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“Tam Zai dialect”: language ideologies and indexicality of “non-standard” Cantonese in Hong Kong.

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Abstract
This paper studies the language ideologies of standard and non-standard language of Hong Kong people in the post-colonial era, by demonstrating the dichotomy of standard and non-standard within the dialect Cantonese. Through the case study of a local commercial advertisement, I examine how the mediatised linguistic event was taken by the audiences through an analysis of the related metalinguistic online comments it aroused. By drawing on the framework of “orders of indexicality”, I demonstrate how “non-standard” Cantonese became indexical of the national power.

Keywords
Language ideologies, standard and non-standard dichotomy, orders of indexicality, crossing, Cantonese, Hong Kong, immigrants, language and nation

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**Introduction**

Nation-state is considered as the legitimate form of political structure of our time and language plays a paramount role in constructing a seemingly homogeneous speech community who share a common national identity based on one language. Indeed, language and nationality often become synonymous (Coulmas 1999) in everyday general discourse (e.g., Chinese people speak the Chinese language, French people speak the French language, etc.). The co-existing significations and the interchangeable use in an unreflected way of these terms suggests that both language and nation are ideological notions. How a language is tied to identity, morality or values shows how the speakers of the language want to organize their life in certain ways, which form social structures.

Language ideology is a mediating link between social structures and speech, and ideology influences social, discursive and linguistic practices in a significant way, as Woolard (1998) suggests. When one variety is chosen as national or “standard” language, it implies that other varieties and variations become “dialects” or “non-standard” language. Standardisation of a language further reinforces such dichotomy as it has a function for boundary setting, group differentiation, imposition of power and maintenance of social hierarchy. The use of specific linguistic form engages a symbolic power (Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991) that is socially constructed.

This paper aims at going beyond the simple dichotomy of language as “standard” and dialect as “non-standard” by examining the sociolinguistic situation in Hong Kong. Cantonese – a Chinese dialect, being the “non-standard” at national level, is widely spoken by the inhabitants of Hong Kong as a local “standard”. Under the strongly established Cantonese culture, migrants, especially those of the lower socioeconomic class must learn Cantonese as a second language in order to assure
their employability and hence integrate into the local society. The practice of speaking Cantonese with a second language (L2) accent contributes to the emergence of “non-standard” Cantonese. “Non-standard” Cantonese is a unique phenomenon because it demonstrates the dichotomy of “standard” and “non-standard” within a dialect. This kind of case does not exist in European languages. For instance, there would not be a variety called “non-standard” African American Vernacular English (AAVE) when AAVE is already considered as a “non-standard” variety. Therefore, whether it is a language or dialect, “standard” or “non-standard” depends also on both linguistic and extra-linguistic factors. The relationship between the two can take on various forms (Coulmas 2013). My study will empirically enrich the framework of standard and non-standard language dichotomy.

The case study in this paper is a commercial advertisement entitled 《譚仔有嘻哈》“Tam Zai has laughter” for a local chained noodle restaurant called 譚仔雲南米線 taam4 zai2 wan4 naam4 mai5 sin3, or Tam Zai1 in short, produced by a satiric online broadcast channel TVMost. Unlike the advertisements shown on the mainstream channels, this advertisement was first diffused in January 2018 on social media platforms: TVMost’s official Facebook Page and YouTube channel. Since it is a commercial advertisement, the content of the video consists of some marketing techniques for branding. For instance, it says in the descriptions that the video is trilingual in [粵/英/譚] (Cantonese/ English/ Tam Zai dialect). The advertisement utilises the “non-standard” Cantonese phenomenon in Hong Kong context, names it as Tam Zai dialect and assumes it as a linguistic skills indispensable for working in Tam Zai.

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1 The noodle shop of the advertisement seems to have its official name only in Chinese 譚仔雲南米線 (in Jyutping: taam4 zai2 wan4 naam4 mai5 sin3). There is a diverse variety of the unofficial romanised version like Tam Zai, Tam Jai or Tam Chai. Here I employ the version Tam Zai which is the closest to the Jyutping version to represent the noodle shop throughout my paper.
Instead of hard selling the noodles, the advertisement tries to sell their product indirectly through associating the noodle shop with a social phenomenon which may generate or arouse a kind of feeling and create resonance. Albeit fictional, the “non-standard” Cantonese performance in the advertisement leads audiences to debates in public online discussions. Through analysing the advertisement, I examine the media representations of language ideologies in Hong Kong. By analysing the related metalinguistic comments collected online, I disclose the language attitudes of the native Hong Kong Cantonese speakers towards the “non-standard” Cantonese spoken by immigrants from mainland China. From these analysis, I reveal how the unique political, historical and social context of Hong Kong has contributed to the non-standard variety of a language becoming an indexical of the national power.

Background
The sociolinguistic situation in Hong Kong

Hong Kong has always been perceived paradoxically as an English-speaking international city and an ethnically homogeneous Cantonese-speaking community. Unlike any other ancient colonies in the world, Hong Kong did not become an independent state. Instead, it was returned to China from British rule and became the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) under the policy of ‘one country, two systems’. After the handover in 1997, the linguistic situation in Hong Kong seems to have no big change from the colonial period. Apart from keeping Chinese and English as the official languages, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government promotes the Putonghua linguistic capacity, the national official language, in addition to Cantonese the local vernacular and English aiming at creating a trilingual culture in the post-colonial era.
Cantonese, the monumental pillar of Hong Kongers’ identity

Cantonese, in spite of being a non-standard spoken language at national level, is the unmarked choice of code used in Hong Kong society which carries a local prestige. Various historical factors over the past few decades have contributed to the prestigious status of Cantonese. Firstly, the vernacular education policy of the colonial government had promoted the spread and use of Cantonese by inviting the intellectuals from nearby southern China who were mainly Cantonese-speakers to operate schools and designed the curriculum. Then, in 1974 the British government granted the official status to Chinese language and implicit recognition to Cantonese by using the term ‘vernacular’ in official documents when precision was needed. The booming of the entertainment industries in the 80’s and 90’s further strengthened the tie between Cantonese and Hong Kong local identity with cultural products like Cantonese movies and Canton-pop which were also exported to the East and South-East Asia.

“Non-standard” or “accented” Cantonese

Hong Kong is indeed not as ethnically homogeneous as some publications describe. “Non-standard” or “accented” Cantonese is not a novelty in Hong Kong society either. It has been spoken by diverse ethnic communities in Hong Kong as L2: the Filipino and Indonesian domestic helpers, the Indians and Pakistanis from the former Commonwealth countries, Cantonese learners of the English-speaking expatriates, etc. Apart from that, since Chinese dialects are often not mutually intelligible, the Chinese immigrants also need to learn spoken Cantonese as their L2. It is normal for these Cantonese speakers to have an L2 accent. More importantly, a “non-standard” variety of a Chinese dialect is a rare phenomenon because a dialect is
basically passed on through “word-of-mouth” learning in families. This implies that a dialect is often L1 of the speaker. It is either one speaks or does not speak the dialect. Plus the fact that Putonghua serves as the lingua franca in mainland China gives not much intentions for outsiders to learn the local dialects when they move and dwell in another region in mainland China.

Immigration history in Hong Kong

At social level, apart from the existing international and Chinese ethnic settlers, the HKSAR government has launched the One-way Permit Scheme since 1997, which allows 150 daily quotas of mainlanders to settle in Hong Kong for family reunions, with the permits issued by the mainland Chinese authorities. After the handover for more than 20 years, Hong Kong has already welcomed over one million of Chinese migrants from the mainland through the One-way Permit Scheme. Starting in the late nineties, Hong Kong is facing the problem of low birth rate and aging population like any other industrialised and economically developed societies. Hence it relies heavily on immigrants to fill up the least-skilled jobs. In addition to the increase in cross-border economical activities which facilitated cross-border marriage with the composition of mainly Hong Kong men marrying mainland women, the majority of people from mainland who came to Hong Kong for family reunion are female. These female mainland immigrants settling in Hong Kong may learn Cantonese and tend to take up low-skilled jobs in catering and sales industries. Indeed, immigration is nothing new to Hong Kong history. Since the British occupation of Hong Kong in 1841, Chinese immigrants from the Guangdong region had been recruited as low-cost labourers. However, the mass exodus of immigrants as political refugees from mainland China to colonial Hong Kong occurred after the Second World War, due to the collapse of the Nationalist Government and the
proclamation of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. The majority of these refugees were from the nearby Guangdong province with part of them from Shanghai and other commercial centres in China. Thus, immigrants in Hong Kong are distinguished by the two different waves: the immigrants in the post-war period who had lived the British colonial period, were “nativised” and became Hong Kongers of the older generation, and the immigrants who came after the handover, with the majority of female, being commonly referred as the “new immigrants”.

The linguistic diversity of Chinese community in the post-war period

Based on the census of 1966, Tsou (1997) recounts the five major linguistic groups of Chinese speakers in Hong Kong who were not always mutually intelligible. The largest group is the Cantonese speakers who are from Guangzhou (the capital of the region) and its vicinity like Sanyi, Nanhai, Panyu and Shunde. That also explains the use of notion “Guangzhou dialect” (廣州話) to refer to Cantonese as it is the lingua franca of these provinces; Then, the Siyi speakers, or commonly refer to Taishan speakers, form a distinct group from the west estuary of the Pearl River. The dialect is considered as a branch of Cantonese yet it is not comprehensible by the Cantonese speakers; Next, the Chaozhou speakers who are from the extreme eastern coast of the Guangdong province speak a Min dialect. Albeit situated in the same region, the Chaozhou dialect spoken in this area is mutually unintelligible with the other dialects in the region, and the people from here do not identify themselves as Cantonese but Chaozhou people. The Hakka speakers, mainly rural farmers, can be seen as the indigenous people of Hong Kong. Among speakers of this linguistic group, some also came from the neighbouring province in Guangdong. Mutually unintelligible with the Cantonese speakers, the Hakka people also prefer identifying themselves as a distinct group from the Cantonese like the Chaozhou people. Finally,
the out-of staters are either Shanghainese or Mandarin speakers who are not mutually intelligible with other groups of speakers aforementioned. These people were settlers around the Yangtze River Delta before migrated to Hong Kong. The presence of large amount of these immigrants with diverse linguistic backgrounds made all the non-standard linguistic features not noticeable because everybody spoke with an accent and their speech was influenced by their own linguistic repertoires. In other word, internal linguistic diversity was perceived as a common phenomenon in the post-war period. People of this generation have a high degree of tolerance with the internal varieties of Cantonese and with the “late comers”, as they were all once “new” immigrants of Hong Kong from the mainland. More, the locals were mainly rural farmers and nearly all the city dwellers were of immigrant status. The boundary between “locals” and “outsiders” were not clear as the immigrants might even outnumber the locals.

**Literature review**

Language and nation-state

The relationship of language and nation has long been discussed and explored by scholars from different perspectives. From historical perspective, it is believed that the ideology of nation was a product of Europe due to the increase in national consciousness in the 16th century. Anderson (1991) argues that mass consumption of books resulted from the introduction of printing press, which is an early form of standardisation, is the prelude of such national consciousness, and later nationalism. He explains that print-language created connections between speakers of various vernaculars of the same language, provided a fixity to language in permanent form and gave rise to “languages-of-power” (p.45) when certain vernaculars were
haphazardly closer to the print-languages. From political perspective, the growth of nationalism in return also facilitated the development of certain vernaculars into standard languages because language was used as a tool for state-building through language policies and diffusion of political ideologies (Safran, 1992). Before the rise of nationalism, states in Europe were based on religion and loyalty to the dynasties instead of language and ethnicity. Safran (1992) uses the case of state-building in France, Russia and Israel to support his arguments. For instance, the French language has been playing a significant role in national unity since the Revolution 1789. Not only did the government agencies heavily engaged in codifying, and hence standardising the Parisian variety of language, regional languages such as Breton, Alsatian and Basque were delegitimised and almost erased. Haugen (1966) also reconfirms the functional use of language at national level. He says that if a nation is defined as a political unit, a common language within a unit is served to minimize internal differences and maximize external ones. Nation is nothing more than an “imagined political community” (Anderson, 1991, p.6) of which its people are bounded by a shared identity which is maintained by a common language. The emergence of a national language can also be resulted from external factors. Culiberg (2013) re-examines the relationship of language and nation with the Japanese language case from a historical perspective. He proposes that the modern Japanese language was developed through contact with Europeans during Meiji Period in the 19th century in the occasion that the question of which variety should be taught to the foreigners arose. He concluded his studies with the circular relationship of language and nation that the Japanese language is constructed by the Japanese nation and the Japanese nation established the modern Japanese language. The research aforementioned has well illustrated how language contributed to the
establishment of nation-states which marked the modern era of world history and explicated the ideological link between standard language and national power. The study I propose in this paper on the association between “non-standard” language and nation-state can fill the research knowledge gap.

Theoretical framework

To illustrate the language ideologies of Hong Kong people towards “non-standard” Cantonese, I use the theoretical framework of crossing to analyse the content of the advertisement. Crossing is a linguistic practice of code alternation by linguistic outsiders, a term coined by Rampton (1995) for his studies on teenage Londoners using different varieties of English such as Creole English and Asian English to interact with their peers, which serves to denaturalize racial boundaries. However, crossing can often be taken as mockery. Based on Hill’s studies on Mock Spanish which is a legitimised use of “disorderly” Spanish by the white communities publicly, Chun (2009) proposes a similar research on Mock Asian, a parodic language style which indexes the stereotypical identity of American Asians. In her studies, she tries to show how the racist mainstream ideologies legitimise such racial crossing and may reproduce ideologies that further strengthen the superiority of whiteness in the U.S. In particular case like what Chun examines, an Asian’s revoicings of Mock Asian can be interpreted as a critique to the racist ideologies in the mainstream context. Yet, discrimination does not just happen between the macro-social categories like race and gender, it exists also at the micro-social level within the same ethnic group who speak the same language when the historical, political and social context intertwine with the standard language ideology, like the Chinese local and their “standard” Cantonese versus the “new immigrants” with their “accented” Cantonese.
Then I draw on Silverstein’s (2003) framework “orders of indexicality” to demonstrate the higher order indexicality of a “non-standard” language revealed in the metalinguistic comments related to the video. Such framework helps understand how some linguistic features like accent were once unmarked and then became makers of socioeconomic class over time, and eventually, in Agha’s term, “enregistered” as a dialect, like Johnstone et al.’s (2006) study of Pittsburghese in the U.S. city. According to this framework, “first-order” indexicality is the linguistic features which can be correlated with a sociodemographic identity from the outside by observation. “Second order” indexicality occurs when the group members have a reflexive perception of the first-order correlation and use this latter to do interpretive or performative social work. In my case, “first-order” indexicality is the “non-standard” or “accented” Cantonese which can be correlated with political refugees from mainland China in the post-war period, observed from a historical perspective. But the massive amount of “non-standard” Cantonese speakers made the linguistic feature of accent unnoticed. “Second order” indexicality occurs when the descendants of these immigrants speak a more homogeneous variety of Cantonese because of language standardization over time. Standardisation of Cantonese leads to a low degree of tolerance towards accents and variations among the younger generations. In other word, the more the language is standardised, the lower the degree of tolerance towards variations. Such standard-ness has given the younger generation a reflexive perception of the first-order correlation, and the “non-standard” variety is invested with second-order indexical meaning, such as the social group of the elderlies. Indexical changes in meaning according to the changing reality in the post-colonial era. Changes in economic and social reality have input new resources for the formation of higher-order indexicality, i.e. when the linguistic feature is widely perceived or
“enregistered” as an emblem of a social persona like the “new immigrants”, or of a conception like nation-state.

**Methodology**

The analysis is divided into two parts: The first part consists of analysing the story and the content of the video. Then I would like to reveal how the video is taken by the audience through analysing their comments made online in the second part, as Wortham (2015) suggests that “the significance of communication is often not located in the original event itself” (in our case, the advertisement), “but instead shaped by how the event is taken up in subsequent linked events” (the comments about the advertisement) (p.144). Comments on the same webpage where the video is posted will be collected and used for data analysis. Since they are of computer-mediated discourse (CMD) nature, the language use is less standard and the content and communication between the commentators are less coherent, according to Herring (2001). Despite the informality of the language, Holtz et al. (2012) evoke various advantages of data collection of online discussions. It is considered as the “natural” discursive data, which can sometimes be more revealing than data collected by face-to-face interviews, particularly with studies focusing on an ideologically sensitive topic. More, relatively anonymous, Internet users tend to express their opinion freely, without the worries of social desirability, cyberbullying or government censorship. More importantly, such method does not require users’ consent because the postings are made public and can be read by everyone with no requirement of logging in or having a membership. Hence the communications within these forums are considered as ‘public behaviour’ (p.57). Ethnographic approach will also be used for the analysis
in the later part. Seeing that the “accented” Cantonese can be an exclusive in-group code which is not easily to be understood by Cantonese speakers outside Hong Kong as well as non-native speakers, as an insider of the Hong Kong community, I will draw on the emic perspectives to interpret the language used in the video and comments.

By the time of data collection in February 2019 for the comments, the advertisement has accumulated more than 6 million views and over 30 thousand comments on Facebook whilst 160 thousand views and 174 comments on YouTube. Positive comments are first separated from negative comments. At a glance, audiences who give positive comments consider the advertisement as a joke so they tend to leave short comments like “funny”, “creative” or “great actors and actresses”. However, negative comments are often language-related, and way more elaborated as those audiences have different interpretations of the content concerning standard and non-standard language. In the analysis, I will be focusing mainly on the language-related comments which hold negative perspective. Among the 30 thousand comments on Facebook, large amount of them are tags, which is a way for Facebook users to recommend the video to a friend. Among the 174 comments on YouTube, 69 of them are language-related comments. The webpage configuration and design of Facebook together with the considerable amount of comments require the help of a free online software to extract the data, while comments on YouTube can be manually extracted. Related data from both social media platform will be used for analysis. For the comments cited in the later parts, the original text is written in Hong Kong Cantonese. English translation is given right below the Cantonese comment. I will use “YT” to represent YouTube in front of the post number to indicate the origin of the comments and “FB” to represent Facebook, and the number represents the n-th
Data analysis

The analysis of the advertisement

In this section I use the concept of crossing to analyse the content of the advertisement. The act of crossing in the video shows that “non-standard” Cantonese is taken as a resources to perform the persona of “new immigrants”, which implies that the linguistic features of “non-standard” Cantonese are “enregistered” as the emblem, and thus the stereotype of the “new immigrants”. Then, I analyse the written part of the video production in order to show how the media tries to standardise the “non-standard” variety by giving a fixity to the form of imagined “accented” Cantonese through written language.

The story

The advertisement uses a Hong Kong well-known TV actor Ma to play the role of a Hong Kong native local waiter working at one of the local chained noodle shops Tam Zai. The story begins with Ma starting his work with enthusiasm and greeting his first customer with his Hong Kong style Cantonese (hereafter labelled as “standard” Cantonese). The client orders his noodles in “standard” Cantonese and Ma reconfirms the client’s order also in “standard” Cantonese. To everyone’s surprise, the client looks confused and gazes at Ma. He repeats his order again and checks if Ma understands what he wants. Ma repeats the client’s order again in an innocent manner, with a kind of that’s-what-I-said and what-have-I-done-wrong mixed feeling. Then an experienced waitress comes and takes over. She reconfirms the client’s order with her
“non-standard” Cantonese and the client seems satisfied and carries on with his ordering. At the end of his ordering he thanks the waitress with a big smile. The waitress apologises for Ma, saying that he is new. Ma looks stunned at the end of the first scene. Then the story goes on. Ma is then yelled by the manager of the shop and from then he decided to train himself up to speak like the other waitress – in “non-standard” Cantonese, or what it is marketised as Tam Zai dialect, in order to fit into the language norm of that noodle shop. Towards the end of the video, Ma succeeds in confirming a client’s order through rapping out the order in “non-standard” Cantonese.

Crossing

In the wider context, Cantonese in general, or “standard” Cantonese is the unmarked choice of code for daily interpersonal communication since it is the mother tongue of 88% of the population in Hong Kong. But in the video, whether “standard” and “non-standard” Cantonese are marked or unmarked depend solely on the relationship of the speakers. “Standard” Cantonese is unmarked when it is used by the clients and when Ma speaks to his colleagues. “Standard” becomes marked when the waiter communicates with the clients because “non-standard” which is represented by Tam Zai dialect is the unmarked code in waiter-client one-way relationship. Ma uses crossing as his strategy of spoken discourse. By appropriating the “non-standard” Cantonese at the end of the story, he utilises language variation as a resource to construct his identity as a waiter in Tam Zai. At the same time, Ma, as a native “standard” Cantonese speaker, switches to a code that is associated with a social group to which he does not belong. The language crossing behaviour has led to incongruent interpretations among the audiences. The double voicing nature of the advertisement creates ambiguity leading to different indexical judgments.
The backdrop of the advertisement production

In fact, the video was issued after the selling of the Hong Kong noodle shop brand to the Japanese company Toridoll (Chen & Zhen, 2017 May 15). The message that the restaurant wanted to convey is written in the description, in “non-standard” Cantonese version, with two hashtags: #坦仔圓難買線 (# Tam Zai Yunnan Noodles) #Wei 窮終巴變 (# taste still the same). “Non-standard” Cantonese is marketised as Tam Zai dialect and used as a symbol of the noodle shop, implying that even after the merge and acquisition by a Japanese company, nothing has changed in Tam Zai, including the taste, ambiance and feeling. The client in the video is shocked because the change of code or style of speech represents the change in ambiance in the restaurant that he likes. However, when he is served by the waitress who speaks Tam Zai dialect, he is assured because nothing seems to have changed. However, the “non-standard” Cantonese that Ma performs in the advertisement seems to tacitly index only one particular group: the new immigrants.

The imagined “accented” Cantonese

In an attempt to understand how the non-standard variety is link to one particular social group among various groups of speakers, we need to first look at the phonological features which mark the difference between the standard and non-standard variety. Non-standard variety is presented not only in form of speech, subtitles which phonologically correspond to the speech are also provided. In addition, the description and credits, which are one integrated part of the video production, are also written in homonymic Chinese characters to phonologically
represent the non-standard variety. According to these written data, five major groups of phonological variations between “standard” and that particular “non-standard” Cantonese spoken by the new immigrants can be deduced. The first difference which distinguish the two varieties is the bilabial nasal syllable final [m] becomes alveolar nasal [n] (欠缺 him3 kyut3 becomes *獻缺 hin3 kyut3) or bilabial plosive syllable final [p] becomes velar plosive [k] (練習 lin6 zaap6 becomes*練擇 lin6 zaak6), as bilabial final sounds do not exist in PTH; The second difference is the close back vowel [u] becomes the close front vowel [i] (終於 zung1 ju1 becomes *終衣 zung1 ji1). It is also a common variation heard from the older generation who speaks other Chinese dialects as their mother tongue; Another common variation is velar nasal [ŋ] becomes alveolar nasal [n] (侍應 si6 jing3 becomes *侍燕 si6 jin3); The fourth difference is the missing final voiceless stop [k] and [t] (國 gwok3 becomes 過 gwo3; 不變 bat1 bin3 becomes *巴變 baa1 bin3), a common feature of Cantonese called entering tone which is also a missing element in PTH; The final difference is mainly caused by PTH intervention (雲南 wan4 naam4 becomes 圓難 jyun4 naan4, which is close to yun nan in PTH). Indeed, these written data show what the native speakers perceive as “non-standard” or “accented” Cantonese spoken by the “new immigrants”. Although accent is phonologically audible and therefore a material “thing”, in reality none of the speakers from this imagined social group of “new immigrants” speak exactly with the same features. Native locals impose such “imagined accented Cantonese” to the imagined social group as if the “new immigrants” are one homogeneous community of practice. This type of written data can be seen as a clue of the beginning of “standardisation” as it has started its way to fix the features of the

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2 Chinese expressions used as examples are phonetically transcribed in Jyutping system. Asterisk is used in front of expressions which are semantically incorrect.
non-standard variety and such fixity is creating and reinforcing a stereotype towards the new immigrants. After the advertisement was out, conversion tables for catering related lexicon between the two varieties can even be found on Internet as a “reference”, with a pretext of helping the locals to have a better understanding in case they “get lost” in translation.

If the client in the video was shocked by the change of ambiance created by the “standard” language, the Hong Kong audiences were aroused by the “accented” Cantonese used itself. The status of Hong Kong standard Cantonese is challenged through the following two media representations: first of all, the fact that “non-standard” Cantonese is the norm (in a noodle shop situated) in the Hong Kong territory. Secondly, the fact that Ma appropriates the “accented” Cantonese is inconsistent with his identity as a Hong Kong native local who speaks the “standard” variety. Commenters had placed the “non-standard” Cantonese at the centre of their discussions. Such “non-standard” variety is loaded with social meanings.

Analysis of the metalinguistic online comments

If the purpose of the advertisement is to create a link between a particular style of speech and Tam Zai noodle shop for commercial branding, how can we explain the different indexical use of “non-standard” Cantonese for indicating “new immigrants” and “China” by the audiences and commenters? In order to explain how the linguistic features were taken as resources and loaded with indexical values, I draw on Silverstein’s (2003) framework of “orders of indexicality” to explain the commenters’ discourse.
Higher order indexicality

In this part, through a selection of comments collected on the page of Facebook and YouTube where the video is published, I demonstrate the various higher order indexicality of “non-standard” Cantonese. Quantitatively rich, the metalinguistic comments can be qualitatively categorised into the three following types and hence the three types of higher order indexical.

First of all, “non-standard” Cantonese is indexical of pejorative evaluation. Such pejorative evaluation was made based on standard-ness of the language. Nominal and adjectival terms frequently used for evaluating the “accented” Cantonese as “non-standard” by commenters were semantically derogatory in general, such as “inaccurate” (唔正) implying an illegitimate use of the language, “rubbish” (垃圾) indicating incapacity, and “rural” (鄉) signifying barbarian. The colloquial expression “not-salty-not-bland” (唔鹹唔淡) is also often cited for expressing someone’s language ability being not up to standard. Lay people like the Internet commenters would evaluate and judge the standard-ness of a language when they think they know what the “standard” is. The numerous comments carrying pejorative evaluation of speaking Cantonese with an accent as “non-standard” reflects the standard language ideologies shared among Hong Kong locals. For examples:

FB#1187 唔明有咩好笑, 一間香港餐廳伙記講唔鹹唔淡廣東話做賣點, 好心就請你地教好 d 阿姐講廣東話啦. 搞埋晒 d 無聊野, 每次聽到都覺得 un 耳

I don’t understand why it is funny, use the not-salty-not-bland Cantonese of the waiter in a Hong Kong restaurant as a selling point, you should teach the sisters\(^3\) to speak Cantonese well, making these kind of nonsense, each time I hear it hurts my ears.

\(^3\) In Chinese, people like addressing the unknown women as “sisters” an “aunties” in a generic sense.
FB#3669 咁係，我唔係話笑佢地講唔正，但真係唔可以搞到講唔正先係啱咁

Yes, I am not laughing at their accent, but speaking with accent cannot be the correct one.

Comment FB#1187 criticised the gimmick of “non-standard” Cantonese as nonsense which hurts the commenter’s ear and suggested that the new immigrants should be taught to speak Cantonese well because the story happened in a Hong Kong restaurant. “Speak well” implies speaking “standard” Cantonese; Comment FB#3669 pointed out that the advertisement was spreading a wrong message, telling the audiences that speaking with an accent was the norm. These two examples demonstrate that the commenters have a consciousness of the correctness of language and their comments disclose the “complaint tradition” (Milroy & Milroy, 1999) of standard language ideology. Derogatory evaluation towards “non-standard” variety of language was the drive for commenters to make complaints in order to express the need of maintaining the standard variety.

Secondly, the “non-standard” variety indexes “outsiders”, and precisely a particular group of “outsiders” – the “new immigrants”. For the locals who now speak a rather “standard” Cantonese, the second-order indexicality, i.e. the “accented” Cantonese and the “old” immigrants is transferred to the new comers from the mainland. Such language feature is served as one of the indicators for evaluating the native-ness of the speaker in order to create the dichotomy of ‘self’ and ‘other’, the distinction between the locals and the new immigrants. The overlapping part of “immigrant” intertwining with the competing part of “insider-outsider” have contributed to the occurrence of such higher-order indexical. Some audiences have taken the “accented” Cantonese as an explicit mockery, as the crossing involved a
parodic language style that indexes a stereotypical Hong Kong “new immigrant” identity. Audiences who were amused left positive comments like “hilarious” (笑死), “high quality production” (高質) or “great” (正呀). However, not all the audiences were amused by such mockery. For those who were not entertained left negative and elaborated comments, as they attempted to justify why the others should not find it funny. Nonetheless, both positive and negative commenters shared the same ideologies that this language style marks explicitly the social otherness. Semantic structures which draw the boundary between “self” and “other” are everywhere in the commentary. The use of terms like “we natively born and raised” (我哋土生土長), “Hong Konger” (香港人) or “local” (本地) in contrast with “new immigrants” (新移民), “mainlanders” (大陸人) or “dama” (大媽) to construct two distinct language-based imagined social communities: “self” is the local community based on “standard” Cantonese, and “other” is the “new immigrants” based on “non-standard” Cantonese. For examples:

FB#31249 仲笑得出? 根本就侮辱緊我哋香港人，侮辱緊廣東話

How can you laugh? It is insulting we Hong Kongers, insulting Cantonese

YT#45 全港食市都比大媽包起做，本地人食屎了

The whole catering industry is taken over by dama, Hong Kong people eat shit.

Comment FB#31249 shows that the commenter took the “accented” Cantonese performance as an insult. More, the language and the speakers are synonymous: “Cantonese” here which implies the “standard” variety is the synonym of all Hong Kong people as a whole: Insulting Cantonese is actually insulting Hong Kong people. Comment YT#45 discussed the social phenomenon of “new immigrant” females
engaging in the catering industries and used the term “dama” to refer to them. “Dama” is a stereotypical notion often refers to a group of middle-aged Chinese women who have received a low-level of education and are deeply influenced by Chinese tradition, especially the tradition of believing in the reliability of tangible assets such as gold and real estates. The term was originated from an incidence in 2013 when gold prices plunged and lots of Chinese women rushing to purchase gold blindly as an investment (“Chinese Dama”, n.d.). Henceforth, “dama” is often used by the Hong Kong locals to refer to all the mainland women and this concept is also extended to the female “new immigrants” in Hong Kong who came from mainland China. Both comments exhibit how these imagined communities distinguishing “self” and “other” are naturally used in daily communications and “dama” is the “enregistered” stereotype among the Hong Kong locals.

Some comments demonstrated the synonymous relations between “accented” Cantonese and the “new immigrants” This implies that this linguistic feature is widely perceived as the “emblem” of these new comers from mainland. For examples:

YT#60 點解大家可以咁 enjoy 呢個矮化正統廣東話既廣告? 潛言默化話畀你聽 你要跟新移民嘅方式做咩

*How come everyone finds funny with such an advertisement which belittles the standard Cantonese? Subtly inculcating you that you need to do things in the new immigrants’ way.*

Commenter of YT#60 criticised the advertisement for undermining “standard” Cantonese by “approving” that “accented” Cantonese is the norm. He not only related the “accented” Cantonese directly to the “new immigrants” as a homogeneous social group, but “in the new immigrants’ way” also suggested that the linguistic feature was related to all the other stereotypical behaviour that the audiences knew by
assumptions, such as being rude, dirty, uncivilised, spitting around, etc. This comment had aroused some comments and replies following the logic of the “new immigrants”. This suggests that the ideological link between the linguistic feature and the imagined homogeneous social group has been strengthened and stabilised in the locals’ mind.

However, some commenters on Facebook were trying to remind the other commenters that their grandparents were also once immigrants. From this logic, these commenters tried to argue that there were no differences between the two groups because new immigrants and old immigrants were still immigrants.

FB#12430 其實大家起度嘈乜鬼？你哋 D 祖先有幾多個係香港原居民，你啲比佢班姐姐好彩在，你啲阿爺阿嬤 50 年代已經來咗香港，所以樓上全部都講到純正香港廣東話，一個廣告帶出譚仔話，笑下咪算 law，何必咁緊張？不喜勿插，插者先唸唸你祖先都係遷移香港嘅一族😎

What are you arguing about? How many of you having your ancestors being Hong Kong indigenous? You all luckier than these sisters, your grandparents came to Hong Kong in the fifties. That’s why all the people above are able to speak pure Hong Kong Cantonese. The advertisement mentioned Tam Zai dialect, have a laugh, that’s it. Why so serious? Don’t criticise if you don’t like. Before you criticise, think about the fact that your ancestors were also immigrants of Hong Kong.

Comment FB#12430 tried to point out to the other commenters that their negative comments about the “accented” Cantonese and the new immigrant were illegitimate because their grandparents were also immigrants. Their offspring, hence the commenters themselves, are also of “immigrant” descent. It implies that if they despise the immigrants they are also despising themselves. The commenter of FB#12430 also assumed that he was addressing the “standard” Cantonese speakers. Such assumption was deduced from his comments, saying that the reason for these commenters’ capacity of speaking “standard” Cantonese was because their grandparents came to Hong Kong early in the fifties. Such remark shows that over the
past few decades, there has been some on-going processes of standardisation of Cantonese happening in Hong Kong through schooling and media influences, which made these commenters able to speak “standard” variety. The fact that people were arguing whether the “new immigrants” were in-group or out-group also reveals that the ideology of insider-outsider exists among the local Hong Kongers.

**FB#13025** 河國榮講唔咸唔淡廣東話就得; 譚仔阿姐講唔咸唔淡廣東話就唔得。李嘉誠嚟咗香港幾十年, 廣東話都講唔正就得; 大陸人努力工作唔攞綜援, 廣東話講唔正就唔得。十年-方言 用咗狗血方式賣悲情片就得; 100毛 用搞笑反諷方式賣廣告就唔得。 maç

*Gregory Charles Rivers speaks not-salty-not-bland Cantonese is okay; Tam Zai sisters speak not-salty-not-bland Cantonese is not okay. Li Ka-shing has come to Hong Kong for a few decades, speaks inaccurate Cantonese is okay; Mainlanders work hard and not depend on social welfare, speak inaccurate Cantonese is not okay; “Ten years – Dialect” a tragic movie in exaggerating way is okay; TV Most making an advertisement in ironical and funny way is not okay. (Emoticon)*

Commenter of FB#13025 pointed out that the negative evaluation towards the “new immigrants” were based on social factors rather than linguistic ones. Gregory Charles Rivers is an Australian white actor who speaks fluent Cantonese with a foreigner accent. He is a familiar face on local TV shows and movies as he often played the persona of a colonial police officer in the nineties; Li Ka-Shing, a Hong Kong business magnate originated from Chaozhou of the Guangdong province, came to Hong Kong as a political refugee with his family during Second World War. Speaker of a Min dialect, Li also speaks Cantonese with a Chaozhou accent. The commenter’s remark shows the double-standard of the “standard” Cantonese speakers towards the speakers of the “non-standard” variety. A white man or an old immigrant business

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*A Hong Kong movie composed of five short stories dealing with sensitive political themes, “Dialect” is one of the chapters in the movie.*
tycoon speaking the “non-standard” variety seems acceptable. Only the “non-standard” Cantonese speakers who also have a status of “new immigrants” are stigmatised.

Thirdly, the “non-standard” variety becomes the indexical of China the national power and the tension between Hong Kong and mainland China in recent years may have contributed to the occurrence of this higher order indexicality. Some commenters who were not amused by the mockery had politicised the “non-standard” language issue by indexing the “non-standard” Cantonese as a top-down political influence. The notions commonly referring to China are more indirect though, such as “Central Communist government” (中共) which draws on the characteristic of the political regime, “mainland” (大陸) which projects the geographical feature. Some created their own pun like “sad together party” (共慘黨) (which sound similar to the Communist Party in Cantonese) so as not to have a risk of the post being easily found and censored. Some even used the very offending term “Shina” (支拿) to refer to China to express their hostile sentiments and the sense of otherness towards the national power. ‘Shina’ (支拿) is indeed one of the transliterations of China of Sanskrit origin. It was brought to Japan through the spread of Buddhism and an archaic Japanese name for China. It had been used as a neutral term without specific connotation until the Second Sino-Japanese War from 1937 to 1945. Associated with invasion and massacre by the Japanese, ‘Shina’ became an offensive term to address China among Chinese people. In 1946, the Republic of China (today’s Taiwan) even demanded Japan to cease the use of the term ‘Shina’. In Hong Kong, this term is brought back to use in recent years by the localist politicians under the backdrop of
increasing tensions between Hong Kong and mainland China. All these notions revealed that the “non-standard” Cantonese is indexical of the Chinese central government, albeit less direct.

Quite a lot of comments which politicised the language issue did not explicitly refer to the national power China but the readers of the comments understood by contextualisation and cultural assumptions. For examples:

FB#24413 我都笑唔出！大量新移民湧入，佢地唔會融入香港，只會溼淡香港文化，再遲啲，粵語都會逐步被邊緣化、被禁止。

*I can’t laugh either! The influx of new immigrants, they will not integrate into Hong Kong, only dilute Hong Kong culture. Later, Cantonese will gradually be marginalized, be forbidden.*

Commenter of FB#24413 first linked the “non-standard” language to the social reality of the influx of “new immigrants”. Then he further elaborated that these immigrants have no intention to integrate into the Hong Kong society. Instead, they would “dilute” the Hong Kong culture. Lastly, he expressed that “Cantonese will gradually be marginalized and forbidden”. Throughout the whole comment, he did not use a single word indicating the Chinese government. But the agentless passive voice used implies that all these things happening is due to the Chinese government intervention in Hong Kong sociopolitical environment, as only the nation-state possesses the power to ban the use of certain languages.

YT# 69 我們的廣東話已經被迫害，如果是自然流失，自然淘汰。大家都無話可說。但如果是被政治控制，另作別論。可是自己人什麼譚仔話，會唔會幫我們的老管家一把殭滅我們的廣東話？

*Our Cantonese is being persecuted. If it is a natural loss, it dies out naturally, we have nothing to say. But if it is due to political control, that's another matter. Yet will we and that Tam Zai dialect help our old master extinguish our Cantonese?*
Post YT#69 was another comment which attracted numerous replies following the logic of the Chinese government influence and the gloomy future of Cantonese. This commenter perceived “accented” Cantonese as a political tool of the national power to “extinguish” Cantonese, and he assumed that everyone knows who wants to make Cantonese disappear (so the mainland government). This commenter used ambiguous terms like “political control” and “old master” to imply the Chinese government intervention in Hong Kong’s language policy.

FB#796 原來大陸用譚仔入侵香港的廣東話

Indeed mainland uses Tam Zai to invade Hong Kong Cantonese.

Post FB#796 reveals a series of assumptions and interpretations of Tam Zai: first of all, originally a Hong Kong company, this commenter thought that Tam Zai is a shop from mainland China due to the use of “non-standard” Cantonese in the advertisement. This post also suggested that Tam Zai, which also implies Tam Zai dialect, is used as a tool by the mainland Chinese government to “invade”, or to “take over” Hong Kong Cantonese.

Serial occurrence of fragmented incidences related to the Chinese government has contributed to the emergence of such higher-order indexical. The “umbrella movement” for a more transparent elections for the Hong Kong Chief executive, the promotion of Putonghua as the medium of instruction, the controversies over the implementation of moral and national education, the increasing self-censorship of the local media industries, the explicit urge from Beijing for “decolonising” Hong Kong’s street and place names (Cheung, 2018), etc. are all perceived as signs of mainlandisation of Hong Kong. Mainlandisation which implies the non-respect of the “one country, two systems” principle generates fear and anger among the Hong
Kongers. Including the One-way Permit Scheme, since the Permits are issued by the mainland government, for the locals, the “new immigrants” are perceived as “sent” by the Central government for the purpose of acculturating the Hong Kong people to mainland China, so that the Hong Konger will gradually do things “in the new immigrants’ way”, which also means “in the mainland Chinese way” for the purpose of facilitate the eventual national integration. Hence the “new immigrant” and their “accented” Cantonese, are perceived as the first step taken by the Chinese government in an attempt to extinguish Cantonese, so that PTH can be implemented later. These commenters did not find the advertisement funny because of their fear and anger towards the mainlandisation of Hong Kong. The “accented: Cantonese was thought to be imposed like the PTH from a top-down process. However, the occurrence of various higher-order of indexical of the “non-standard” Cantonese case in Hong Kong is driven from a bottom-up process.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the language ideologies of Hong Kong native Cantonese speakers towards the “non-standard” variety spoken by the “new immigrants” from mainland China settling in Hong Kong through analysis of the media representation of the “non-standard” Cantonese used in a commercial advertisement and of the related metalinguistic comments. Standard language has always been the indexical of the nation because such variety has always been imposed by the initiative of the national government. In Hong Kong, the Chinese government also tried to impose the use of the standard language PTH through the Education Bureau in the education domain. It is logical that PTH is indexical of the Chinese government. When facing the augmented linguistic diversity brought by migration in
the context of globalisation, the native locals tend to turn back to the traditional model of language and nation, claiming authenticity, purity and ownership for their national or standard language and delegitimised the migrants’ use of their national language (Park & Wee, 2017). Although HKSAR is a city in the territory of China which enjoys certain political autonomy, Cantonese and Hong Kong constitute a parallel example of the traditional model of language and nation because Cantonese has become a synonymous term of Hong Kong. The dominant group draws on variations like accent to create and reinforce the dichotomy of “standard” and “non-standard” language. The dichotomy of “standard” and “non-standard” language in Hong Kong is not just restricted to the battle between PTH and Cantonese, but also within the substandard level: “standard” and “non-standard” Cantonese. Such ideological distinction between Cantonese at the local level implies the distinction between “locals” and “outsiders”. The data has also shown that the “non-standard” variety is not always the indicator of stigmatisation. Whether the speaker of “accented” Cantonese is stigmatised or not depends more on social factors instead of linguistic factors, such as the fact of being “new immigrants” from mainland are more likely to be subjected to stigmatisation. The “non-standard” Cantonese was also taken as a resource in the advertisement to perform the stereotype of “new immigrants”, which is enregistered as an emblem of such imagined homogeneous speech community among the Hong Kong locals. The written description based on the phonological differences between “standard” and “non-standard”, which was also an early form of standardisation, gave a fixity to the “non-standard” form, which would eventually serve to reinforce the stereotype. Finally my study has shown that since the “non-standard” Cantonese is indexical of a social group originated from the mainland, such geographical overlapping fact has contributed to occurrence of an unusual higher-
order indexical: “non-standard” Cantonese also became indexical of the national power because such variety of speech constitutes an unwelcome reminder of mainlandisation in Hong Kong.

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