning in his own attempts at maintaining relationality with his lyric subject; in other words, we are all learning as we go. If this sense of queerness that Chen feels is, in the words of Muñoz, "the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" (1), then this dissatisfaction with the present reality is what motivates Chen to invent a queerer, more abundant future abound with possibilities. To Chen, this queerness also entails thinking about and acting upon a selfhood that is inseparable from the immediate and distant communities, kinships, and lineages that we emerge from, because only then will a more hopeful future come into view.

In conclusion, the "I" in Chen's poetic space is never alone without its communities and kinships, which come in a range of shapes and forms, from imagined friendships to the gathering of fellow poets. This is because Chen's lyric subject exists within a collective space, whose perception of the self and experience of reality is always intertwined with its immediate and distant networks of relations. The relationality that Chen's lyric "I" insists on has effectively pushed against the assumed universality and solitude of the conventional lyric subject, thereby opening up lyric subjecthood and revealing "a system of possibilities that underlie the tradition" (Culler 6). By establishing the lyric poem as a scholastic environment, Chen's poem saves a seat for alternate histories, queer realities and multifarious identities to feel seen and heard. And as the title suggests, it takes consistent effort to learn to be with each other in the "school" of Chen's poetry. When the lyric is positioned as a site that welcomes collaborative learning and a sense of doing-towards, the possibilities that inhabit the lyric subject then extends beyond the realization of the subjective to a collective future-building as well. This projection into a future of collectivity informs Chen's poetics, and which testifies to Muñoz's idea that queerness is a mode of working towards togetherness. As a poet, educator, and a member of his communities, Chen demonstrates to us through his lyric subject the ways that we can transform our current reality, such that we might "move toward ever new possibilities of fuller and richer life individually and collectively" (Shaull 32). It is undeniable that Chen's relational lyric "I" has offered a possible way for the lyric genre to break from its assumed solidity, but what I found to be the essence of Chen's work speaks to the very reason that we read poetry: to feel hope that one has the ability to change one's circumstances, to see hope in a future worth going towards, and to act on this hope as a collective to be the change that one wants to see in the world.

Creative Component:

Things That I Would Say (after Chen Chen after Bhanu Kapil)

Who are you and whom do you love?

My fingers smell of spit. My mouth crushed into the color of your mouth. You hate that the green rock on my chest digs into your skin. You hate that your silver cross clatters cold in your rib cage.

Who are you and whom do you love?

In summer afternoons 婆婆 would let me climb over her and land on her soft belly. I would crash my face into her sunken cheeks over and over until I heard her light, airy laugh ring in the house. Her chest would inflate while I rested my head on the joy-pulsed pillow of her body, my face indented in the shape of the bodhisattva hung low around her neck. A small patch of sun sat stubborn on her nose. She looked at me like I was the warmest thing in the world.

Where did you come from / how did you arrive?

The Chinese believe that every time a jade fractures, it is the deities above deflecting harm away from the body.

On the morning of my first day of school she looped around my neck a small jadeite bodhisattva.

To protect you, and look after you.

Or, *I am here with you.*

What do you remember about the earth?

Wong Tai Sin has immigrated to Taiwan after centuries of being our patron saint of ask-and-you-shall-receive. They said that he couldn't stand the people of Hong Kong complaining to him about every single trivial matter. They said that he's had enough. Do the people of Taiwan lament less? Or are they more polite to him about their inconveniences—less of the demanding and more of the *yes, please, thank you, I would like that very much*? But why would anyone leave one humid place for another? Though I wonder what he gets up to while he earns his right of abode in the coming years. Not even Wong Tai Sin himself could escape the relentless laws of the humans, his believers. Not even when they get on their knees and say *please, please*.

What is the shape of your body?

I've been growing out my hips and all the places I want you to grab. That summer. And a love skinny enough to fit in the folds between my belly rolls. So I kiss you on the school track flooded in blue. Around us are tall office buildings and apartment complexes that stood unblinking. On a skyscraper, jesus reminds you that he equals god and they are both very much real, very much

gazing down at his creation, the ones who are horny and sad and covered in sweat. You tell me that hell is a fiery red place for people like me. Your face leaks blue and is very beautiful.

How will you / have you prepared for your death?

I run.

Or, I pick up the wrong shoes and wear the wrong skin and press feet into the scorching gravel and try to go somewhere and going nowhere and wish that I am elsewhere. The ground shifts below me and gravity pulls and I fall, face on concrete, teeth against teeth bit down hard; a mouth full of crushed jade.

Tell me what you know about dismemberment.

In the dark, the altar table glows red in the smoke. A neatly framed photograph of 婆婆 with her husband next to a statuette of the bodhisattva next to the *tudigong* next to a ceramic monkey from the Wong Tai Sin temple. A diorama of a fantastical afterlife. My mother once told me that incense burns because it means that our ancestors are listening to our prayers. So I watched the smoke rise and told 婆婆, *I love you*.

I didn't tell her about the blue track, or the beautiful blue girl, or the splinters of green still wedged between my teeth. I didn't tell her about the dried blood on my lips that looked more black than red. I didn't tell her about the god I had angered, or why I ran.

But I did get on my knees. And held what remained of the piece of jade, broken into many pieces, and said *please, please*.

How will you begin?

Between 2019 and 2022, an estimate of more than forty-thousand Hong Kong people moved to Taiwan, with an average influx of around 9000 per year into the country. Some went to escape from the shadows of their city cast long and flat on their passports. Some went to find hope. I wonder if anyone went in search of Wong Tai Sin, if anyone told him to come home.

Critical Reflection: Challenges and Future Endeavors

This capstone project has been a wonderful opportunity for me to consolidate my undergraduate education by putting my knowledge and research skills to the test. One of the biggest challenges presented by the project was to outline a clear research narrative that is focused and structured. Having written numerous academic essays for my undergraduate coursework, I have experience with organizing my research and thinking in a concise manner, but I was not prepared for the much larger scale of a capstone project, and I really struggled with finding a clear research direction in the beginning stages of the project. While I had many ideas regarding the academic communities that I wanted my project to be in dialogue with, narrowing down the scope whilst being mindful of the scholarly sources that I consulted was very difficult, and it took me much longer than expected to come up with a clear outline for my project. Having to synthesize a large amount of data and information was also a steep learning curve, since I wanted to strive for a good balance in the writing that reflects my own thinking without it being overshadowed by the research of other scholars. Through careful planning with the help of charts and tables, I was able to comb through the convoluted sections in my arguments and map out a structure that presents my discussion in a clear and concise manner.

Another challenge that I encountered was to decide on the research-to-creative proportion for my capstone project. In order to reflect my position as both a literature student and a creative writer, I had originally planned for this to be a hybrid project that had equal weight in both research and creative writing. But as I developed my ideas further, I ended up dedicating a lot more energy into the research component, because I realized that there was so much about the

lyric tradition and the conventional lyric subject that I did not yet understand, and making sure that I have a solid understanding in the literary area that my research was about was important for my creative writing practice as well. This was why I prioritized the research component in this capstone project, as I believed that there were key questions about the lyric genre that must be answered first in order for me to move forward in my own creative writing practice.

On that note, I see this project as a seed for the future research that I will be doing for my MPhil degree at CUHK next year. While this capstone project marks the completion of my undergraduate studies, it also represents the start of an exciting postgraduate journey, during which I can hopefully spend more time building upon the ideas that I have discussed in this project, and apply them in other areas of literary studies. I am confident that the research and communication skills I have gained during this project will become very useful as I continue to pursue a career in research. Although I was unable to flesh out the creative component as much as I had originally wanted to, I see the creative work in this capstone as a springboard for the kind of projects that I want to create in the future. Creative writing is a lifelong passion for me, and this capstone project only marks the beginning of a lifetime of creative pursuits. I am satisfied with the completion of this capstone project, and I am excited for the future endeavors it has prepared me for.

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DEAR, DEAR: A CODED EPISTOLARY

BAUTISTA Janelle Ann Valmonte

Supervised by Dr. NOGUES, Collier Desha

ABSTRACT

Dear, Dear: A Coded Epistolary began with a simple archive: the text messages between myself and a person from my past. What emerged was an experiment in digital haunting—a Large Language Model (LLM) trained on our correspondence to generate words we never wrote, the conversations we might have had. Blending creative writing with machine learning, I constructed an interactive web application where users encounter these algorithmic ghosts: notes composed in the conditional tense, apologies crafted by artificial intuition, all rendered in the aesthetic of handwritten stationery. As a séance in code, this project takes the corpus of a failed romance—texts brittle with longing, coarse from unresolved fights—and runs it through an LLM like a deck of tarot cards. Rather than a prediction, the output becomes a possession. The machine spits back messages we might've written, conversations we almost had, alternate timelines where we were kinder, or crueller, or simply different. It's an electronic artefact of a relationship transformed into a ouija board, where the cursor flickers between *then* and *what if*.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

There is an intimacy to data that no one warns you about—the way timestamps become a pulse, how message bubbles fossilise into artefacts of longing. A few summers ago, I met someone. It didn't last. But the messages did—hundreds of them, stacked like unplayed levels in a game I've since quit. *Good morning. Goodnight. I love you. I miss you*. Digital breadcrumbs that lead nowhere. In the electronic age, our most vulnerable moments are reduced to timestamps and character encodings. This coded epistolary interrogates this paradox: how do we mourn relationships when their artefacts are trapped in the cold logic of databases? Coding then, to me, became an act of narrative defiance. Literary studies often taught me to utilise technology as ancillary—a delivery system for text, not a collaborator in meaning. Creative computing, however, offered a way to show and interact with the gaps that prose could only describe. Through its construction, I aimed to confront the limits of both language and code, a way to translate code as more than just infrastructure, but rhetoric—an argument about how the real triumph of my work is in its refusal to be categorised—not as an essay, nor a poem, or a game, but as a communion where keystrokes become keepsakes.

Digital intimacy is a contested archive, a paradox I've lived with in the years since those messages were sent. Smith and Watson frame memory as a "source and authenticator" (16), but their theory cracks when applied to the digital. Memory, in the digital age, is a fragmented thing—shards of text suspended in databases, echoes of conversations trapped in JSON files. What does materiality mean when a love letter is a string of Unicode, when a timestamp replaces the sweat-smudge on paper? Experimenting with what Smith and Watson call the "embodied materiality of memory" (38), a collection of over 32,000 messages becomes more than mere data—they become artefacts of a relationship that no longer exists, yet persists in the algorithm trained to mimic its voice. Rather than reassembling these fragments into

coherence, what materialises is a museum of feelings—where the glass cases are server racks to expose their fractures, their contradictions and their latent possibilities.

The tension between archival preservation and generative reinterpretation defines digital memory. Paul Duguid warns that material artefacts, even digital ones, "operate as a mantle for both creating and validating information" (500), yet their stability is illusory. Archives are curated, not neutral. Deleted DMs, edited texts, cropped screenshots—preserved artefacts often a palimpsest of choices. The messages, though born as ephemeral chat logs from a short-lived relationship, are reimagined as tangible objects, cut and pasted into new configurations. On the other hand, the generated phrases are neither pure invention nor faithful reproduction, but what Ricoeur might call "mediated narratives," shaped by "symbolic systems that configure time" (74). Though it borrows the language of systems and interaction, this project was not developed as a game. It is something far more slippery—a work of electronic literature, a term as contested as the memories it seeks to reconfigure. In her chapter from *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature,* Amy J. Elias writes how virtual autobiographies provide a "lens through which [...] the 'self' [is] constructed by these genres and radically broadens the range of what counts as life writing" (513). Autobiographical memory here refuses the neat borders of memoirs or diaries. It spills, pixelated reconfigurations becoming the latest layer in the algorithmic cycle of obligatory updates: not to remember, but to remanufacture. Interactive endeavours resist containment and instead invite experimental engagements with forms that stitches itself together from fragments—part confession, part algorithm, part story.

The tension between preservation and reinterpretation mirrors debates in electronic literature. American literary critic N. Katherine Hayles argues that digital texts demand we consider "how literary works change as they shift from print to electronic media" (4), a transition made visceral as chat logs shed their ephemeral skins, morphing into a fragmented

constellation of handwritten confessions and algorithmic ghosts. Yet, where Duguid emphases the role of materiality in "creating and validating information" (500), it also exposes its fragility. The output of an LLM as a taxonomy of romantic dissolutions—reveals how machine-generated text, as Huang et al. cautions, becomes a "double-edged sword," extending creative possibility while risking "the decay of culture" (1).

Where critics warn of cultural erosion through unconstrained datasets, I aimed to inhabit a more paradoxical space, the "privacy threshold of emotional AI" (McStay 7). Here, the LLM operates within strict autological constraints—not scraping the public sphere, but metabolising my own keystrokes and my own vulnerabilities. These messages, digitally fossilised as an "embodied materiality of memory" (Smith and Watson 38), become strange artefacts: memories crystallised into data structures, longing parsed as tokens.

AI ethics often fixate on external exploitation—the mined, the appropriated. What happens, I wondered, when the training corpus is your own archived heartbeat? Rather than exploiting external data, I saw its potential to engage in what Riordan might recognise as a technologically mediated form of "scriptotherapy" (263), where the machine becomes not an appropriator, but an interlocutor for self-examination. Riordan dubs scriptotherapy as "the deliberate use of writing designed to enhance therapeutic outcomes" (263), a practice where the act of putting trauma into words on the page helps the mind make sense of the experience and reclaim power over it (263). In other words, grief, when pressed into language, becomes something else—a kind where writing becomes both a wound and a suture utilising the act of narrating trauma to reconfigure its weight. This psychological mechanism, however, depends on two conditions Riordan couldn't anticipate: the digitisation of intimate communication, and the algorithmic reprocessing of lived experiences.

Where scriptotherapy assumes a stable authorial "I" shaping narrative through deliberate composition, machine learning introduces radical instability. An LLM doesn't just

record—it reconfigures, exploiting what Riordan identifies as writing's capacity to "assuage obsessive internal ruminations" (263) while paradoxically amplifying them through synthetic repetition, creating a new paradigm for Riordan's "deliberate use of writing" (263)—one where the therapeutic act becomes a collaborative performance with non-human intelligence.

Conversely, the consent paradigm shifts decisively when creator and subject coincide. Duguid's concern over material artefacts validating information (500) transforms when the artefacts in question are-self generated. Chat logs already exist as what Smith and Watson attribute as "stable artefacts that engage with the complexities of lived experiences" (48). By processing them through an LLM as a means to engage with data as a medium for reflection and exploration through algorithmic mediation that differs from conventional uses of training data. Where Chakrabarty et al. examines AI as a collaborative partner (6848) for disparate voices, here the collaboration occurs intra-personally between my present curatorial self and past epistolary selves. Hayles' observation about electronic literature configuring new temporalities (5) manifests uniquely when the texts in question are temporal versions of oneself. The project does not reconstruct a relationship so much as stage what Ricoeur would call a "mediation of symbolic systems and [...] narratives" (74) between who I was when writing these messages, and who I am now interpreting them.

My idea did not begin with a blank page but with a blinking cursor in a code editor—a space where syntax errors and semantic gaps felt more honest than the polished veneer of traditional prose. My decision to transpose life writing into a digital medium emerged from a tension. As a student of literary studies, I was fluent in the grammar of essays and the rhythm of stanzas, yet consistently found myself drawn to the uncharted spaces where narratives mutate across languages and digital landscapes. A few semesters ago, a previous exploration of life writing asked students to consider how form bends memory, how medium shapes voice, and how the act of writing a life might fracture—or flourish—across languages, screens, and

generations. The seed was planted in an earlier life writing seminar where we dissected texts like Paisley Rekdal's *West: A Translation*，a work that exists in the liminal spaces of poetry collection, digital archive and historical excavation. Visitors to the website encounter the original Chinese elegy from Angel Island not as static text, but as a constellation of characters that can be clicked in any order—each selection generating a different "translation" in the form of Rekdal's responsive poetic medium ("诗 – Poem Page"). This duality—the way *West: A Translation* inhabits both code and paper—gave me permission to see creative computing not as antithetical to literary craft, but as its natural extension. If Rekdal could make databases poetic and search functions elegiac, then perhaps my own work could otherwise transform digital detritus into literature. Her work taught me that when histories are fractured by design, their retelling demands forms that are equally disruptive—forms that, like the railroad itself, lay new tracks between then and now.

What followed next was the question of what form this excavation would take. The archives of my life were not etched in photo albums nor journals, but were delineated within the flickering glow of a smartphone screen. I had no trove of snapshots to arrange into an autoethnographic collage, nor the patience for the slow unfurling of a novel. What I did possess, however, was a cache of text messages—endless bubbles of blue and grey. Here, I soon realised, was the new form of the modern epistolary: fragmented, fleeting, yet pulsing with the same raw immediacy as ink on parchment. Derived from the Latin word, *epistola* (199), the epistolary form has always thrived on what Seth identifies as "a written equivalent to conversations" (199), their power laying in the delay between writing and reading—the liminal space where emotions ferment and misunderstandings crystallise. What is a text, if not a letter stripped bare? The same hunger for connection, the same performance of authenticity, now compressed into thumb-tapped glyphs. Like the historical letters that Seth describes—which served as "a means of abolishing distance" (200)—digital messages inherit this dual nature:

intimate yet mediated, spontaneous yet algorithmic. They expose what Seth demonstrably describes as letters offering "unmediated access to the character's feelings and vision of events" (204) with epistolary fiction, extending this quality to digital correspondence. Like the "apparent simultaneity of the time of writing and reading" (Seth 204) in 18th-century novels, algorithmic messages collapse temporal boundaries while heightening their performative nature. Scholar Esther Milne calls it the "postal imaginary" (80), this skeuomorphic longing where new media dresses itself in the relics of the old (86). The envelopes becomes the inbox, the wax seal a read receipt. But the paradox remains: these exchanges—so intimate, so fleeting—are reduced into data. They wait in cold storage, not alive but not quite dead either, ready to be resurrected by an algorithm or a wandering heart. The epistolary form has always thrived on intimacy, on the illusion of eavesdropping on a private exchange. Letters, diaries, journals—they were windows into unguarded moments, where the act of writing becomes a performance for an audience of one. As Milne observes that even in the "eclipsing [of] the materialities of [...] particular communications systems," this intimacy is always mediated, always staged (87). The handwritten confession, the sealed envelope, the diary tucked beneath a mattress—each carries the weight of artifice, the knowledge that even the most private words are shaped by the spectre of being read.

Digital correspondence, then, is the epistolary form's natural evolution. They are at once ephemeral and eternal, a message sent then swallowed by the cloud, yet lingering like a half-remembered dream. They bear the same contradictions—the illusion of spontaneity, the performance of authenticity—but with the added friction of emojis, of timestamps, of the unspoken rules that govern how long one should wait before replying. To mine these digital fragments is to confront a paradox: the most intimate exchanges of our lives, reduced to data points, waiting to be reassembled into something new.

DEVELOPMENT AND PRODUCTION

In the early minutes of Spike Jonze's 2013 film, *Her*, Theodore Twombly sits in his sunlit office, staring at a photograph of an elderly couple. A client's bullet points at the corner of his computer monitor lists out a summary of their relationship: Chris, love of my life, happy 50th anniversary. Twombly inhales, then begins dictating: *"I can't believe it's been 50 years since you married me. And still to this day, every day, you make me feel like the girl I was when you first turned on the lights and woke me up…"* (*Her* 1).
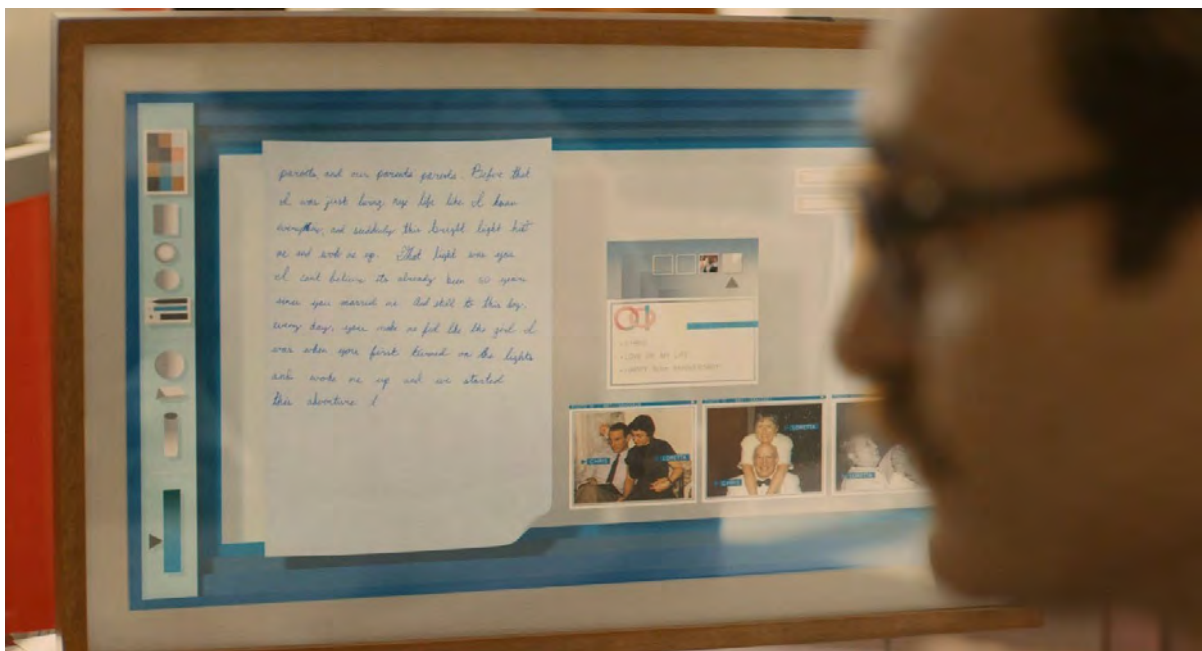
Fig. 1. Theodore Twombly (Joaquin Phoenix) composing a letter in *Her* (2013). Source: Annapurna Pictures, 2013. Wild Side Video, 2014.

In Jonze's film, the art of articulation has since become a luxurious commodity. Clients submitting photographs and summaries to be eloquently verbalised by Theodore as their ghostwriter reflects the same contemporary reality we face today. The film is set in 2025 and features a diverse variety of clientele that seemingly lack the emotional breadth required to articulate their emotions on paper. Instead, they submit photographs and prompts for the writers to base their writings on, much like how generative AI (GenAI) produces work based on the materials and prompts that we feed it. Inspired by this very sentiment—this outsourcing of

articulation—I turned to the production of my very own LLM to perform a similar mediation for my own past.
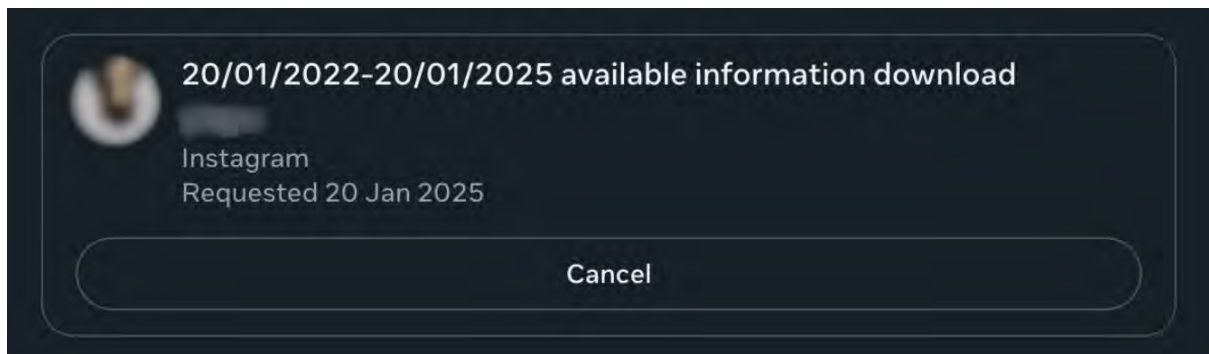
Fig. 2. Screenshot of account data request on Instagram.

The work began in the quiet hours, when the glow of my laptop screen was the only light in the room. I downloaded the messages—all 32,000 of them—watching as the months of conversation compressed into a single ZIP folder on my laptop (see fig. 2). Just as Theodore's clients surrender their memories to be shaped by a more eloquent hand, I surrendered data to an algorithm, allowing it to reassemble my conversations with a past lover into phrases I could no longer construct myself. In identifying and employing generative algorithms as a vehicle for collaborative writing (Chakrabarty et al. 6848; See et al. 1), I take these photographic shards of past conversations and reassemble them into new configurations of truth and fiction that allows me to strike a balance between "entertaining gameplay and compelling storytelling" (Nichols et al. 1). At its core, it is generative poetry, though not in the traditional sense. The LLM-recomposed text messages—those spliced-together phrases neither wholly mine nor wholly artificial, function as a kind of found poetry, excavated from the digital sediments of a relationship. They are artefacts of a voice that no longer exists, yet persists in the machine's uncanny mimicry. Like all poetry, they thrive on compression, on the spaces between words, on the weight of what is left unsaid.

The process felt like exhuming something, like brushing dirt from old bones. The digital ephemera of a relationship preserved in JSON files and chat logs became my raw material—

the kind of memories Smith describes as "successive manifestations of self-representation" (4), each timestamped message a pixel in the portrait of what we were. The data was messy, cluttered with Spotify links, typos and half-finished thoughts—the digital detritus of two people trying to understand each other across screens. The parallel between Theodore's sentimental ghostwriting and my excavation of data to reveal a turn to intermediaries, both human and algorithmic, not because we cannot speak, but because we hope they might speak more clearly.

Cleaning the corpus became archaeological. I wrote scripts to parse the messages, to separate the meaningful from the mundane, but no algorithm could filter out the weight of certain phrases. "I miss you" appeared 157 times. "I love you," 892. The LLM required structure, so I segmented the conversations by emotional arcs—the giddy euphoria of early infatuation, the taut silence of unresolved fights, to the hollow aches of farewells—and observe Reese-Weber's taxonomy of romantic dissolution to "better capture the nonlinear fluctuations in relationship qualities throughout the development of a relationship" (205). The model's output, naturally, was never exact. It generated phrases that spliced our voices into something uncanny—lines we never wrote but could have. From this, the algorithm's output arrived like dispatches from a foreign country—clinically precise translations of emotional realms it had never crossed. *"See, flirt is not something that u miss"* read one, *"Let's talk in the physical and non-physical sense"* said another. Thus, what came to be was the birth of a speculative epistolary—messages we never wrote, conversations that never happened, a relationship unspooled into parallel universes now laid bare by a machine trained on the grammar of our affection.

These digital artefacts needed grounding, needed to be pressed back into the physical world like flowers between pages. Building the website was an exercise in translation—an endeavour into how I could make the digital feel as tactile as intimate letters tucked into envelopes meant only for the recipient to cast an eye over. The language model coughed up

phrases that I sent out into the world like paper boats on a river, asking friends to transcribe them on paper with their own hands. They came back in fragments—some on notebook paper torn hastily from spirals, legal pads from old lecture notes, or in the margins of erased calculations ghosting beneath gridded papers. I collected these pages like gathering evidence. The differences between them were everything—the way one person's cursive made the words feel nostalgic, another's block letters written with a thick marker made the texts seem angry and sound loud. Some wrote quickly, their letters slanting forward as if rushing toward the end, others formed each character carefully—like they were handling something fragile.
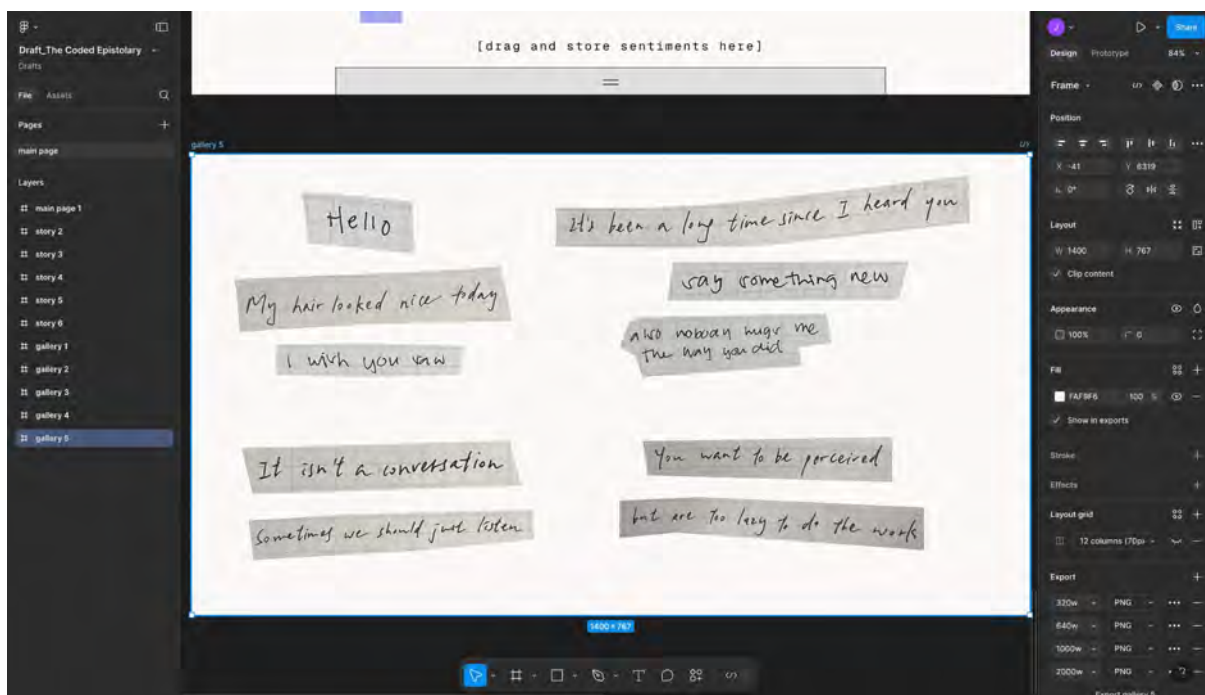
Fig. 3. Screenshot of LLM phrases transformed as a collage of handwriting in Figma.

When I photographed these written artefacts, I made sure to capture their imperfections. These blemishes, words lifting off the lined paper or with the ink bleeding through pages, perform as Smith and Watson's "embodied materiality of memory" (38), proving that even digitised, emotions resist clean encapsulation. I didn't want them neat. I wanted them lopsided, uneven and as fractured as the memories they represented. Digitally, I cut them apart with Figma as the cutting board (see fig. 3), ensuring no two fragments aligned perfectly. The result

was a collage of handwriting—some phrases barely legible, others painfully clear, all of them hovering in the uneasy space between machine-generated text and human touch. Between the shortcomings attributed to the success of its output quality, the value attributed to the LLM model lies precisely in its failures—the way it generates phrases such as "The idea of a structure is a thing that worries me" or "Thank u for being so entrenched in white masculinity?" These anomalies, born from the recomposition of personal correspondences, expose the absurdity of treating human relationships as data to be mined. Like a generative model's "chameleon-like" mimicry of context—its tendency to echo prompts with eerie precision falters in coherence (See et al. 8-9). They reveal what gets lost—or uncovered, when we uncritically extend the tools of intellectual labour into artificial domains.
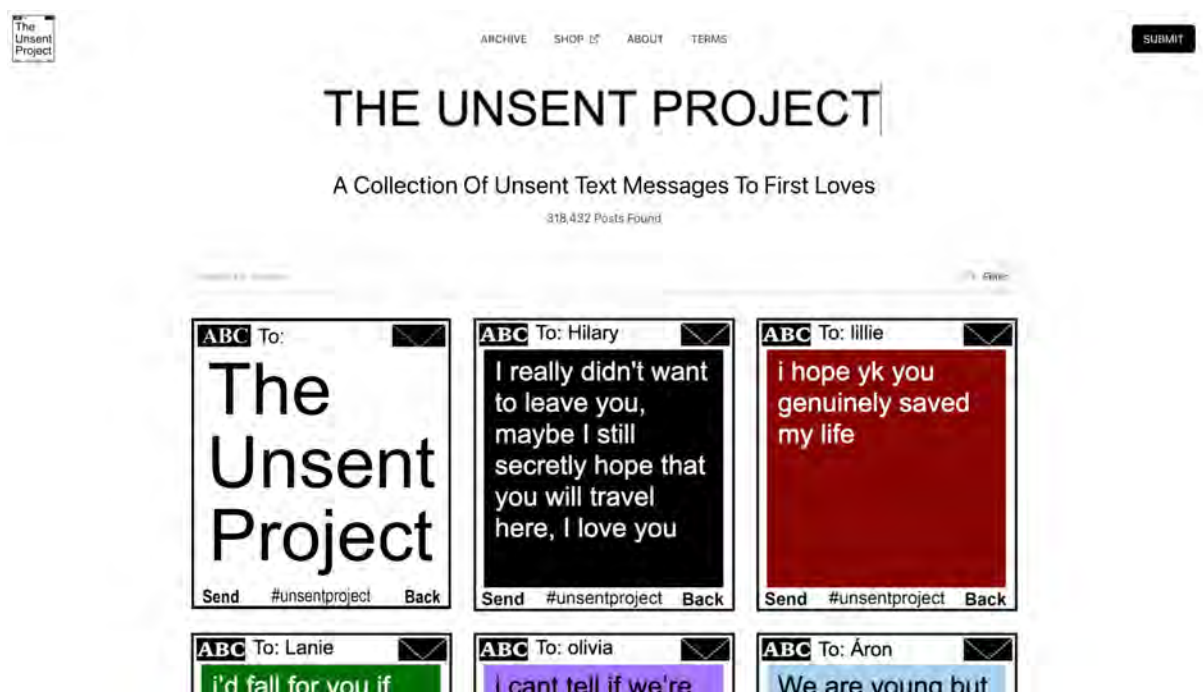
Fig. 4. *The Unsent Project* by Rora Blue, 2015.

Be that as it may, I am not the first person to mine heartbreak for data. Rora Blue's *The Unsent Project* archives thousands of unmade confessions (see fig. 4). Broadly defined to include lovers, friends, family—and even pets, submissions can also be personalised to include names and colours that the sender associates with said love and further contributes to a vibrant

exploration of love's emotional spectrum, behaving as "an emotional outlet for those that need it" ("About"). But where Blue preserves, I resurrect. *The Unsent Project* archives millions of these spectral messages, yet as Ricoeur observes, memory is never static—it demands narrative reconfiguration "mediated by symbolic systems and [...] narratives" (74) to become meaningful. My intervention lies in using the LLM not as an archivist, but as a medium for a technological séance that channels a former relationship's unwritten possibilities from digital correspondence as found poetry. The output—generated phrases splicing my ex-lover's clipped pragmatism with my rambling vulnerability, exists somewhere between recovered memory and speculative fiction.
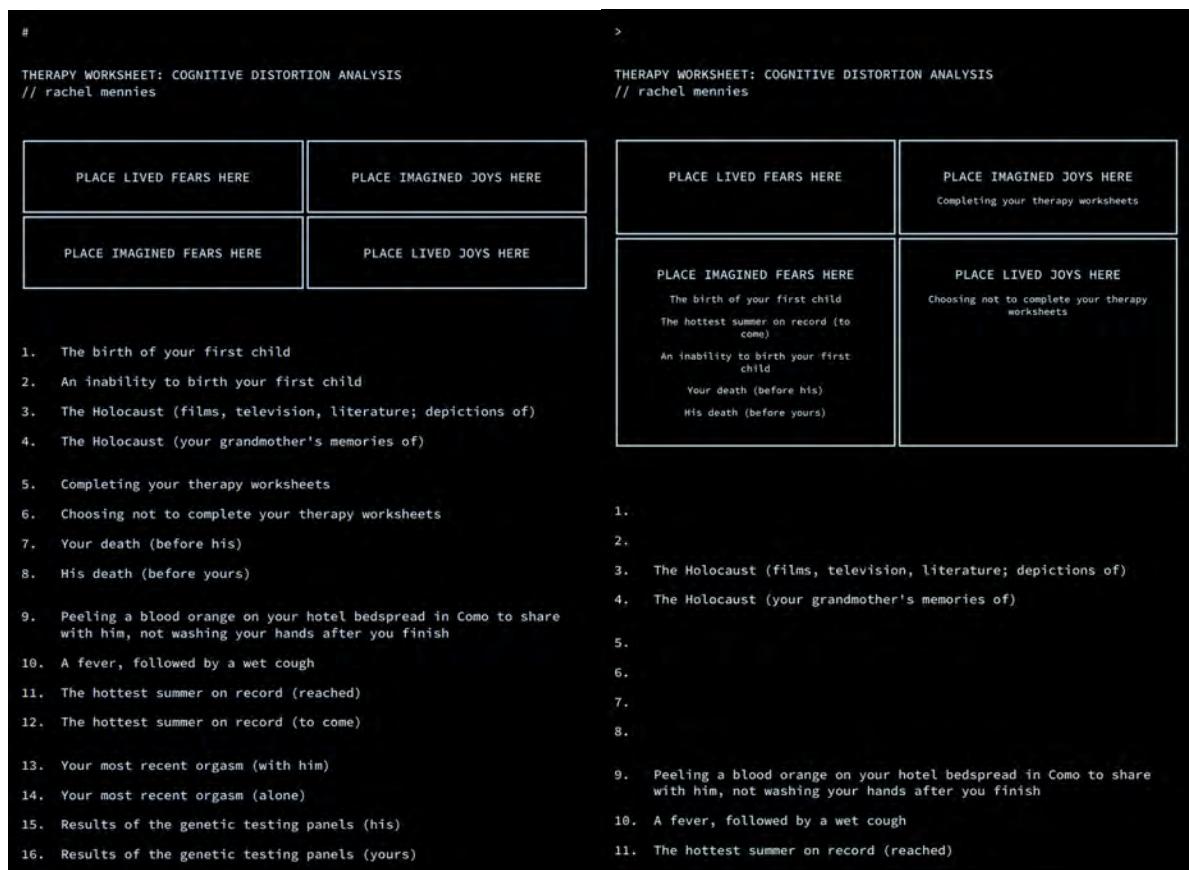
Fig. 5. Screenshot of *Therapy Worksheet: Cognitive Distortion Analysis* by Rachel Mennies, *Code Lit*, Virtual Press, 2023.

In producing the website's interactive interface, I drew inspiration from Rachel Mennies' *Therapy Worksheet: Cognitive Distortion Analysis*, primarily with its interactive

quadrants that allowed users to reposition lines of poetry based on their own lived experience (see fig. 5). A poem can change with every reader, with every day of reading. I wanted that same sense of participation, of a collaboration between the text and the reader. What Mennies achieves through interactive poetry, the way "the birth of your first child" shivers between joy and terror depending on the reader's own lived experience, this project replicates through algorithmic pareidolia. Here, the utilisation of a personal dataset frames memory as a candid subject "constituted through experience" (Scott 779)—a truth vividly rendered through a medium of intimate correspondences interactively communicated through my own work. In corroborating with the capacity words—and in this case, line-items, can be interpreted based on the user's own lived experiences, a story that has since been rewritten by an algorithm can be further altered based on an individual's perceived emotional and experiential experience.
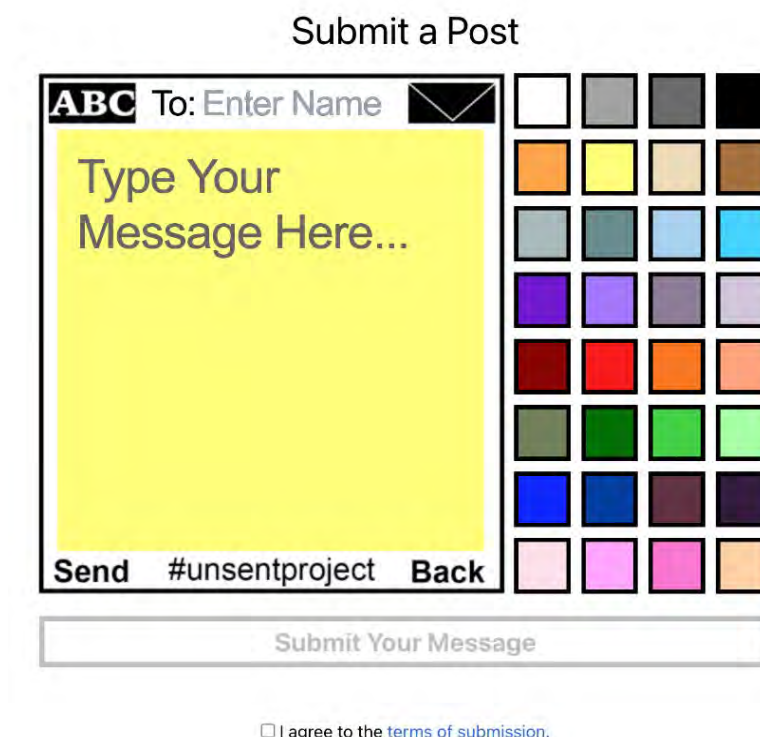
Fig. 6. *The Unsent Project* by Rora Blue, 2015.

Memory is not archival but performative, to make a work about memory interactive is to acknowledge the fundamental truth that remembrance is never a solo act. Digital mediums are not simply a series of zeroes and ones—it is a space of affective engagement

(Kirschenbaum 10). Rora Blue's *The Unsent Project*, for example, demonstrates how handing users tools to articulate suppressed emotions can transform private pain into a form of communal release (see fig. 6). In the same fashion, I wanted to emulate a sense of catharsis in physically dragging a generated phrase and dropping it in storage or stitching it into a new sentence. The interactivity that comes from the act of dragging phrases around, toggling arrows and narratives transforms the reader into a kind of collaborator, a co-author of meaning. As such, rather than a simple means of creative expression, I wanted to turn this fragmented nature of memory into a form of narrative therapy—the kind that Ricoeur might call a "narrative reconfiguration" (74) that provides participants with an outlet to externalise their own unresolved emotions by emphasising user agency through the proxy of my own story. These algorithmic recompositions calls back to Mennies' *Therapy Worksheet*: *Cognitive Distortion Analysis*, where repositioning poetic fragments becomes an act of participatory mean-making. Like Mennies' interactive poetry, the interface demands a confrontation with entropy—inviting users to stand amidst the wreckage of memory, gathering shards and fitting them into patterns of their own design.
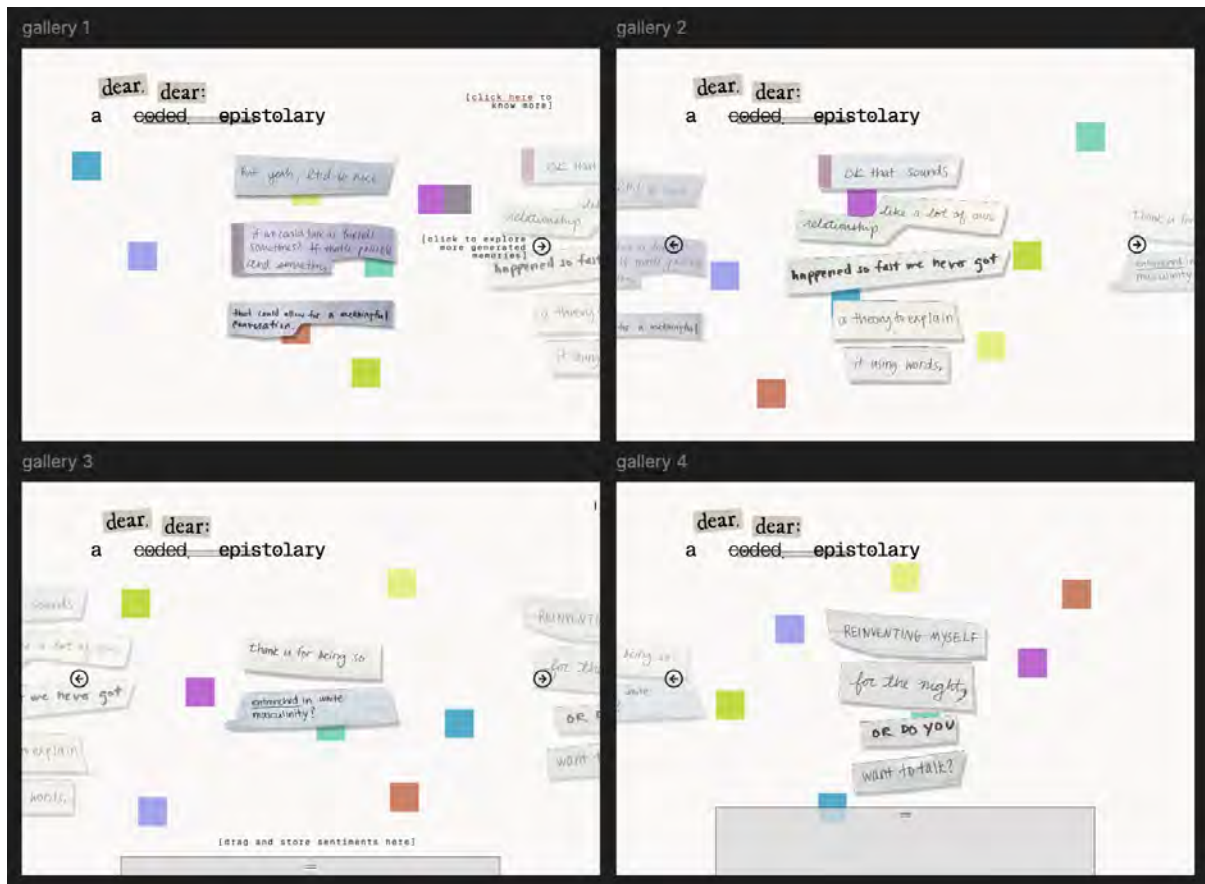
Fig. 7. Mockup of the interactive gallery interface for *Dear, Dear: A Coded Epistolary*

designed on Figma.

As the generated phrases—fragments of disparate exchanges, spliced and reconfigured,

required a visual metaphor that expressed their output as an arrival of salvaged correspondence,

I built upon a web application to better honour the messages' patchwork nature (see fig. 7).

Rendering this visible, the web interface makes use of core front-end languages such as HTML,

employed to build the application's skeleton with semantic precision. CSS, on the other hand,

developed the application's responsive layout to ensure the production of an engaging and

responsive interface—vital for amplifying the web interface's dynamic user experience (UX)

and visual aesthetics crucial to enhancing the emotional facets of the project. Tying it all

together, JavaScript plays a critical role in the interactivity of the application that weaves into

the project's premise of narrative deconstruction and reconstruction. Integration of these

technologies are strategically curated to make the most of their strengths—CSS for design,

HTML for structure, and JavaScript for functionality (see fig. 8). As a result, what emerges as a result is not simply a gallery, but what Smith might call an embodied reading experience directly "implicated in materiality" (21). With the production of an ouroboros-like function, a carousel gallery guides users through the curated phrases, while a digital drawer allows them to drag and drop fragments with a click of a button. Ensuring that no fragment ever truly disappears, the words simply rotate out of view, waiting to be recalled.
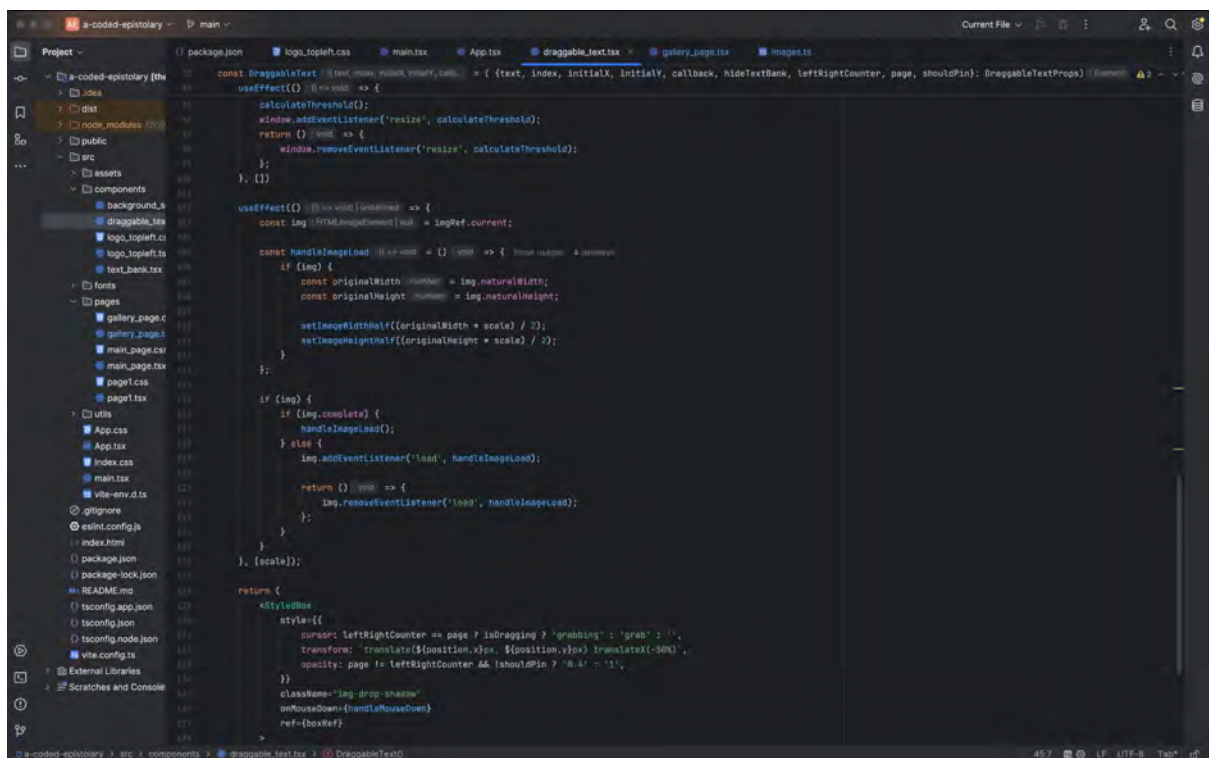
Fig. 8. Screenshot of JavaScript framework (React TSX) of the web interface for *Dear, Dear: A Coded Epistolary* with IntelliJ IDEA.

I also developed an explanatory page that users can freely toggle and interact with to better contextualise the project (see fig. 9-10), to explain its premise without demystifying the interface's capacity for user control and freedom. As opposed to subjecting myself to preservation, I opted for transformation—a similar way to what Hayles calls the conflation of context and chronicle (5) through the production of electronic literature as a vessel for expression. The messages, once suspended in digital amber, now live as mutable artefacts that remind us that even in the digital age, remembrance requires something to hold onto.

Fig. 9. Title page for *Dear, Dear: A Coded Epistolary*.

Fig. 10. Contextual page for *Dear, Dear: A Coded Epistolary*.

Dear, Dear: A Coded Epistolary is published on janellevb.github.io/a-coded-epistolary.

What exists now is merely the first iteration—a prototype of longing. While it is currently only

optimised for widescreens such as laptops and desktop PCs due to developmental constraints

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brought forth by time, the possibilities for future enhancements and scalability opens avenues for me—both as a coder and as a creative, to position present limitations as conceptual strengths. Within the paradox of digital artefacts, their incompleteness is their vitality. Much like the sentiments that inspired it, *Dear, Dear: A Coded Epistolary* remains deliberately, productively unfinished—a system waiting for its next collaboration—whether that be the capacity to save and revisit constructed letters, optimising the application for tactile interfaces, or code I haven't yet learnt to write. Here, what matters is that at the heart of its production—the algorithm's whispered recompositions to the interface's fragmented storytelling—remains intact, ready to be translated into whatever forms the future demands of it.

CRITICAL REFLECTION

The first time I tried to build this project, my code collapsed spectacularly—not with the polite error messages of beginner tutorials, but with the guttural scream of a system pushed beyond its limits. I had envisioned creative computing as a fertile middle ground where my technical ambitions could shake hands with my two years of literary training at CUHK, but instead, I found myself stranded in no-man's land, staring at a terminal that initially mocked my hybrid aspirations. What followed was months of false starts and recursive frustrations, where every theoretical insight seemed to crumble against the unyielding logic of actual implementation.

The computational language barrier proved the most immediate obstacle. While I could dissect a poem's meter or unpack a novel's theoretical framework with ease, making a React component properly render conditional tenses left me paralysed. There was something humbling about how mistyping a colon with a semicolon could collapse an entire interface. The compiler didn't care about my thesis statement or my close-reading skills. It saw that one wrong character and threw the whole system into darkness, while my professors would have circled the same error with a red pen and a casual "revise?" in the margin. Each crash forced me to confront how differently meaning operates in these two worlds I was trying to marry. What saved me was learning to think differently about failure. The interface's glitches transformed from bugs to features when I realised their poetic potential. I stopped trying to force the project into purely literary or computational boxes and instead embraced the messy reality of their intersection.

What began as a capstone has become a compass. I enrolled in the English Studies programme on a whim—a dart thrown blind at a board of possible futures. Two years ago, I couldn't have told you what creative computing meant, let alone imagined it as a career. Now, that "whim" has crystallised into purpose. This project proved I can navigate the no-man's land

between disciplines, but more importantly, it revealed how many unmapped frontiers remain. This hard-won perspective has since shaped my next steps. I'm pursuing platforms that won't just tolerate but actively cultivate this hybridity—where I can push LLMs to generate not just coherent text but meaningful emotional artefacts, where interface design is understood as a narrative act. The industry implications are also equally compelling, tech firms increasingly need storytellers who understand API architecture, while publishing hungers for writers fluent in uncharted possibilities. What CUHK gave me wasn't just a degree, but a blueprint for synthesis. The bugs I couldn't fix, the errors that resisted debugging, these aren't failures but coordinates for future exploration. My undergraduate work ends not with mastery but with a clearer map of where mastery might lie—in those liminal spaces where code and metaphor, memory and machine, continue their uneasy dance.

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LAM Chun Kiu, Anson

Supervisor: Dr. Carolyn LAU

Somewhere Between *Flèche* and Bone—Food and Consumption in Mary Jean Chan's

Queer Poetics of Postcolonial Hybridity and Lived Liminality

Reflection #1

I find it rather fitting to write my capstone project on Mary Jean Chan for, among many strong reasons, the sheer number of times I have encountered her works throughout the course of my undergraduate studies (which are all somehow inevitably tied to Professor Collier Nogues). I first read Mary Jean's "Flesh" in Collier's course "Reading Poetry." I took an immediate liking to it if only because it was just ambiguous enough to provoke in me an insatiable curiosity to decode and explicate it. The same year, I was lucky enough to be selected for the Oxford Summer Program offered by the department (and assessed by Collier). For this course, we had to conduct research on an Oxford-related topic, which happened to be Mary Jean, an Oxford alumnus. This was the first time I explored *Flèche* in greater detail and truly fell in love with her poems. The semester after that, Visiting Professor Dorothy Wang opened a course on Contemporary Asian Diasporic Poetry. Needless to say, Mary Jean again came under academic scrutiny.

At last, the icing on the cake which fortified my passion for her poetry came when she visited CUHK for the Poetry's Englishes Symposium co-organized by Collier and Professor Wang. During the event, Mary Jean skillfully addressed each inquiry about her poems, about

poetry-writing, and about critical interpretation with poise, eloquence, and intellectual rigor. I had the privilege of talking to her, getting a photo, and having her sign my copies of *Flèche* and *Bright Fear*. I remember someone jokingly said these signed copies might be worth thousands in the future (and still I would keep these books in my possession forever); but I understand it takes as much effort from literary critics as it does from the poet themselves to create a lasting impact on the literary canon, so if ever I conduct literary research abroad, Mary Jean will be the first author in mind.

There are many other reasons why her poems resonate so much with me. Growing up queer in Hong Kong, I have experienced first-hand a lot of the internal conflicts and the external battles which Mary Jean depict in her poems. Yet, she always manages to present them in a novel, precise, and most importantly sophisticated way that does not only make me feel seen but is actually also illuminating about critical issues in LGBTQ+ politics, postcolonialism, feminism, and English literature. By virtue of her rigorous academic background, she is acutely aware of the intricacies of British colonial influence on Hong Kong's sexual and gender politics. But perhaps more impressively, she always manages to meticulously weave together the sociopolitical and the personal. Her poems are an impressive tapestry stretching across such diverse themes as motherhood and motherland, gender/sexual identity and colonialism, romance and cultural hegemony and food and diaspora. As such, there is always some level of challenge required to fully understand the complexity of her ruminations and preoccupations, but simultaneously her works are also far more accessible than many of her contemporary poets, and this I believe is the defining quality of Mary Jean's writings.

It is this balance between opacity and accessibility, as well as the intricate blend of sociopolitical and the lived experience, that imbues her poems with complexity and

sophistication and that has inspired my own poetry. I have never been an elegant writer or a very original one for that matter, nor have I any intention of becoming a poet; but the three or four poems that I have written on impulse and even shared during Outloud Poetry, I owe to Mary Jean. It is she who gave me my poetic voice and her poems from which I have derived thematic inspiration.

As any queer community in the world would know, representation is essential in initiating social change, which is why it is ever more pressing that academia should pay attention to Mary Jean's poems. Heavily acclaimed and awarded, Chan is among the most internationally recognized queer poets from Hong Kong. She is the first Hong Kong poet to be published by Faber and Faber, joining the ranks of T. S. Eliot and Kazuo Ishiguro. What actually positions her as a poet with immense potential for influence is her balance between artistry and academic literacy. Having previously done Political Science and earned her Creative Writing PhD researching postcolonialism and seminal works in the Asian diasporic literary canon and now also a guest lecturer at Oxford University's Creative Writing program and a Poetry Fellow at Cambridge, she above anyone is capable of bringing Hong Kong literature as well as its critical themes onto the world stage.

Her works also belong to a canon of Asian British diasporic writings, whose relevance is increasingly pertinent. Following the 2019 protests, Hong Kong experienced a mass exodus with many emigrants choosing to relocate to the U.K. due to issues of political asylum and former colonial ties, constituting a significant growth for the Hong Kong diasporic community in Britain. Mary Jean, as a diasporic poet is particularly vocal about issues of racial and sexual discrimination in the U.K. in *Bright Fear*, as well as gay rights in Hong Kong in *Flèche*. Therefore, this thesis would also contribute to an ongoing discourse which attempts to map out

an East Asian diasporic canon that emerged as a counterpart to the far more rigorously studied South Asian diasporic canon in the U.K.

With all that being said, there is still an irking lack, in fact absence, of critical writing done on Mary Jean and her works. There is no doubt that her works qualify in every regard for scrutiny under intellectual discourse, from their cultural and sociopolitical significance to the sheer dexterity and proficiency of her craftsmanship. Thus, in selecting Mary Jean as the sole focus of my capstone, it is my hope to initiate a much-needed academic discourse on her claim to canonicity.

Mary Jean Chan works within a long tradition of Hong Kong diasporic writers like Sarah Howe and Marilyn Chin who are no strangers to food tropes. Yet arguably, none of them is as prolific in the use of culinary imagery as Chan. Chan's poetry collections, *Flèche* and *Bright Fear* are rife with mentions of food and consumption, often foregrounding such food items as tea, milk and rice, as well as the ritualized domestic dinner. More than a reminder of home, food is inextricably tied to the themes of queerness, matrilineage, colonialism, and diaspora that Chan advances in her works.

With regard to the history of food criticism in literature, various literary critics have expounded on food's role in cultural semiotic systems, most notable of whom include Terry Eagleton, who, in line with post-structuralist tenets, says of food that "the one sure thing … is that it is never just food," but rather it is an "endlessly interpretable" element of a text that extend beyond the "semiotic" into the "somatic" (Eagleton). He echoes Roland Barthes, who views food as a signification of culture and "a system of communication," in which food and by extension the act of consumption as signifiers denote a culturally unique set of socially constructed meanings governed by "the economy" and "the mental life of a given society" (Barthes 14).

Since such breakthroughs, food tropes have become a favorite object of literary criticism, especially in contexts which pertain to cultural identity. By virtue of this signification of greater sociological systems, food and consumption have acted as reliable launchpads into such literary themes as subjectivity and alterity, social marginalization, and matrilineage. More specifically, food criticism has demonstrated considerable utility in the analysis of minority literature such as queer writings in diasporas. Similar to my research, Shuk Shun Chan, writing on food and East-Asian British novels and films, points out that literary criticism within the Asian British context has tended to favor a "South(-east) Asian perspective" over "an East-Asian focus" (2). He then

attempted to bridge this research gap, but also neglected the poetic form in the process, which arguably rewards the study of food tropes more than any other form due to its highly porous nature, allowing for greater symbolic and connotative productivity along the paradigmatic and metaphoric axis. This thesis also differs from his in that I will focus on postcolonial discourses rather than diasporic ones, even though Chan's poems are inevitably diasporic by genre.

In line with current trends in postcolonial Hong Kong studies, this essay will avoid considering Hong Kong identity as being either of the dichotomy between the colonizer and the colonized, or home country and host country. This is because the historical construction of Hong Kong as an ontological space and as a subnational identity is complicated by the fact that China in the form of the PRC did not exist when Hong Kong was ceded to England. For this reason, scholars often deem that Hong Kong exists ontologically as a space of its own, emerging in "the post-war era" circa 1949 (Tsang 222). However, ideologically speaking, pre-colonial indigenous residents, regardless of their involvement in the various historical iterations of dynasties and sovereignties, were within reach of the spread of Confucianism. Therefore, in a nutshell, while Hong Kong is distinguished from China and England, it is at once a hybrid of the two, and this hybrid is still continuously negotiating cultural values against both Confucian and colonial influences. Those born into colonial Hong Kong such as Chan are likely to find ethnic and historical roots in what we know as China today, given the mass exodus which took place during the Cultural Revolution, but they would likely find ideological and sociocultural roots in both China and England. As a result, conducting literary archaeology on the circumstances leading to various forms of gender and sexual oppression is one of immense difficulty, and it often leads to confusion and, as I attempt to prove, a sense of postcolonial liminality—an in-betweenness— which stems from the hybridization of colonial and pre-colonial influences.

Upon this backdrop, this thesis aims to explicate the ways in which Mary Jean Chan, a queer woman growing up in conservative Hong Kong, utilizes food as a poetic motif to shed light on the cultural oppression upon her sexuality through colonialism and matrilineage. Drawing on Bhabha's postcolonial notion of hybridity, I argue that Chan's experience reflects a liminal identity caused by a colonial hybridization which weaves together the importation of oppressive colonial norms and the practice of filial piety within Confucian ideology into an inextricably oppressive totality against her sexuality. To begin the unraveling process, the first section of the essay will subvert the popular notion that sexual oppression stems from traditional Chinese ideology about filial piety and instead investigate the manner in which food is used to reveal sources of oppression that take root in British colonialism. Then, the second section will reintegrate the role of Chinese ideology into the British-imported oppression on sexuality through the notion of consanguinity in Confucian ideology to reveal tensions in Chan's lived experience.

A Hybrid Normativity: Food, History, and Oppression

Chan's first and most critically acclaimed collection of poems is called *Flèche*, and it is evident why she chose this title. The word "flèche," meaning "arrow" in French, has a triptych of meanings. First, it is an aggressive and sometimes transgressive fencing technique that takes the opponent by surprise through a flurry of movements. Second, it is "a slender spire" often placed upon the roof of a church ("Flèche, *N.*"). Third, it is a homonym of "flesh." There is no lack of abundance of symbolic references respectively to the phallic, transgressive, religious, patriarchal, and homoerotic in the triptych, but more so it is microcosmic of the burden of the intersectional oppression she faced as a queer, diasporic woman growing up in colonial Hong Kong. Similar to other diasporic literature written by women, Chan uses food tropes and matrilineal conflicts as

symbolic of the complex oppression by pre-colonial national cultural inheritances and the hegemonic importation of colonial rules and conventions. Thus, this section of the essay aims to explore Chan's use of tea and other food items to symbolize a hybrid oppression by both traditional Chinese ideologies and imported colonial conventions. This hybrid oppression then constitutes what Bhabha deems the cultural third space, which is key to the sense of marginality and liminality, which is an ambiguous, transitory and in-between space, that Chan expresses.

In Chan's poetics, tea serves as a central metaphor for institutionalization—the internalization of cultural norms. This is evident in a multitude of texts, but it is established most fundamentally in "A Hurry of English," in which the narrator states, "A public history seeps into the body, the way tea leaves soak up / the scent of the fridge" (Chan *Flèche* 12). The narrator establishes this dualistic yet codependent relationship between the body and the "public" cultural institution as the body internalizes or "soak[s] up" cultural norms and then performs them (12). This is done through invoking quotidian domestic imagery of food and appliances such that readers are reminded of Barthes' argument that food reveals the "mental life of a given society," or the "public history" (14; Chan 12). The narrator then implores the readers to "interrogate the walls [of the fridge]" for "An odourless room is not necessarily without trauma" (12). Extrapolating from the metaphor of tea as body, fridge as institution, the "odourless room" would connote an ethereality and difficulty to delineate an ontological rendering of Hong Kong culture as it was experienced by the narrator (12). This ethereality causes distress to the narrator because she is frustrated by the confused amalgam of norms that she is forced to internalize. Much as "O chews its own tail," the search for an origin of oppressive norms is frustrated by the cyclical process of the normalization of values (12). Particularly, it is her language and sexual desires which she questions against homophobic, anglo-centric normative values, as she describes her

homosexual "desires dressed themselves in a / hurry of English to avoid [her] mother's gaze"

(12). The narrator associates England with sexual liberation as evident in her Googling

"'homoeroticism + Shakespeare,'" which contrasts with the rejection of queerness by appealing

to Chinese traditions as embodied by the mother (12). Still, there is an ethereality as to the true

source of her sexual repression and oppression, and it is this thesis' goal to explore Bhabha's

third space theory as explanatory of this ethereality, which really is a sense of liminality from

living in a monstrous hybrid of inherited Chinese ideology and imported British ideology.

The rationale behind this "hybrid" consideration of Hong Kong culture in relation to

oppression stems from Bhabha's understanding of culture. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha

posits that the idea of "*nationness*," "cultural value," and "collective experiences" emerge in the

"interstices" of cultures (2). In previously colonized regions, such interstices emerge as a

fluctuating, continuously "negotiat[ed]" hybrid of pre-colonized traditions and the colonizers'

ideologies—a hybrid which distinguishes itself from "*pre-given* ethnic or cultural traits" or those

of the colonizers (2). What emerges is the aforementioned third space—a cultural "transnational

totality" emerging in this interstitial space (221). If the first space is the original, pre-colonial

Chinese heritage of ideology such as Confucianism, and the second space is the colonial power

dominated by Protestant belief, the colonial and postcolonial collective consciousness of Hong

Kong would constitute a third space deriving from but distinct from both the culture of the

original sovereign power China and the colonial power England. It is in this third space "where

the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline

existences" for the colonial subjects, which constitutes a liminal existence for both the culture

and its practitioners because the negotiation of cultural values is transhistorical and primed with

"antagonistic or contradictory elements" (25). This will be uncovered through Chan's account of

her gender and sexual oppression in "Versions from the Twenty-four Filial Exemplars" and "The Importance of Tea," but such is the way Bhabha recommends critics to view ever-morphing hybrid cultures. To, in Derridean terms, incise a positive ontological rendering of a culture at a given time through interrupting the endless deferral of the signifying chain, Bhabha recommends what critics would now call an intersectional approach, which considers race, class, gender, and by extension sexuality, towards understanding third spaces because oppression is often explicitly symptomatic of the continuously fluctuating cultural negotiation of norms and values. Through investigating these symptoms or intersections, readers may excise pieces of history as relevant to Chan's experience with oppression.

From "A Hurry of English," it is evident that the narrator's primary suspect for the source of her sexual oppression is tied to her Chinese heritage from the way she pictures "the mother's gaze" as antagonistic to her "desires" (Chan *Flèche* 12). "//" echoes this Chinese rejection of homosexuality through the symbolism of chopsticks and the ritual of dining with family.[1] The narrator explains that her mother "expects [the narrator's British lover] to fail at dinner," citing the trite metaphor that "To the Chinese," same-sex couples "are chopsticks: lovers with the same anatomies," drawing attention to their overlapping sexual function and the inability to reproduce (37). In Confucian ideology, filial piety is one of "the most fundamental concepts in early Chinese ethics," and one which plagues Chan as exemplified in her criticizing it in "Versions from the Twenty-four Filial Exemplars" (Radice 185). Mencius deems "no posterity" as the "greatest" "unfilial" act towards parents, and thus the naturalization of heterosexual relationships finds powerful roots in Confucian social structures (Pi 1). In fact, it is still an argument which

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[1] Although it is possible to link the word "ritual" to the anthropological concept related to rites of passage, for the purpose of the essay, it is taken loosely to emphasize the performance of conformity and complaisance in order to achieve the status of pious daughterhood.

dominates anti-gay marriage rhetoric in contemporary Hong Kong legislative affairs. The

narrator's mother then says, "*chopsticks* in Cantonese sounds / like *the swift arrival of sons*,"

invoking not just the natural heterosexual filial order, but also the gender hierarchy within the

patrilineal Confucian system in which male descendants were preferable for passing on the

family name and properties (Chan *Flèche* 37). Hence, the narrator is rendered at the outermost

margin of Confucian society for her sexuality and gender. In reaction, the narrator chooses to

"forget that [she is] bilingual" and "imbibe each *yes*, spit out every *no* among scraps of / shell

and bone," choosing again to suppress her indignation through filtering the "expletives," and

projecting ambivalence through the quotidian dining ritual of separating meat from bone—the

ingestible and the unpalatable (37). Such is the way she is forced to perform a ritual of

indifference and forced piety towards her disapproving parents.

Thus far, I have only considered oppression in relation to Chinese Confucian thought, and

yet Chan's poems also foreground the role of colonialism in the oppression of homosexual

individuals. It is important to note that this dual oppression extends beyond a simple overlapping

of ideologies between classical Chinese thought and Christian British thought, which is a binary

mode of thinking Bhabha wishes to deconstruct. Rather, it is an ongoing process of negotiating

differential Chinese and western values which constitutes the third space and which "creates a

tension peculiar to borderline existences" (Bhabha *The Location of Culture* 218). This is the

premise in which the politics of sexuality takes place in Chan's "The Importance of Tea," and

what will illustrate the tension of mutual (dis-)identification in the making of Hong Kong as a

marginal, liminal space in Chan's poetics.

"The Importance of Tea" places the postcolonial new normal in Hong Kong—the hybrid

third space—in direct confrontation with its colonial history using tea as the central metaphor.

The conflict emerges when the aunt of the Chinese narrator's British partner visits them in England. The aunt "arrived" and "asked for / *normal tea*," which confuses the narrator as it "sounded a bit like *normality*" to her "untrained ears" (Chan *Flèche* 67). The intrusive arrival of a British person from a previous generation and her subsequent demand for normality is reminiscent of the hegemonic colonial importation of Christian norms and values in an attempt to civilize and "reform" the ethnic and cultural Other (Bhabha "Of Mimicry and Man" 126). This importation of norms is echoed by the double entendre of "Importance," which shares etymological roots with "import," such that "The Importance of Tea" is also the importation of norms. The aunt expresses dissatisfaction at the narrator "as if [she]'d failed / to properly assimilate" for not having "normal [British] tea" "in the cupboard," which included "*Assam, Darjeeling or Earl Grey*" (Chan *Flèche* 67). These normative selections reveal an exploitative colonial history in which Britain, fascinated by "Chinese tea cultivation," "establish[ed] plantations in India" and appropriated Indian blends for their profit, leading to popularization and eventual normalization (Arora 11). The notion of assimilation in the diasporic experience is also repurposed to signify the desire for colonial subjects to "emerge as 'authentic' through mimicry," where through institutional change and the subjects' desire to ascend the ranks of ethnic-based social stratification, they adopt the values and dispositions of the colonizers (Bhabha "Of Mimicry and Man" 129). However, there remains an irreconcilable "excess" or "slippage" that causes the narrator to "[fail] / to properly assimilate" (129; Chan *Flèche* 67).

Chan then compares this irreconcilability to the poststructuralist split, "signifier and signified refuse to conjoin," which has three implications (67). Concerning semiotics, this is one fundamental difference between Chinese and English, for the Saussurean signifier-signified split fails to account for the neither "arbitrary" nor "motivated" iconicity of the Chinese writing

system (Ting 111). Concerning Bhabha, the severance accounts for the third space being the site where new meanings emerge beyond binary classifications of Chinese identity and British identity as seen in Chan's alienation from home but simultaneous failure "to properly assimilate" (Chan *Flèche* 67). Concerning Chan's own oppression, this "refus[al] to conjoin" can be read as a reference to gay marriage and by extension the criminalization of homosexuality, which was outlawed by the British in 1865 by the "Offences Against the Person Act" (Chan 67; Han & O'Mahoney 33). It is in sexuality regulations that readers find the negotiation of "antagonistic [and] contradictory elements" between Chinese and British culture (Bhabha *The Location of Culture* 25). This is because the modern concept of homosexuality which links "acts" to "identifications" was technically written into existence through Britain's attempt to write it out of legality (Han & O'Mahoney 6). Prior, the Chinese public had been said to be "general[ly] indifferent to" it, and in "vernacular stories," they even "positively depicted" gay characters (7). Hence, the criminalization of homosexuality and subsequent naturalization of homophobic rhetoric actually finds roots in the west.

This realization is a confusing one because modern LGBTQ+ advocacy is propagated by the west, and anti-gay marriage politicians in Hong Kong have since co-opted the traditional Chinese marriage system as the primary argument against gay marriage. As aforementioned, Chan is equally confused as to the origins of her oppression in "A Hurry of English," in which she describes that her "desires dressed themselves in a hurry of English to avoid [her] mother's gaze," and how she googled "'homoeroticism + Shakespeare'" as a misattribution of sexual liberty to the English and a misattribution of homophobic oppression to China, filial piety, and her mother (Chan *Flèche* 12). Such is the result of "the negotiation of [the] incommensurable differences" between pre-colonial China and colonial England, which creates not just a confused

hybrid of culture in the form of Hong Kong as the third space, but also the "tension peculiar to borderline existences" which plagues those who are marginalized by a multifaceted, transcultural, and transhistorical oppression, as seen in Chan's poems thus far (Bhabha *The Location of Culture* 25).

While this section has focused primarily on deconstructing normativity as solely a remnant of traditional Chinese ideology and more so a British colonial import, the next section aims to re-problematize the Confucian ideology of filial piety as contributing to the hegemonic hybrid oppression through the concept of consanguinity in Confucian filial piety. In other words, having shed light on socio-political issues of normativity and oppression, the next section will delve into how this normativity is received and reconciled by Chan, especially as it pertains to the mother-daughter relationship.

Lived Liminality: Dining and the Mother-Daughter Complex

The connection between food and familial relationships extends beyond *Flèche* into Chan's second collection of poems, *Bright Fears*. Although in the latter she focuses predominantly on racism, the pandemic, and poetry-writing within the migrant experience, throughout which there is a near-absence of food imagery, food returns immediately onto centerstage in section three "III. *Field Notes on a Family*." It is no coincidence that food and the dining process are thematically tethered to familial relationships, as has been substantiated earlier through a brief dialectic of Confucian ritualism. However, this connection proves more extensive than is obvious and thus will constitute the bulk of this section. Much in the same way as Chan reveals through food imagery a liminality under the hegemonic cultural hybrid due to a misrecognition of a dichotomous colonizer-versus-colonized relation, so does she experience liminality within her familial relationships in the form of a mother-daughter complex. I argue

that her precarious relationship with her mother is exacerbated by the dining ritual and the Confucian notion of consanguinity which is more colloquially known in Hong Kong as *gwat1 juk6 zi1 can1* (骨肉之親). Upon establishing the connection between consumption and filial piety, and filial piety and motherhood, I will investigate the role of the dining ritual in Chan's matrilineal relations as an intermediary and liminal process that lingers between acceptance and rejection, but which constitutes a point of equilibrium in the mother-daughter relationship.

The notion of consanguinity is frequently expressed in Confucian dialectic. This is reflected particularly in *The Classic of Filial Piety*, wherein the cardinal and first chapter states, "Our bodies—from a single hair to a bit of skin—are derived from our parents[;] we must not in the least injure or wound them. This is the beginning of filial [piety]" (2-3). While kinship is observed in numerous cultures, few take blood relations to such extremes as parental ownership of offsprings' bodies. Yet, this practice is obviously taken literally as reflected in the aforementioned "Versions from the Twenty-four Filial Exemplars" in *Flèche*, where children sacrifice their bodies to maintain their parents' comfort. Chinese scholar Liu Qingping coins the term, "consanguineous affection" to refer to this bodily tether, which he posits is what "Confucius and Mencius … consider … to be the highest value of human life" and takes precedence over all other virtues such as "humaneness, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and truthfulness" (Liu 3). In other words, filial piety is the "root" of all virtues. This notion of "root" is what fuses consumption to motherhood and motherhood to motherland: since it is the mother who bears the child, the illusion of consanguineous unity is deepened by the parasitic nature of gestation, where the child derives nourishment and in fact its entire materiality from the mother, thus appearing as an extension of the mother's body; and because this emphasis on bodily "roots" derives from Confucian ideology, "root" also expresses a third layer of meaning in

relation to the cultural and ethnic identity of one who has emigrated, which then ties back to the

ideology of filial piety being the "root" and the "mother" of her suffering as a result of

consanguinity. Such is the way that all these concepts are weaved into an oppressive and

hegemonic maternal totality in Chan's life, which also accounts for why her preoccupation with

identity and oppression is predominantly maternal in nature.

"Reunion" in *Bright Fear* expresses this oppressive rhetoric of maternal possession in a

dreamscape through its depiction of a cannibalistic reverse childbirth. In the dream, the narrator

describes being in a "hotel in Bloomsbury" with her mother who "asks [her] to fill it with images

of [her]self" (Chan *Bright Fear* 52). This appears to be an innocuous wish of a parent wishing to

catch up with her daughter who lives across the sea. However, it shifts into a rhetoric of

possession when the mother proclaims a desire "to devour" her daughter (52). Although it is

expressed much in the same way as cute aggression, a phenomenon in which adults feel

compelled to pinch, squeeze, or bite cute things out of instinct, this proclamation is also haunted

by the undertone of consanguineous affection in filial piety. In this latter interpretation, the

mother is asserting bodily ownership over her child by invoking the ingestion of flesh and bones

in what echoes a reversed process of childbirth. By citing a time when the narrator was "so tiny

once," the mother is calling attention to her dissatisfaction with the current physical and

emotional distance which alienates her from her daughter, as contrasted by their closeness during

the daughter's infancy (52). The forceful ingestion of the daughter is then an assertion of the

then-physicalized consanguineous affection during the childrearing process, but which dissipated

as the narrator became emotionally and physically alienated from the mother. This need to assert

ownership due to physical alienation is reiterated when the narrator claims that her mother

"stares whenever she hasn't seen [the narrator's] face for a long time" but then expresses

discontent with her "hair [being] too short" (52). The appearance which the narrator is projecting

conflicts with her mother's wishes such that there is a tension between the narrator's self-

conceived identity and her identity as the consanguineous daughter. The former is one of free

expressions of her sexuality and gender, and the latter is one of sexual and gender normativity as

is desired by the mother. As mentioned, this normativity is a colonial import, but the need to

suppress the self and appease the parents is one of Confucian origins.

This constitutes another liminal space in which the daughter must negotiate between her

sense of filial duty to appease the mother, and her private life which conflicts with the mother's

heteronormative beliefs. The narrator demonstrates this duty by "mak[ing] sure [her] mother has

a hard seat" to alleviate her back pain, and also by "wearing [a] watch" which her mother "gave

her for [her] thirtieth birthday" but which she "do[es] not usually wear" (52). The watch

symbolizes a concession and a performative role which she adopts in the presence of her mother

but sheds otherwise. Strikingly, at this point of conflict, dining emerges as an intermediary or a

distraction, as the narrator begins to describe in almost unnecessary detail their dinner "at a

Hunan restaurant on Gerrard Street," where they order "wood ear mushroom salad," "prawns,"

"Lanzhou stretched noodles," and "a pot of Iron / Buddha tea" (52). The setting and the foods are

notably ethnic, which project an illusion of home and normalcy so that the narrator and her

parents can "enjoy the / cacophony of families" with the broader British setting temporarily cast

aside and forgotten (52). The poem also ends with the somber line, "We pretend that I live in

London alone," which points to another concession on the narrator's part to avoid bringing up

her private life with her female partner in order to appease her mother as an act of filial piety

(52). Instead of confrontation or reconciliation, the narrator participates in a ritual of small talk

with her parents where "[She] ask[s] about them. They ask about [her]," but fearing to delve

deeper into their personal lives (52). This concession fails to resolve the narrator's liminality because it is a pretense and a temporary, performative role, yet it is an effective point of equilibrium between acceptance and rejection. This effectiveness is expressed more explicitly in another poem in *Bright Fear*.

"[F]ireworks on the tongue" mirrors "Reunion" in various ways but elucidates the role of the dining ritual in relation to mediating the mother-daughter tension. The mother in this poem expresses a similar disapproval of her daughter's sexuality, and the narrator reacts by conceding, confessing that "yes my partner had stayed that week in an Airbnb in / order that my parents might visit me in peace" (44). However, what this poem foregrounds is the narrator's inner conflict from performing actions which contradict with her true desires and beliefs. The poem is written in a stream of consciousness where one scene flows into another through a repetition of "and yes," which, contrary to its affirmative appearance, actually signifies concession and a subtext of "despite your presumptions." She does this to juxtapose a series of contradictory beliefs and actions which spring to mind as she "bit into the turbot sautéed in herb oil," such as her "conscious choice to be pescatarian in spite of those tragic documentaries about farmed salmon" and how she noticed the "homeless man" before "call[ing] an Uber … to return home" (44). Among these contradictions is the line about her partner staying at an Airbnb to avoid parental conflicts, which then leads to the concession that the narrator is "still trying to / achieve [her] way into love" (44). Through the verb "achieve," the narrator highlights her forced performativity of filial piety to appease her mother for only then would she be deserving of love. Still, the repetition of concessions reveals a reluctance or a conflict between her asking her partner to leave and her wishing it were unnecessary. However, as soon as the narrator recognizes the mother's longing for normalcy and companionship as when the mother "told [the

narrator] to / take care of [her] since it has been so long," the narrator recognizes the necessity of concession and performativity in carrying out her filial duties, so she tellingly detracts from the tension once again like "Reunion" and uses descriptions of food to "distract [her family] into harmony (44). This constitutes a point of liminality is that it exists between two totalities— acceptance and rejection. The mother demands intimacy, love, and care just as the narrator wishes to provide them, but their differences remain unreconciled and perhaps irreconcilable. In much the same way as the postcolonial liminality frustrates Chan, this impasse in the mother-daughter relationship is what keeps it reoccurring throughout *Flèche* and *Bright Fear* over an array of contexts, but all of them revolve around this one unreconciled difference.

Here it might be helpful to return to the notion put forth in the previous section about dining as ritual where the narrator finds it necessary to project ambivalence while having to indignantly "imbibe each *yes*, spit out every *no* among scraps of / shell and bone" as the parents launch homophobic remarks at the narrator (*Flèche* 37). A similar sentiment of projected ambivalence through performative dining is expressed then, through the juxtaposition between inner dissatisfaction and outer performance. Chan here argues for the necessity of the projected ambivalence and endurance in the performative ritual of dining regardless of how indignant and oppressive it feels to her. This is because she now recognizes "fine dining" as the "social lubricant of [her] family," or a distraction from what might otherwise lead to rejection or even emancipation (*Bright Fear* 44). She claims that without the performative dining ritual to project a façade of "harmony," "there would have been all the love [they] could / muster or a desolation none of [them] could have withstood" (44). Either the family would be completely accepting of her identity, or it would create catastrophic tears in their relationship that causes suffering in every family member. In between these two extremes, one which has consequences too painful to

imagine, Chan seems to have found a point of equilibrium in the form of the performative dining ritual. Dining is a means through which they could project some sense of normalcy even if there are unresolved or even irreconcilable differences. The aforementioned negotiation between being entirely herself and an entirely filial daughter has become suspended in time, stuck at an impasse and mediated only by performed social rituals that signify piousness, such as swallowing pride and projecting ambivalence in "//," pretending to live alone and initiating small talk in "Reunion," and suspending selfhood to preserve harmony in "fireworks on the tongue." This point of equilibrium remains liminal but a necessary compromise within Chinese households to avoid confrontation or even disintegration. The attitude is also paralleled by the Chinese government, which has long asserted the "'Triple No Policy' (no approval, no disapproval, no promotion)" in relation to homosexuality to avoid having to confront or write into legislation a definition for homosexuality, contrary to what colonial Britain did many years ago (Miles-Johnson and Wang 324). While the reasons may differ, the overarching attitude towards queer relationships on the interpersonal and the sociopolitical level has seemingly reached a stalemate—but it is one that allows queer individuals to continue living without persecution and prosecution.

In summary, this familial liminality operates in conjunction with the colonial liminality in that they create the illusion of the hegemonic maternal totality of motherhood and motherland as the sole source of gender and sexual oppression. However, using Bhabha's hybridity as optics, this essay revealed that it is a combination of pre-colonial Confucian influences and colonial Protestant influences that constitute this oppression, although it is easy to misrecognize either as being the greater of two evils. While the source of homophobic normative values can largely be attributed to colonialism, the role of Confucian filial piety in carrying out these values in

interpersonal relationships is equally salient and detrimental to queer individuals growing up in Hong Kong. Through the use of quotidian motifs such as food, consumption, and dining, Mary Jean Chan deconstructs the postcolonial hybrid and reminds readers of the complex interplay of factors which contribute to modern oppression of queer individuals in Hong Kong. While this essay is by no means exhaustive in explicating all the various themes in Chan's poems, it establishes food as a useful focal point to view oppression and Hong Kong as a cultural hybrid as well as an entry point to deconstruct the hybrid to better understand the sources and origins of cultural norms in Hong Kong.

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Reflection 2

This capstone project truly feels like the culmination of my undergraduate studies at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. The vast majority of my ideas in the essay originate from various interdisciplinary courses I have taken over the years. This includes departmental courses such as "ENGE2390 Reading Poetry," which introduced me to Mary Jean Chan, the "ENGE2960" Oxford Summer program, which deepened my understanding of British colonialism, "ENGE3320 Hong Kong Literature in English," which introduced me to Bhabha, and "ENGE4240 Special Topics in Literature," which gave an overview of canonical queer writings in Asian diasporas. My auditing "ENGE5710 Critical Approaches in Literary Studies" also established a solid foundation in my understanding of canonical literary critics, three of whom I cited in the essay—Barthes, Eagleton, and Derrida—with Derrida being one whose ideas were critical to my understanding of Bhabha's nigh-impenetrable writing. Then, there was "ANTH1020 The Study of Global Humanity," which provided the idea of liminality and using food as a critical lens, "GDRS1002 Feminist Theories," which taught me about feminist and queer criticism, and "CURE2022 Feminisms," which was key to my understanding of intersectional criticism. This is one strength which I have come to recognize in myself, and which will be of great value in my future endeavors—the curiosity and ability to cross-pollinate interdisciplinary knowledge and ideas.

Having been accepted into the Postgraduate Diploma in Education program at CUHK and having also decided to enter the field of education in the near future, I am entering a different discipline that requires a new body of knowledge. However, I remain optimistic that I can continue to apply the liberal values I have gained and the humanistic knowledge I have learned in the field of education both in theory and in practice. Upon fulfilling my scholarship

requirement of teaching for three years, I will reconsider entering academia through a postgraduate degree abroad, likely researching Mary Jean Chan once more and perhaps other Hong Kong poets such as Nicholas Wong and Sarah Howe. I am keenly interested in a career in research and teaching English Literature at the tertiary level, so my experience writing this capstone is an invaluable one as I have gained much more in-depth experience with the research process. Through writing this thesis, I have gained a more realistic understanding of what it is like to conduct an independent research project: it is definitely more challenging than I had expected, but also more fun when I get to work on themes and issues that I am passionate about. I have also become better acquainted with my strengths and weaknesses particularly in conducting research, ones that I will bear in mind should I ever return to academia.

One of the greatest challenges I encountered in writing my capstone was defining the scope of the thesis. As someone who enjoys cross-pollinating ideas, I often run the risk of overloading my essays with too many ideas. This is especially so when working with talented poets like Mary Jean Chan, whose poems are so thematically dense and formally porous that there are far too many ideas I would like to discuss but not enough word count to discuss them, especially when there are as many critical approaches to the analysis as there are themes. Hence, this was a great opportunity for me to practice restraint and to limit the scope to one motif (food) and two major themes (hybridity and matrilineage). There are far more ideas that I would have loved to explore, but those will have to wait until my postgraduate pursuits when I would have more words to explore those themes. For now, I have learned that there is always more room to expand on even the narrowest of ideas and I have no reason to fear a great word count.

Also, I had some difficulty cohering the two themes of hybridity and matrilineage given their respective nuances. Having only worked with Bhabha's idea of mimicry in ENGE3320, it

proved a great challenge to learn from scratch about hybridity and matrilineage, and then to link them together. However, I believe I have done sufficiently well to familiarize myself with key concepts through extensive reading and viewing and also done well to put forth my arguments in a clear and sensible way. Growing up, I was trained to always provide the "correct" answer that the teacher wanted, and still I was always dubious about my own ability to do so. This thesis and this degree in general have taught me that any argument can be correct so long as it is amply and logically justified. For many of the greater questions in life, there is no answer but a well-reasoned one. This knowledge will undoubtedly be a great source of courage and confidence when I have to pass on world knowledge to the classes I teach. At the same time, the poststructuralist thinkers have also taught me to never be too trusting of any conclusion I come to even if they are well argued for there are often other perspectives that can be argued just as well, if not better. This honestly is something I wish more teachers in Hong Kong understood and is something I hope to embody and pass on to my students.

Overall, I am satisfied with everything I have learned throughout my four years of undergraduate studies. It is because of my time in the English department that I have learned to do extensive research, read prolifically, always justify my arguments, and be open-minded and curious about new ideas. I am excited to embark on a journey of English language teaching while keeping in mind and hopefully even passing on what I have learned throughout my undergraduate years about literature, about English, about culture, about humanity, and about learning to my future students, but I also remain optimistic that someday I will return to the literary studies and academia, ready to earn my PhD and make my mark on the field.