

**CANTONESE STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON
THE USE OF THEIR FIRST LANGUAGE
IN ACQUIRING ENGLISH**

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore ESL students' perceptions of what helps them to acquire English as a second language, and specifically, whether the use of their first language (Cantonese) helps them to better understand English and their school work. Interviews with ten secondary school students revealed that they use Cantonese extensively in and out of class. They regarded the use of Cantonese as being beneficial to their comprehension of the English vocabulary, concepts, and directions given by teachers. The participants' language use practices, attitudes toward first language usage by others, and perceptions of how their peers, teachers, and parents react to them when they use Cantonese, are also examined. In addition, other related questions central to the issue of providing ESL services to immigrant students are explored. To further facilitate ESL students' acquisition of a dominant second language, the incorporation of the use of students' first language is put forth as a possible alternative to the present education they are experiencing.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to
my parents, Nung and Shui Ying Cheung, and
grandparents, Chew and Yiu Shui Cheung,
and Choy and Choi King Yeung,
who arrived in Canada as immigrants and
experienced the trials and tribulations
of learning a foreign language and culture.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The focus of my research is on the issue of whether students learning English as a second language (ESL) use their first language (L1), in this case, Cantonese, to help them understand and acquire English. I wish to explore possible relationships between the amount of time, with whom, and for what purposes these students use their first language in their daily lives to support their academic achievement. As well, I wish to learn from ESL students their perceptions on whether they think the use of Cantonese is beneficial in helping them to understand concepts and content presented in classes such as ESL, English, Social Studies, and Physics. Another related issue is the students' attitudes toward the use of L1 in school.

This research problem was prompted by both personal and professional experiences and interests. I was an ESL student who grew up in Vancouver, and I maintained and developed my Cantonese by going to after-school Chinese classes during my elementary school years. I remember using Cantonese quite extensively while learning English, and as an adult, I am now fluent in both languages and can appreciate and participate in both Chinese and Canadian cultures.

Professionally, during my teaching career in Vancouver, where most schools have a large Chinese population, I have used Cantonese with great success with many students to enable their comprehension of English in areas such as reading and following instructions. Another reason for my interest in this issue stems from a recent controversy, an "English Only" proposal adopted by a few schools in the Lower Mainland, which has received much attention from teachers, administrators, parents, and legislators who reflect and argue language issues from their own points of view. All believe that students need to develop competent English language use for academic achievement. Some believe students need to learn English in order to become assimilated into Canadian society. Still others recognize the inherent value of students' first language and culture, as well as acquiring English. In spite of all the arguments, it seems to me that the most important stakeholders in this issue have been neglected. ESL students have not been asked to express their perceptions on the issue of the use of their L1, in terms of academic and psychological development, as well as social integration.

Cummins and Swain (1986) believe L1 maintenance and development should be fostered in schools as it is critically important to students' psychological, linguistic, and cognitive well-being. Taking into consideration that emotional well-being affects learning, first languages could be seen as among the

many tools to be used in teaching ESL students. This, of course, is contingent on students feeling that the use of their L1 is beneficial to their learning.

Social and political factors play a major role in framing the debate and controversy surrounding languages in education. Social influences such as demographic changes in schools brought about by increased immigration, the changing labor market which emphasizes completion of formal schooling in a competitive labour force, and the legacy of the 1960s American civil rights movement have all played roles in shaping the context of language and education debates in North America. Many of the strongly held opinions and positions taken by members of society have more to do with broad economic and political issues of concern to mainstream society than with providing optimal educational programmes for ESL students (McGroarty, 1992). Pease-Alvarez and Hakuta (1992) discuss two opposed points of view on these matters: Rosalie Porter and Jim Cummins.

Rosalie Porter, in Forked Tongue (1990), argues that the central goal of education is to provide language minority students with the English necessary for social and economic advancement in the dominant society. She states that it is impossible and inappropriate for schools to preserve students' L1 and culture. From her assimilationist perspective, Porter feels these students are being empowered through the learning of

English and having access to the mainstream curriculum.

Conversely, in Empowering Minority Students Cummins (1989) argues for the use and development of minority students' L1 in the form of additive bilingualism and biculturalism which will empower them to take control of their own lives. He stresses that social transformation that recognizes and values the cultural and linguistic resources of minority students is the ultimate goal of schooling.

Pease-Alvarez and Hakuta (1992) argue that the majority of research on programmes for language minority students is assimilationist-oriented and often assumes a deficit view of these students. ESL students are often evaluated using standardized tests with English language and basic skills acquisition as the determining factors. Very few evaluation studies report on and take into consideration ESL students' L1 abilities. This may be taken as evidence that researchers consider these experiences and abilities as either inadequate or irrelevant to the learning of a second language (L2) (Pease-Alvarez & Hakuta, 1992). Both the assimilationist and deficit perspectives lead to programmes that stress English-only, emphasizing basic skills.

According to Cummins (1992), approximately one-third of the Canadian population consists of people who speak languages other

than English or French, and schools in major urban areas have been experiencing a substantial increase in linguistic and cultural diversity over the past twenty years. Rivers and Associates (1991) state that over two thirds of immigrants between the ages of zero to seventeen years did not speak English when they arrived in British Columbia in 1989 (69%) and 1990 (70%). British Columbia's immigration statistics show that during the first three quarters of 1994, of the 38,947 immigrants to the province, a majority of them (80.3 %) came from Asia (Ministry of Government Services, 1995). In addition, data drawn from the Vancouver School Board's 1994 Home Language Report by Schools shows that the Vancouver schools' ESL population (52%) is increasing and is becoming more diverse; this presents major implications for the education system at all levels. Central to the issue of the ever-increasing numbers of ESL students is the question of how educators can provide instructional opportunities to enhance ESL students' academic development by utilizing these students' cultural and linguistic resources.

Purpose of Thesis

My experiences as an ESL student and as a teacher in a school district where approximately 50% of the students learn English as a second language have contributed to my knowledge regarding second language learning. This first-hand experience

of my own learning and of teaching a dominant language to minority students, along with the review of literature, have shaped my belief that current local practices for educating ESL students require some changes. Information from research findings as well as ESL students' individual and collective beliefs, thoughts, and perceptions need to be considered prior to making such changes. Therefore, it is important to emphasize that the goal of this study is not to build theories of student learning, but rather, to discover the cultural reality of a group of Cantonese-speaking students learning English as L2.

Hence, the goal of this specific ethnographic research is to contribute information from students' perspectives (through in-depth interviews) as to how they think educators can improve ESL students' learning experience, specifically, with regard to first language usage. This group of students has first hand involvement and expert knowledge as ESL learners in our educational system and their experiences and how they interpret these experiences should be valued when making changes to improve student learning.

Organization of Thesis

Chapter one begins with a discussion of personal and professional experiences, and interests which led to the research focus on whether ESL students use their L1, in this case,

Cantonese to help them to understand and acquire English. This is followed by the rationale for the research and the educational implication this research problem has for large urban school districts with an increasing ESL population in their schools.

The literature review in chapter two starts with an examination of efforts to both eradicate and promote minority languages in schools which were started as early as 1897. This chapter focuses on four major areas in reviewing research and findings on the use of L1 in schools: Types of minority language programs; Use of minority language in education; Influence of first language; and Possibilities for minority language students.

Chapter three, the methodology chapter, provides the hypotheses and questions for this research, discusses the significance of the study, provides detailed information regarding the participants and site selection, and outlines the data collection process. This chapter concludes by stating some limitations imposed on this study.

The fourth chapter provides data collected from the interviews with the ten secondary-school aged students. Interview questions were grouped into categories of related issues. Most of the interviews were conducted in both English

and Cantonese as participants often switched between the two languages to better represent their ideas and experiences. The information gathered from the interviews was grouped into the following categories: Demographics and Educational background; Study habits and learning strategies; L1 usage; Classroom difficulties encountered while learning English as a second language (L2); Strategies that helped ESL students learn English; Participants' attitudes toward the use of L1 and L2; Participants' perceptions of peers, parents and teachers and their views of teachers' use of L1; and a look at their language pattern while engaged in activities outside of school time. This section concludes with a summary of data to the above issues.

Information gathered from the participants' about their experiences and their perceptions on learning English as a second language have been analysed and interpreted. Discussion of data collected and the implication for educating our ever-increasing diverse ESL population is provided in the Fifth chapter. I have attempted to explain the emergence of several issues from the data based on my personal experience as an ESL student and as an educator, in addition to knowledge gained from the literature review. As well, references are made to applicable existing policy documents to underline the importance of some of these issues. Findings and suggestions from this research are presented as possible alternatives to providing our

ESL students with a socially positive and academically
successful experience in learning ESL.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter looks at various groups of stakeholders' points of view, regarding the use of minority languages and their efforts to eradicate and promote minority languages in schools. Effort has been made to include research from as many countries as possible, but with so few Canadian research available, the majority of the review is based on American literature.

Historical Background

Ashworth (1992) makes us aware that concern for the preservation of languages and cultures in schooling was evident very early in Canada, when the Ukrainians from the prairies of Canada established bilingual schools to preserve their heritage languages and cultures. In 1897, Manitoba had passed a school act which allowed the setting up of bilingual schools, if there were ten or more students speaking Ukrainian. By 1916, this act was repealed, and following the lead of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta also banned bilingual education. The official reason for the closure of these schools was the perception that students in bilingual schools were receiving a lower standard of education than those in monolingual schools and that bilingual education did not Canadianize new immigrants (Ashworth, 1992).

Between 1920 and 1960, English-Canadian and North American educators in general attempted to replace immigrant and non-English-speaking students' L1s with "English-Only" based on the assumption that L1 was a negative influence in children's personal and academic development (Cummins, 1989). Cummins (1989) further states that students from minority backgrounds who were experiencing difficulties with learning were often labeled as learning disabled; the cause was attributed directly to their bilingualism.

The following is a chronological look at research on bilingual education programmes from 1963 to 1988.

American Bilingual Education Programme Research

In 1963, an American initiative caught the attention of educators. A bilingual programme in a school supported by the Ford Foundation was initiated in grades 1, 2, and 3 in Miami, Florida. The student population was about equally divided between English speakers and Spanish-speaking Cuban children. Parents of all students were offered the option of enrolling students in the traditional all-English programme or the bilingual programme, and all but a few of the Cuban parents opted for the bilingual programme. The bilingual programme consisted of curriculum taught in students' L1 for half of the school day and the other half in their L2 to reinforce the

concepts taught in their L1 (Andersson, 1971).

In 1968, Mabel Wilson Richardson reported the result of an evaluation of this programme and found that the bilingual programme students performed as well as the control group in the regular curriculum (Language Arts and Arithmetic). In addition, it was observed that the English-speaking students were learning a second language and the Spanish-speaking students were learning to read and write in their native language. Since then, many studies and research by different individuals and organizations on the topic of bilingual programmes which support the benefits of such programmes have been done. These individuals and organizations doing these studies were, in part, instrumental in the introduction of the Bilingual Education Act and its subsequent passage in the Senate of the United States in 1968 (Andersson, 1971).

In 1970-71, Bruce Gaarder, then director of language research in the United States Office of Education, concluded that most of the American bilingual programmes he had observed had evolved to what he terms the Assimilation model. These programmes tended to promote ethnic language shift from the ethnic language to English, which was contrary to the initial pluralist goal of promoting ethnic language maintenance. Andersson (1971) concluded that the goals of bilingual programmes had shifted somewhat from the original goals of the

Bilingual Education Act of 1968, and this shift was due to the lack of funding, personnel and material, and inadequate evaluation of programmes to convince the mainstream communities that the maintenance of non-English languages was desirable.

In the early 1980s, several reports, the most prominent being that of the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983), suggested a decline in standards of English usage and literacy was occurring for all students. The result was a wave of educational efforts in pursuit of English academic excellence. This movement toward improving the instruction of English resulted in legislation now passed in seventeen states to make English the official language. Supporters of this view perceive linguistic diversity as a threat to national unity as well as to academic excellence (McGroarty, 1992).

This has been a popular view, despite the abundance of recent studies and research which suggest that bilingualism can affect students' intellectual and linguistic progress positively, and that bilingual children may be more flexible in their thinking than students with only one language (Cummins, 1984). Many researchers have argued over the past twelve years that use of L1 to develop academic skills during instructional time will not hinder academic performance in English (Cummins, 1993; D'Onofrio, 1993; Saville-Troike, 1985). On the contrary, it is seen to be the most effective way for bilingual students

to develop both academic concepts and English language proficiency (Garcia, 1986). In fact, many researchers recommend the use of ESL students' L1s to build on the strengths the students already have in areas such as cognition, literacy, social skills, and special talents (Saville-Troike, 1985; Burnaby, 1992; Corson, 1992; Toohey, 1992; Meyers, 1993).

In 1988, the English-Plus coalition was formed in the United States to promote the freedom to use any language and the value of learning and using languages in addition to English. This coalition of professional groups represented the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the American Psychological Association, to name a few (McGroarty, 1992).

While there was strong opposition to the use of languages other than English in educating ESL students, some educators believe that the use of L1 is beneficial in supporting ESL learners. Hence, minority language programmes have been established in many American school districts.

Types of Minority Language Programmes

Currently there are three major types of minority language programmes which have been documented extensively -

transitional, bilingual, and heritage language. (Cummins, 1984; Cummins & Swain, 1986; Toohey, 1990; Medina & Escamilla, 1992; Danesi, McLeod & Morris, 1993). The psycho-educational rationales given for these programmes can be termed "L1 as transition", "L1 as enrichment", and "L1 as maintenance".

Transitional Programmes

The "transition" rationale supports the use of L1 as an initial medium of instruction necessary to bridge the cultural and linguistic gap between home and school. Students' L1s are used as a temporary bridge to facilitate subsequent instruction in English. The aim is to make their adjustment to school more secure, while not neglecting their academic progress during the learning of English. The major goal of these programmes is to provide educational equity for minority students rather than for the development of their L1 skill. The end result is usually students who are monolingual in English (Cummins, 1993).

Lambert (1977) classifies this as the subtractive form of bilingualism. As noted earlier in this chapter, Gaarder had concluded in 1970-71 that most of the intended bilingual programmes were falling into this model.

Fleras and Elliott, in their book The Challenge of Diversity - Multiculturalism in Canada (1992) refer to the transitional approach as a bridge for assisting ESL students to

learn English while acquiring academic skills. This coincides with Cummins' (1992) view of the transitional use of students' L1s in helping them to keep up with academic content while acquiring proficiency in English. By providing opportunities for bilingual students to utilize their L1 in a positive and interactive environment, teachers have potentially enhanced their students' verbal ability.

Medina and Escamilla (1992) reviewed many longitudinal studies done on transitional programmes and found that students' use of their L1 was responsible for significant gains in the areas of reading (Medina & De la Garza, 1989) and mathematics achievement (Medrano, 1986). In particular, Curiel et al. (1986) (as cited in Medina & Escamilla, 1992), reported that Hispanic secondary students in transitional programmes experienced significantly less grade retention, lower dropout rates, and were more often placed in appropriate grades than Hispanic counterparts in an English-only curriculum. Another study by De la Garza and Medina in 1985 (as cited in Medina & Escamilla, 1992) reported that students were performing at national norm levels of English and Spanish achievement in reading and mathematics after three years of exposure to transitional programmes. These American findings support the use of first language for instructional purposes to enhance students' learning.

Bilingual Programmes

The psycho-educational rationale of enrichment associated with bilingual programmes emphasizes personal and emotional benefits, as well as the cognitive effects of becoming highly competent in two languages, leading to bilingualism and biliteracy. Lambert (1977) terms this the additive form of bilingualism. Enrichment bilingual programmes aim at adding a second language to the students' L1, while promoting their L1 fluency and proficiency. This is done by using students' L1 as a medium of instruction or as a subject on a long-term basis during part of the school day. Students in these bilingual programmes come to view their L1 and prior learnings as assets to learning the new language. One of the first initiatives in which this programme was attempted was in the French Immersion programmes in Canada.

The original French Immersion model in Canada was an experimental project in St. Lambert, Quebec, in the 1960s (Lambert & Tucker, 1972). The purpose of the project was to promote functional bilingualism by using French as the language to teach all subjects other than music, art, physical education and library, with students (in Grade 2) receiving 70 minutes of English Language Arts instruction each day. These students responded positively to the programme. They felt comfortable with French-speaking people and were able to participate in

social activities, and appreciate the French ways of life. Most importantly, they considered themselves both English and French-Canadian in makeup (Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers, 1995).

Over the last 25 years, the French Immersion programme has grown and been adopted and adapted by provinces across Canada. Great variations in the amount of English being used, and when English is first introduced, in these immersion programmes are now found, even within provinces.

While French Immersion programmes utilize a bilingual model, less common in Canada have been such programmes for speakers of minority languages.

Cummins and Swain (1986) reviewed and reported on many longitudinal studies and evaluations done on bilingual programmes. Amongst them are the English-Ukrainian programme by the Edmonton Public School Board in Alberta (1974) for Kindergarten and Grade One; the Bradford (England) mother tongue and English teaching (MOTET) project for five year-old native speakers of Punjabi with no knowledge of English (1981); the San Diego Spanish-English language "immersion" programme for pre-schoolers to Grade Three (San Diego City Schools, 1975); the bilingual programmes in Holland for children of migrant workers (Appel, 1979); and the Navajo students at Rock Point in the

United States (Rosier & Farella, 1976). Students in all these projects, as compared with monolingual English students (control groups), showed that well-implemented bilingual programmes (experimental groups) have had considerable success in developing English academic skills, despite the fact students received less exposure to English than in monolingual English programmes. Many others reported similar findings indicating minority languages can be used in school at no loss to the development of proficiency in the dominant language, and that, in fact, bilingual programmes should be used to support minority students who are academically at risk.

D'Onofrio (1993) in her discussion of the development of early biliteracy skills, pointed out that many studies (Cummins & Gulutsan, 1974; Bain, 1974; Christian, 1976; Ehri, 1985) show that children who have access to two languages are superior to monolingual children in terms of their meta-linguistic abilities and cognitive development. These and other studies conclude that bilingual children benefit from an increased meta-linguistic awareness, display verbal and non-verbal enrichment, possess a heightened sensitivity to languages, learn to read and write in two languages and hence are able to have inter-cultural understanding through books and print. D'Onofrio also noted that these children are socially more flexible, less prejudiced with regard to other cultures and races, and more tolerant of others and their opinions.

Amongst theorists and researchers in the field of bilingual education, "L1 as enrichment", also referred to as the additive programme, is considered to be the ideal choice for promoting intellectual, linguistic, and academic development for students learning a second (dominant) language (L2). The rationale for using the first language to teach academic content is that students will be able to comprehend what is being taught while they are learning English. Spending time learning in students' L1s benefits both languages with respect to developing those language-related skills associated with cognitive functioning and literacy-related activities.

Heritage Language Programmes

Heritage language programmes are aimed at enabling children to retain their cultural heritage and to communicate effectively in their homes, thereby fostering a sense of self-esteem, ethnic identity, and pride in their culture.

Corson (1996) in reference to Norway's aboriginal people, the Sami, argues the use of a first language at home is the key factor in establishing ethnic identity. Corson reported :

The Norwegian government and education system have responded to the accumulated research evidence about the importance of mother-tongue maintenance for minority-language peoples. When they are without this maintenance, and where their languages are not languages

of wider communication, minority first-language children may arrive in schools with their first languages relatively underdeveloped in certain contexts, styles, and functions. At the same time, their grasp of the majority language may be limited to a small range of functions. (p.97)

In keeping with this belief, the Norwegian Parliament introduced the Sami Language Act in 1992 which declared both the Sami and Norwegian languages as having equal status. This Act also guaranteed the Sami first-language education and enables the Sami to develop their language, culture, and way of life. For the Sami-as-a-first-language students, all subjects are taught in Sami until Grade 9, provided teachers and text books are available, with Norwegian taught as a second language. Corson indicated that graduates of these programmes are successful bilinguals in Norwegian and Sami. Currently, two of the universities offer the Sami language as a subject and in 1994, a new first-language methods course for teachers-in-training was introduced to Sami College.

Aside from the benefits of students using their first language in the homes, Toohey (1990) proposes three other rationales for promoting heritage language programmes: economic, educational, and sociological/psychological. The economic rationale argues that having Canadian citizens who are bilingual or even multilingual will contribute to the international trade and technological growth of our society. The educational rationale emphasizes the importance of using L1 to enhance L2

learning, in addition to offering students opportunities to develop oral and literate competence in both L1 and L2. The psychological and sociological reasons provided by Toohey focus on the impact of valuing L1s by the community to enhance self-esteem and confidence of minority students in their adjustment to the majority culture.

Acceptance and recognition of the importance of languages other than English in the community allows children to feel good about themselves, their family and their heritage language. This positive attitude towards bilingualism and biliteracy will benefit them cognitively, culturally, and academically.

Canada presents very few examples of programmes where minority speakers' L1s are used extensively as media of instruction in public schools. In the Lower Mainland of British Columbia and throughout Canada, many non-government funded heritage language schools have been established after public school hours and week-end classes for the continuation and development of students' L1. While Beynon and Toohey (1991) recognize the efforts of a variety of educational and community groups in organizing and continuing to bring heritage language education to the attention of policy makers, they acknowledge social and educational issues which need to be resolved when creating a policy regarding heritage language programmes.

Transitional, bilingual and heritage language programmes are distinguished from one another by the extent to which the minority languages of the students are incorporated into the programme.

Having provided a chronological historic background and outlined the types of bilingual education, I now examine literature which looks in a broad way at the issues of using L1s in the context of teaching L2s; research findings on the influence of L1; and possibilities for educating minority language students.

Use of Minority Languages in Education

Many authors, based on their research in the field of educating ESL students, strongly believe that students' use of their L1 in their homes does not impede their academic progress in acquiring English (Goodz, 1994; Handscombe, 1994; Tabors & Snow, 1994). They stress that studies reveal that what is important is the quality and extent of interaction between parents and their children in using language beyond the conversational level. Hence, telling immigrant parents, who are not fluent in English, to speak English to their children in their homes would limit the quantity and quality of family interaction and language development in both languages. Cummins (1993) recommends that parents read, tell stories, sing songs,

and interact with their children in their L1 in the homes.

Teachers and parents often express concern that ESL students will never learn English if they are always speaking in their L1. Opponents to the use of L1 assume that the development of English academic skills is directly related to exposure to English. In other words, if students were to interact only in English, they would learn English faster and therefore, do better in school. Proponents of immersion experiences believe that students need to be exposed to as much English as possible to acquire the oral proficiency necessary to communicate in English and to become fully integrated into the English-speaking society.

Students who immigrate with little or no English are placed into programmes where English is the language of instruction and communication. Teachers believe that the English milieu will lead to the students making efforts to communicate in English and that quite unproblematically, minority language students will thus 'pick up' English.

Daphne Brown, in her book, Mother Tongue to English: The Young Child in the Multicultural School, (1979), refuted this belief by citing two case studies. In her first study, she documented and described a day's experience of a new young immigrant student in a primary school. This description

illustrated the school's policy and general attitude of the staff toward students with no English entering the school system. These ESL students received no special services. They are simply left to absorb the English language through working with other English-speaking students. The author observed that throughout the day, the ESL student did not utter any English words other than the vocabulary that his teacher had him repeat after her. His attempts to join in group activities were ignored by other students.

In the second case study of two young students from Bangladesh, the observer spent twelve weeks documenting situations in which any form of communication was produced by the two ESL students. Findings showed the students alternated between periods of silence and use of ego-centric speech in Bengali. Their socialized speech (mostly in Bengali) was limited to trying to communicate in a one-to-one context with an adult who spoke English only. The case study also pointed out the ESL students' frustration and difficulties during group activities due to limited socialised speech in English.

Brown questions the quality of education for these ESL students in learning environments such as immersion programmes where they are left to "pick up" from their teacher and peers. She strongly recommends that ESL students' mother tongue be used wherever possible, to establish comfort and security for these

students.

The assumption that minority students require maximum exposure to English in order to succeed academically is further refuted by Cummins and Swain (1986). They argued that increased exposure does not necessarily speed the acquisition of English. They acknowledge that maximum exposure to L2 is important, but equally important, if not more so, is the extent to which students are able to understand the academic input and relate to the conceptual attributes which they have developed in their L1. Alternately, Cummins and Swain posed the hypothesis that some aspects of linguistic proficiency are cross-lingual, and that literacy-related instruction in one language will benefit both languages. This interdependence hypothesis is commonly known as the Common Underlying Proficiency model (CUP) of bilingual proficiency. This model is supported by three major sources of evidence: results of bilingual education programmes; studies relating age on arrival and immigrant students' L2 acquisition; and studies relating bilingual language use in the home to academic achievement.

Influence of L1

As mentioned in previously cited research, a large number of researchers and educators have documented consistent and convincing evidence which supports the development, retention,

and use of students' L1 to enhance students' English skill development in the areas of cognition and literacy (Cummins, 1984; Cummins & Swain, 1986). This transference of knowledge and concepts in content areas and thinking and processing skills from L1 into English is further supported by Hakuta & Gould who concluded that, "A strong native language foundation supports the subsequent learning of English, and most of the learning that goes on in the native language transfers readily into English" (1987, p. 41).

A study by Fritz, McClure and Saville-Troike (as reported by Saville-Troike, 1985) of a group of middle-class non-English speaking students (6 to 12 years) in the United States, found that the influence of students' home language was a major factor in these students' success in school. During the latter part of the year, students were administered three English language tests, in addition to the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills in English at year end. The findings contradicted expected outcomes. It had been assumed that "children who interacted socially the most extensively with other English-speaking children would learn English faster and thus do better in English-medium instruction" (p. 209).

Video-taped recordings from the study showed that three of the five students who scored highest in English reading and content areas chose to request information from their bilingual

peers, and often joined forces with others to discuss and solve problems they could not understand in their L1. It further showed that students who demonstrated early skills at combining English and miming to communicate and interact with native English-speaking students were not among the group that scored highest on the standardized achievement tests at the end of the school year.

The authors of the study suggest that children's use of their L1 appears to influence both L2 learning and academic achievement due to the transference principle. One of the generalizations drawn from the study by the authors, which is of particular relevance for teaching ESL students, is that when children are given the opportunity to discuss the concepts they are learning in their L1 with other children or adults, they seem to achieve best in content areas when measured by tests in English.

Pease-Alvarez and Winsler (1994) also lend support to Cummins' Common Underlying Proficiency model and strongly recommend that the academic use of L1 be maintained and developed in the classroom environment in order to further develop the linguistic resources that students have previously acquired. This recommendation came as the result of their study on the language use practices and beliefs of bilingual students enrolled in a fourth-grade class in a Mexican immigrant

community. The study addressed the issue of how students use English and Spanish in class and their attitudes towards the use of Spanish. Their teacher is monolingual but open to and supportive of L1 maintenance. The goal of the school is for students to acquire English and be mainstreamed into the English-only curriculum. Data collection was through class observations and student interviews.

Results showed that students spontaneously chose to use Spanish for academic literacy activities fairly often and used a fair amount of Spanish in the classroom with their peers. Overall attitudes toward bilingualism were favourable and subjects thought it important to be able to speak both English and Spanish well.

A study examining factors which might have influenced ESL students to become academically successful was conducted by Early (1992) in Vancouver. She interviewed twenty-six teenage ESL students to elicit their perceptions of their educational experience. Early found that many students who were considered academically successful in school had continued to use their L1 to better understand content information.

Kanno & Applebaum (1995) interviewed three Japanese secondary students in Metropolitan Toronto and noted a strong connection between the importance of learning English and

friendship groups. In two of the interviewees, their need to become part of the peer group prompted them to use English and become proficient orally. Interestingly, these two students felt the easy acceptance of other students and the relaxed atmosphere of the school environment hindered their English communicative skills, in that they had "plateaued" at early levels of communicative development, therefore, reducing their motivation to further learn more complex linguistic forms. In the case of the third student, she didn't find success in making friends with native-English speaking students and so therefore, had lost her motivation to continue learning English. She found friendship with other Japanese students. Kanno and Applebaum concluded that learning English has to do with ESL students' negotiating new identities in a new environment, and that students help shape the learning that occurs as active initiators of their own education.

Possibilities for Minority Language Students

Cziko (1992) cites a recent new approach to bilingual education in the United States, referred to as "bilingual immersion education", also referred to as "two-way bilingual education" and "developmental bilingual education". These programmes combine features of bilingual education for language minority (Spanish) students with L2 immersion for majority language (English) students. These classes are usually

comprised of 50% Spanish L1 speakers and 50% English L1 students in the same classroom sharing the same teacher. In kindergarten to grade 3, all school subjects are taught in Spanish except for 30 - 90 minutes of English language arts daily. In grades 4 to 6, students receive approximately half day each of English and Spanish in the classroom. For the Spanish students, this is similar to the bilingual education programme, except that these language minority students are integrated with students whose L1 is English. For the language majority students, this resembles the successful French Immersion programme in Canada, with the difference being that these students have contact with classmates who are native Spanish speakers. In contrast, the teacher in Canadian French-Immersion programmes is most often the only native speaker of the L2 in the classroom.

In 1987, Lindholm listed thirty such bilingual immersion education programmes in seven states. The San Diego programme, which started in 1975, provided longitudinal evaluation data which showed that both language majority and language minority students performed considerably above grade level (66 - 81 percentile) on a standardized achievement test of reading and mathematics in Spanish. When tested in English in reading and mathematics, language majority students were also above grade level in both reading and mathematics (74 and 83 percentile, respectively), while the language minority group was above grade norms in mathematics (66 percentile) and near the norms in

reading (46 percentile). Cziko emphasizes that the success of the San Diego bilingual immersion education programme does not prove that bilingual education is necessarily the best approach to educating all ESL students. Best educational programmes are dependent upon factors such as: prior educational background of ESL students (ranging from students with a well established educational background to some with no prior schooling) and the locality of immigrant settlement (high concentration of one or two major ethnic groups within school districts or schools). However, Cziko's study does show it is possible for both Hispanic and Anglo students to attain academic achievement levels at or above national norms in two languages in an integrated classroom.

Conclusion

With the vast amount of literature on language acquisition, bilingual education, and heritage language programmes, similar underlying assumptions about the use of L1 and L2 are reported. This literature review presented some common findings on the beneficial effects of bilingualism and support for maintaining the proficiency of children in the languages of their heritage. These findings encompass and emphasize the importance of L1 and L2 learning in respect to educational, cultural, political, economic and general social development for ESL students (Toohey, 1990).

In order for educators to provide effective educational programmes for ESL students in our increasingly diverse society, there needs to be a number of alternate approaches from which to choose. The question of "What can be done to make the schooling experiences of ESL learners more positive, productive, and successful?" can only be answered by moving away from research that focuses on searching for findings that specifies necessity and probability, to research findings that provide possibilities and alternatives.

The following ethnographic research is based on Runkel's "method of possibilities", to offer alternatives and choices from the perspectives of ESL learners, in order to further the educational goal of improving our programmes for students learning English as L2. It is important to note that the purpose of this study is not to provide a definitive model for educating ESL students which could be applied to all ESL students born to focus on their academic achievement. Rather, this study is intended to promote discussions of the findings on student perceptions, in addition to examining literature on the use of L1, to help Canadian schools to understand the student-teacher and student-student relationships in pedagogical settings prior to suggesting alternatives and choices.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Although most of the literature reviewed focussed on elementary age students, I have chosen to pursue my research with secondary age students for two reasons. A year ago I did a pilot for this study with a group of eight elementary school students and found that this age group of students did not provide me with in-depth responses, perhaps due to their lack of maturity and experience. Having done this study with the younger students, I now wish to do a more in-depth look at the experiences of an older group of ESL learners.

Hypotheses and Questions

This research attempts to elicit from a small sample of Grade 12 ESL students their perceptions on learning English as their L2, to analyze their attitudes towards their use of Cantonese in their daily lives, and to look at some of their strategies, most specifically the use of their L1, in learning English.

Information regarding situations and circumstances where students use their L1, the frequency with which and with whom they speak Cantonese, and their attitudes toward the use of Cantonese in school are examined. As well, questions addressing

how students feel they are perceived by their peers and teachers when they speak their L1 in the classrooms, hall, and schoolgrounds are discussed. Another question being explored is whether students perceive the use of their L1 as a beneficial bridge in learning subject matter ordinarily presented in English. Does the use of L1 help them to comprehend, identify and recognize knowledge and concepts in L2 that they may already have in their L1? Like many school personnel and parents who oppose the use of first language in schools, some ESL students themselves, especially at the secondary level, advocate banning the use of languages other than English in schools. Whether students really feel this way, or whether they are parroting what they have repeatedly heard from teachers, parents, and their peers is one of the questions I am exploring in this study (see Appendix D for the specific questions asked).

My hypotheses for this study are that ESL students with Cantonese as L1 will respond positively to the use of Cantonese in school environments, that they believe the use of Cantonese in school will make them feel comfortable, and more competent as learners. Knowledge I gained from the literature review regarding the transitional use of L1 in enhancing conceptual learnings leads me to hypothesize further that students believe their academic learning and English language development would be enhanced through the use of Cantonese.

Significance of Study

According to Spradley (1979), ethnography is work which describes an "insider's view" of a culture. Conducting ethnographic interviews is one of the ways of getting people to talk about what they know and how they feel. Spradley argues that understanding how people see their experiences can offer insight into how different cultures make sense of their world. By stepping away from our ethnocentrism, and refraining from making assumptions and imposing theories on different cultural groups, we can then attempt to understand people who think and interpret situations and experiences from their own cultural viewpoint.

In our multicultural society, the value of ethnography in providing information to understand our ESL students better has been overlooked, as indicated by the limited ethnographic research in this field. According to Early, Mohan, & Hooper (1990) much of the research on evaluating the effectiveness of bilingual programmes in terms of how well students do academically are based on standardized scores in English language tests and subject-matter tests. Very few studies place an emphasis or report on how well ESL students maintain and further develop L1 in addition to acquiring their L2 (English). Therefore, in order to seek possibilities and alternatives for more effective educational programmes, it is essential for

educators to consider ESL students' perceptions, both their understandings and confusions.

Site Selection

The site for this ethnographic research is a public, secondary school in an affluent part of a major cosmopolitan city in British Columbia. In addition to the regular Grades 8 to 12 curriculum, many special alternative programmes such as "Advanced Placement", "Gifted", "Extended Skills", and "ESL" are offered. According to a staff member, students from this school have consistently achieved a B average, as indicated by the Grade 12 Government Examination results. As per the school profile, an "overwhelming majority" of the school's students continue with post-secondary education (School Profile, Jan. 1997). Students are actively involved in extra-curricular activities such as sports, outdoor education, drama and music. Students have received numerous forms of recognition for excellence in these activities.

Presently, the school has approximately 1400 students enrolled in both regular and alternative programmes. Of the total school population, approximately 60% is Chinese, with students speaking Cantonese and/or Mandarin. A staff member in the ESL department observed that over the last 5 years, he has seen an increase of 100% in the number of ESL classes

established in the school to accommodate new arrivals. This was confirmed by school board records which indicate that in 1992, three ESL classes (60 students in total) were established in this school, as compared to six classes (120 students in total) in 1997.

English is the language of communication and instruction in this school. From my interview with the school administrator, it was noted that of the 84 administrative and teaching staff, 12 members have additional languages; 7 of the 21 support staff also speak languages other than English. In total, approximately 20% of the staff members can speak another language in addition to English. Furthermore, the present staff list shows three teaching and one support staff members with Chinese surnames. It is confirmed by the school administrator that the three teaching staff can speak Chinese.

The cooperation and consent from the administrators to conduct the study were received prior to the study's commencement (see Appendix A for Letter of Approval).

Participants

Purposeful sampling was done to obtain a small sample of information-rich (maturity of Gr. 12 students and personal experience) cases of students who share the common experience of

being an ESL student in a major city in Canada. It is important to note that participants represent just one culture of the many in our Canadian schools. Selection of participants for this study is based on a set of desired attributes, in addition to the specific experience of learning English in an environment where instruction is given in English. This set of criteria focuses on: students who are now enrolled in the regular Grade 12 programme; students who have been in Canada for approximately two to five years; students who have progressed through ESL programmes; students who attend the target school.

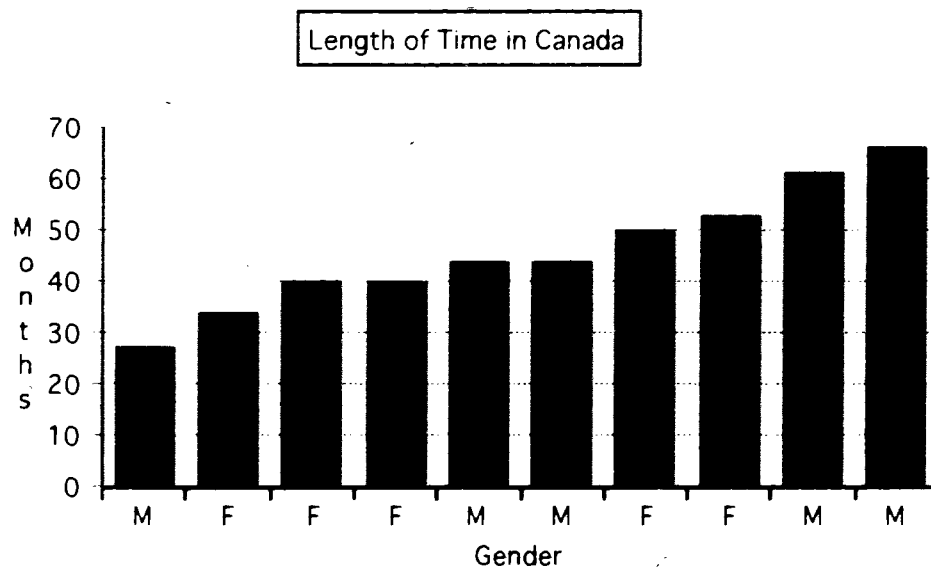
The ESL teacher in this selected school played an important role in matching students to the above criteria, as he is most familiar with this group of Grade 12 students who have been in the ESL programme. Names of all potential participants who met the above set of criteria, regardless of their academic achievement, were given to the school counsellor and were contacted by the school counsellor to set up a meeting date.

After the initial contact by the counsellor with potential participants, I met with the group of fifteen Cantonese students in person at their school to discuss my research. I explained in English the purpose and format of the study, and asked for their voluntary participation in an one-hour oral interview to be conducted by me in either English and/or Cantonese.

Of the fifteen ESL students whom the counsellor initially recommended, ten agreed to participate. These five males and five females have been in Canada ranging from 2 years 3 months (27 months) to 5 years and 6 months (66 months), with 3 years and 8 months (44 months) being the average in the group (see Figure 1). More specifically, two of the participants (Eric and Derek) arrived in 1991, two (Stephanie and Tammy) in 1992, four (Stacy, Michelle, Aaron, and Mathew) in 1993, and two (Alden and Tracy) in 1994. All came from Hong Kong and speak Cantonese as their L1, and they all speak predominantly Cantonese at home with their parents and siblings.

FIGURE 1

Participants' Length of Time in Canada



Average time = 44 months

Data Collection

I have been teaching for seventeen years in a variety of assignments, with teaching ESL as one of my specialties. This is my second year as Vice-Principal at a nearby elementary school and this is how I introduced myself to the participants at our initial meeting. I acknowledge that my professional affiliation might have some influence on how the participants reacted and responded to the questions during the interview. Nevertheless, I felt a formal introduction was necessary to provide credibility with the Chinese community, as parents and students would thus be more inclined to consider participation in this research study instead of rejecting it from the beginning. I knew from past experience and my knowledge of the Chinese culture, that most Chinese parents and many students are hesitant to participate in outside activities which are not school-related. By introducing myself as a vice-principal, I had hoped that parents and students would view this study as a legitimate activity in which to participate.

As I had predicted, I received few responses (three) after the initial group meeting. I waited two weeks before contacting the list of recommended students by phone and asked that they consider participating. All students with whom I was able to establish contact and speak to personally, agreed to be interviewed. Hence, I was able to work with a sample of ten

participants, five males and five females. I strongly feel that these students' reconsideration was largely due to their perceptions of my position of authority as a school vice-principal.

All involved were assured that their names and their school would be kept in confidence, and that their participation would in no way affect their school grades. They were also assured that during and upon completion of the research, all data collected would be kept in a locked filing cabinet.

Written consent from parents/guardians of students and of students themselves who were interested were obtained (see Appendix B for sample of consent form from Parents/Guardians and Appendix C for participants). Students who returned their consent forms to the counsellor were given a copy of the interview questions prior to the interview session. Participants were contacted by phone to set up appointments before or immediately after school hours, as many have tutoring and night school classes to attend in the evenings.

Students were interviewed individually, in a private office within the school. The school was chosen as the interviewing site as it is familiar to the students. I wished to provide these students with some comfort and security, and to gain their trust in me as an outsider.

Each interview lasted approximately one hour. At the start of the interview students were informed that it would begin in English, unless they did not understand the question and would like it asked in Cantonese. I decided to start in English unless otherwise indicated by the participants as I did not wish to insult the participants by implying that their English was not good enough to conduct an interview in or to influence them on the choice of language. Although the interview began in English, I was very specific that participants had the option to respond in Chinese if they wished. All of the participants used their L1 at least part of the time during the interview when encouraged to do so. It was interesting to note that when questions went beyond relatively straight-forward demographic information, Cantonese was used extensively by half of the participants. This is especially true for three of the female (Stephanie, Stacy, & Michelle) and one male (Mathew) participants. Although several of the sessions were conducted mainly in Chinese there were many instances where English words and phrases were mixed in with the Chinese. This is very typical of the way many of the new immigrants from Hong Kong speak, even parents. After each response in Cantonese, I paraphrased it in English for the participants to ensure my understanding and accuracy of interpretation with my choice of English words, as I am not able to write Chinese. As Spradley (1979) notes regarding ethnographic interviews, language is the primary form of communication in a culture and it functions to

create and express meaning which reflects cultural experience and knowledge. He strongly recommends communicating in the participants' native language to prevent distortion of cultural interpretation and to reduce the influence of translation from North American perspectives. It would appear that my ability to converse with the participants in Cantonese contributed to the eliciting of details for more meaningful responses, and participants seemed more forthcoming with their opinions and ideas as the interview progressed.

The interview followed a structured form with forty predetermined open-ended questions. These questions were designed to elicit participants' experience and behaviour in an ESL environment, their opinions and values regarding L1 usage and the ESL programme in general, their feelings and reactions to L2 learning, their knowledge and interpretations of others' actions, as well as demographic information for identification of participants in relation to other ESL students.

Each interview was tape recorded, and hand-written notes of students' responses were taken during the interview sessions (see Appendix D for Interview Questions). Throughout the session, I retained a friendly, conversational tone to indicate empathy and understanding to encourage participants to elaborate on their ideas, beliefs, and opinions. I found it was necessary to convey a non-judgemental attitude, with constant reassurance

to participants of confidentiality of the interview content, prior to participants being forthcoming with controversial issues.

In addition to the oral interview, I was able to obtain records of the school board's initial academic assessment for most of the participants. Student records from previous schools, both in Hong Kong and in Canada (when available), were reviewed to gain additional educational and family background information. These records served to verify what participants have said in response to questions regarding their perceptions of their academic ability. Records of their educational achievement in Hong Kong indicated that the majority of these students are "good" students, using the scale of "Excellent, Good, Fair, and Poor". It is worth noting that all information was verified by these records except in one case where the participant had mistaken her year of entry into Canada. There were also two instances where the participants had rated themselves slightly different academically in Hong Kong than were indicated in their report cards. This information has been adjusted and accounted for when reporting in the next chapter.

The initial research question was to explore the role of L1 in ESL students' learning of English and to examine students' own perceptions about their use of Cantonese in their daily experience. During some of the interview sessions, other

specific issues regarding ESL learning emerged which are of great interest and relevance to our education system, but are not related directly to my research. Participants expressed their opinions and commented extensively on issues such as their perceptions on: ESL programmes; desirable teacher qualities; and preferred teaching styles. They also voiced their concerns regarding exit (ESL programmes) criteria and procedures, and subsequent integration into the regular programme.

Limitations

The intent of this study was to obtain information from a small sample of Cantonese-speaking ESL students who were willing to talk about their own learning experiences in school. I had some difficulties in getting volunteers, but with follow-up telephone calls, I was able to convince the students to participate. I presume that these difficulties were mainly due to cultural barriers to this type of participation. I acknowledge limitations to the selection of the sample in that it is not randomized and representative of all ethnic groups and all ability levels, therefore, generalizability is restricted. As well, my dual role as the interviewer and an authority figure in a nearby school may or may not have implications for the participants responding candidly. Nevertheless, I feel the results from this study can provide valuable insights into the complex task of teaching ESL students.

Chapter 4

Findings

The interview questions were designed to elicit data which might provide information to either support or query research findings reported in the previous literature review chapter. Before analyzing the responses provided by the participants, these interview questions were grouped into issue categories in order to seek an over-all picture of relationships amongst the data. Questions related to each of these issues are included in the beginning of each section. Issues such as L1 usage, strategies which help ESL students to learn and succeed in school, and participants', teachers', peers', and parents' attitudes toward the use of L1 and L2 are examples of such categories.

Participants have been given pseudonyms to protect their identities. Their responses were quoted extensively and in their entirety to illustrate the various ESL learners' perceptions and viewpoints. Specific sample quotes are presented to illustrate similar comments expressed by participants, and the number of quotes cited does not represent the frequency of similar comments elicited.

It is important to note that portions of the interviews were conducted in Cantonese and participants' responses were

translated directly into English. Participants' quotes are indicated by * followed by quotation marks. When the entire quote was given in Cantonese or in English, it is indicated by the bold-faced words '**In Cantonese**' and '**In English**'. Isolated English words mixed in with Cantonese responses are **bold-faced**.

To English speakers with little knowledge of the Cantonese language, these quotes in English could appear to be telegraphic and at times grammatically incorrect. This is because the structure of the spoken language in Cantonese is different from the structure of written language. The oral language does not correspond grammatically to written expressions. I chose not to alter the participants' responses structurally in order to retain their responses as spoken.

Demographics

Questions asked in this section included:

- # 1 - Where did you live prior to coming to Canada?*
- # 2 - How long have you been in Canada ?*
- # 4 - Who do you live with ? List the members of the household.*
- # 5 - What language(s) do you speak at home ?*

All ten participants lived in Hong Kong prior to coming to Canada. Lengths of residence in Canada range from 2 years 3 months to 5 years and 6 months, with the average being 3 years and 8 months. Eight of the participants live with both parents and the other 2 (Stacy and Eric) with one parent (their mother). All of them have siblings; 4 with younger siblings only, 4 with older siblings only, and 2 with one younger and one older siblings.

The language of communication at home is mainly Cantonese, with one participant having reported some Mandarin also being spoken at home, as with Fukinese in one family, and a little English in another. Four of the participants reported that they do not speak any English in their homes even though their parents can understand some English. When asked how many of the participants' parents have some understanding of oral English, 4 reported "none", 2 reported "little", and 4 reported "some understanding". When English is spoken in the homes, it is usually amongst siblings or on television programmes.

Educational Background

Questions asked in this section included:

- # 3 - What grade did you complete in Hong Kong ?*
- # 6 - Do you know how to read and write in Cantonese ?*
- # 7 - How would you describe your academic ability in*

Hong Kong ?

8 - *How well did you speak English before you came to Canada ?*

9 - *Have you ever had tutoring - privately or by school ? How often ?*

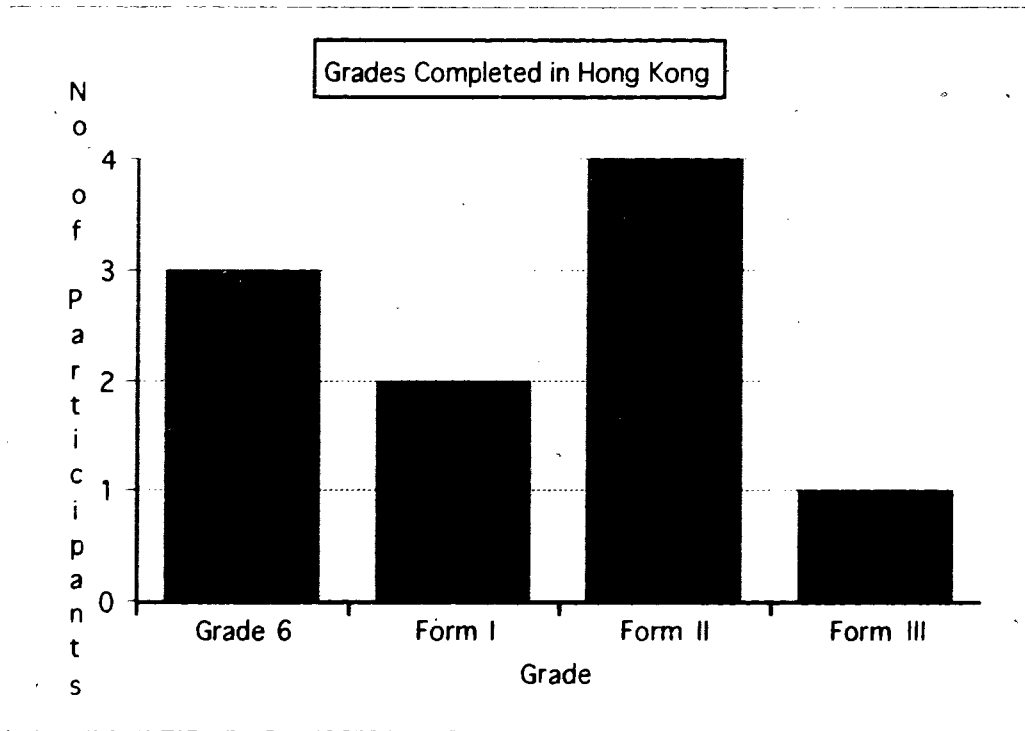
10 - *How would you rate your academic ability in English now ?*

All of the participants had prior schooling in Hong Kong, with Cantonese as the language of instruction. The Hong Kong school system differs slightly from the Canadian system in that elementary years end with Grade six, and high school education starts with Form 1 to Form V. Three of the participants (Tammy, Eric, and Derek) had completed Grade 6, two (Stephanie and Mathew) completed Form 1 (Gr. 7), four (Stacy, Michelle, Alden and Aaron) Form 2 (Gr. 8), and one (Tracy) Form 3 (Gr. 9) (see Figure 2).

When asked to rate their present reading and writing ability in Cantonese on a scale of little, some, or fluent, all of them rated themselves as fluent in reading, but only 8 rated themselves fluent in writing. The majority of the participants described their academic ability in Hong Kong as being fair (3) to good (5) as per their report cards from Hong Kong. With the remaining two, one responded with excellent and the other poor.

FIGURE 2

Grades Participants Completed in Hong Kong



All except for one participant (Tracy) have had English as a subject in elementary years (K-6), with 5 periods per week being the average. The seven participants who have had high school experience (Form 1-3) reported an average of 6.5 periods of English as a subject per week. Information provided by the participants seemed to indicate that English classes in elementary grades concentrated mostly on written grammar and vocabulary development, with very little opportunity for speaking. In high school, mainly grammar (tenses) and vocabulary development were taught, along with some listening and little speaking skills. Skills such as composition, reading

and listening comprehension, singing, conversation, memorization, and dictation were each mentioned once by different participants as having been taught in English classes in Hong Kong. When asked to rate how well they spoke English before coming to Canada, eight responded with little and two with some. Replies by the participants were:

- * **In Cantonese** "I think it's okay but not very good - listening not too good. For example, if they speak in very **detail** than I can't understand." (Stephanie)
- * **In Cantonese** "I feel that my speaking is poor. Can read some. I can, when compared to others, be more **logic**, easier to understand." (Stacy)
- * **In English** "I can make simple sentences." (Derek)

All of the participants have had ESL support in Canada, with all of them having enrolled in ESL classes ranging from one to three years; the average stay being one year 9 months. This support was followed by enrollment in transitional (modified program) classes for one year for nine of the participants, and two years for one participant. Seven participants are now in their first year of regular classes, with two in their second year, and one in third year. Participants report feeling more comfortable now with their academic ability in English than when they first arrived in Canada as they rated themselves as being good (4) to fair (6).

Study Habits and Strategies

Questions asked in this section included:

11 - How much time do you spend daily doing homework ?

How much time on studying and reviewing ?

12 - Do you do your homework/studying by yourself or with a friend ? In English or Cantonese ? Why ?

13 - Are your parents able to help you with your homework ?

Participants' study habits revealed that they spent a daily average of two hours doing assigned homework, and an average of one hour studying and reviewing daily. One participant spent two hours on homework and four hours on studying/reviewing. When asked why she spent so much time, she indicated that it was not due to English, but largely due to the lack of knowledge and background information in subject areas such as Chemistry and Physics. In addition to the time spent on homework and studying, five of the participants are presently receiving private tutoring after school hours, on an average of two and a half hours per week. Eight of these participants have been receiving tutoring service ranging from a few months to four years in areas such as grammar, reading comprehension, vocabulary, essay writing and help in homework for Math, Physics, and English.

Six of the participants indicated that their parents do not help with their homework. If asked by the participants to help with homework, only one parent is able to do so in English, and the others will provide help in Cantonese. Five of the participants indicated that their older siblings will at times assist them, two in English and three in Cantonese.

It is interesting to note that half of the participants prefer to study or do homework independently. The need to concentrate on their task was the reason most given, as indicated by their comments:

- * **In Cantonese** "Usually can't get work done because busy talking." (Stephanie)
- * **In English** "Because I like to work independently, more concentrating." (Alden) (Aaron and Derek also made similar comments)
- * **In English** "I like to be by myself. I don't like gather information from others and sometimes they could give bad opinions." (Tracy)

The other five participants preferred to study with a friend. Some samples of their responses are:

- * **In English** "Because it's easier like, you can put together our ideas. Talking and discussing with a friend helps to understand." (Tammy)
- * **In English** "For some tests, we like to share notes and to

talk over so we can have better understanding. We study mostly in Chinese because that's the friend that I work with. It's just more comfortable speaking. I should say we are used to it, it's not just more comfortable, it's just the way it is." (Eric)

When studying with friends, these participants use mostly Cantonese, with vocabulary items where applicable. They cited the following reasons for using their L1:

- * **In English** "Because it's easier to communicate. The material we are dealing with we use English, but like communication, . . . [language switch occurred]
In Cantonese "like what we speak and when we do it, it's in English but when we discuss, it is in Cantonese."
(Tammy)
- * **In English** "Because easy to communicate - feel **strange** because we are **Cantonese** why speak **English**." (Stephanie)
- * **In Cantonese** "Because others understand Cantonese. When you speak **English**, it's only a sentence once in a while, would not purposely speak **English**. If others know Cantonese, why would you want to speak **English**, make others more **confuse**. Feel more close to speak in Cantonese. After all **English** is not my **first language**. It's not that I don't know how to speak English, but because I am used to Cantonese, **feel more comfortable speaking in Cantonese**." (Stacy)

First Language Usage

Questions asked in this section included:

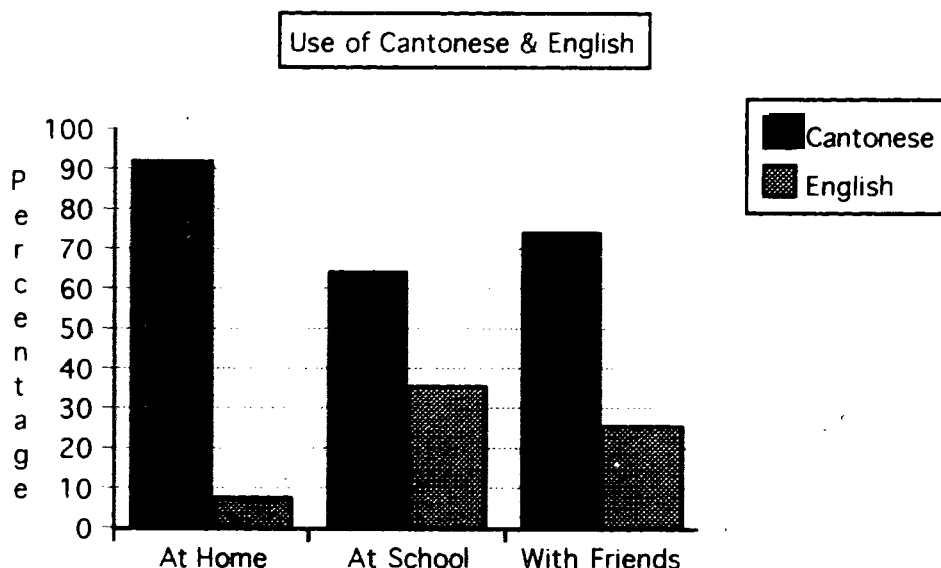
- # 19 - What percentage of your friends have as their first language English --, Cantonese -- Others ?
- # 20 - Do you speak Cantonese with your Chinese friends in school ? When - outside of class -- in class --
For what purpose - eg. socializing, learning content, communicating OR Why not ?
- # 21 - How often do you speak Cantonese (percentage of a day) at school -- at home -- with friends -- ?
- # 22 - How often do you speak English ?
At school -- at home -- with friends --
- # 23 - What reasons do you have for choosing one language over the other ?
- # 24 - How comfortable are you in switching from one language to another in different situations ?
- # 25 - Have your pattern of language usage changed over the years? eg. more English, less Cantonese.
How and Why ?

When analyzing participants' responses on how often they use their L1 (Cantonese) through out the day, it appears that Cantonese is used extensively ; at home (92.3%), at school (64%), and with their friends (74.6%) (see Figure 3). It is worth noting that participants reported of all of their friends,

59% have Cantonese as their L1, and only 18% speak English as their L1. The other 23% speak either Mandarin, Korean or Japanese. This might explain the high percentage of Cantonese spoken throughout the day.

FIGURE 3

Participants' Daily Use of Cantonese and English



The major reason given for use of Cantonese in class was to ask friends for assistance in comprehending classwork. Ease of socialization and communication were reasons given for using Cantonese outside of class. Typical were comments like these:

* **In English** "I use Chinese is like a way for me to understand things better and I use English because I don't want English-speaking friends to be frustrated. Like

sometimes when I talk to friends who speak Cantonese in front of English-speaking friends to feel frustrated or to think that we are talking about them so I would avoid speaking Cantonese in front of English-speaking person."

(Tammy)

- * **In English** "Feel more comfortable, easier communicate so we can understand." (Tracy)

Others provided these comments to illustrate their reasons for choosing one language over the other (English versus Cantonese and vice versa):

- * **In Cantonese** "If the other person doesn't speak English well- and I speak English to them, then it's like making fun of them - an insult to the other person. Sometimes the other person would feel **embarrassed**. For example, if I speak a sentence **in English**, they don't understand, I immediately speak **Chinese - Cantonese**, then we feel better- like looking down on them." (Stacy)
- * **In English** "I use Cantonese to explain or rephrasing. Because it's my first language, more convenient. Sometime in English you have to think about it and in Cantonese, you just say it." (Aaron)
- * **In English** "Friends think you are cocky if you speak English to them - think you are so good in English. Sometimes you mix two languages, more comfortable for friends whose English is not well. I prefer to speak

Chinese when we are playing games like basketball- so the other team can't understand us, or when we listen to Chinese tapes." (Alden)

* **In English** "Weird if we speak English when all of us are from Hong Kong." (Derek)

* **In Cantonese** "Because I have been using Cantonese - **first language**. Easy to communicate in Cantonese and used to it. At home, Daddy and Mommy don't know English, must use Cantonese." (Mathew)

* **In Cantonese** "Convenient. They speak to me in Chinese, so I speak back to them in Chinese. All my friends have been in Canada the same amount of time as me. All in the same situation." (Michelle)

These responses are significant in revealing participants' need to communicate in their first language. Their comments clearly illustrate language as an instrument of communication and social affiliation. Communication encompasses not just the language forms, but the understanding of social attitudes, norms, values and perceptions of the culture. For these participants, a sense of affinity with the Chinese language and culture provided them with comfort and ease, and they often revert to Cantonese in situations where English is not mandatory.

When participants were asked how comfortable they were in using Cantonese or English for different situations, most replied that it was very difficult to use English in the beginning, but that they are fine now. Some samples of response are:

- * **In English** "Before, every English word I have to like translate from Chinese to English. Now, it's better."
(Derek)
- * **In English** "At the beginning, not quite comfortable but right now is fine. Before, my English is not good and not much vocabulary I can use in my sentence thing, think more slowly." (Tracy)
- * **In English** "I rather speak one language - Chinese. It's quite difficult to transfer from one language to another language." (Aaron)
- * **In Cantonese** "Very difficult to do because English is difficult to learn." (Mathew)
- * **In English** "Sometimes we use Mandarin - three languages - confusing sometimes." (Alden)
- * **In Cantonese** "Not very comfortable in switching languages because hard to express ideas and vocabulary. This school has too many Chinese, hard to learn English." (Michelle)

One participant (Alden) stated that he sometimes mixes Cantonese and English because it is more comfortable. Two others replied that it is not a choice since they speak whatever

their friends speak. As they stated:

* **In English** "It's really not my choice. What my friend speak, then I speak that language with them. For a guy who are immigrant, I won't speak English with them, it's just the natural way, but for a CBC (Canadian born Chinese) or like a Canadian, I speak English with them. Like I wouldn't go out there and choose a friend because of a language, like nothing about that. It's just that I know this friend speak English, I speak English with them, I know this friend speak Cantonese, I speak Cantonese."

(Eric)

* **In Cantonese** "Not a matter of choosing or not choosing, it depends on who you speak with, you use that language."

(Stephanie)

In examining the pattern of language usage, the majority of the participants reported that they used mostly Cantonese when they first arrived in Canada. Although they have learned English, they feel that they are still using more Cantonese than English. Two participants stated that they were using more English when they were first learning the language, but are now using more Cantonese, as illustrated by this quote:

* **In Cantonese** "When I first came three to four years ago, I went to -- school and there weren't as many Chinese. I have more English friends. Now, I am at this school, I use more Cantonese because there are more Chinese friends."

(Stephanie)

Some of the reasons given for using more Cantonese now when participants have learned English are:

- * **In English** "I still have some Chinese friends and they ask me not to speak English with them. At home, I use Cantonese with my parents, no English." (Alden)
- * **In Cantonese** "Most of my friends are Chinese." (Tracy)

The following comments illustrate situations where English is used by the participants outside of classrooms:

- * **In English** "I have more friends who speak English - I now know more vocabulary and slang, can express feelings more comfortably." (Eric)
- * **In Cantonese** "I now know more English - I communicate with tutor and other people who speak English only."
(Stacy)

Classroom Difficulties

Questions asked in this section included:

- # 14 - Do you understand your teacher when he/she gives instruction in class? If no, why not?
- # 15 - Do you ever feel frustrated in class when your teacher gives instructions or when you try to express yourself in English? Always - Often -

Sometimes - Never -

16 - *Name some of the situations where you were frustrated.*

17 - *What do you do when you are frustrated ?*

18 - *What would help you to better understand your work in class ?*

When participants first arrived in English-speaking classrooms, they found it very difficult to understand instructions given by their teachers. Difficult vocabulary was cited by three students, and the teacher speaking too fast was cited twice as reasons for their lack of understanding. Other reasons included participants' lack of background knowledge, their poor English listening skills, and adjusting to different teaching styles.

Most of the participants (7) feel frustrated in class at least some of the time. They attributed their frustration to three major causes : inability to express themselves; not knowing how to write essays; and receiving poor grades. These comments illustrate their frustration:

* **In Cantonese** "Know in Chinese but not in English. Not good mark, not what I expect, not good always."

(Stacy)

* **In English** "Don't understand assignments/instructions.

When I want to ask questions about the assignment, it is

hard to express myself." (Tracy)

- * **In English** - "Even now I want to say something but I couldn't find a really good way to say it, express it, so I say forget it. That happens all the time. Sometimes I feel embarrassed - not because I don't know but sometimes the teachers and students don't understand what I am talking about. I try my best to think of a way to say it or probably ask somebody how I would express this idea - in Cantonese." (Eric)
- * **In English** "Because I try very hard but results not that good - assignments in English. For examples, I do essay - research for many hours, many days, the teacher say not clear and ask me to find a proof-reader. Then next time I write an essay and I give it to a tutor to proof-read it and he (teacher) said it's not your writing style." (Aaron)
- * **In Cantonese** "Tests I feel are too hard - Not good grades. Homework is Okay." (Michelle)
- * **In Cantonese** "Don't know how to write essay - to do research." (Mathew)

When asked what they felt would help them to understand their school work, and to ease their frustration, the overwhelming response was the ability to converse with classmates in Chinese. This response confirmed what many of the researchers in the field of bilingualism and first language programmes have found (I have also found this in my own ESL

teaching experience). If learners are given the opportunity to discuss in their first language the concepts they are learning, comprehension of content along with the learning of the language will be enhanced (Saville-Troike, 1985). Participants' comments are:

- * **In English** "ESL teachers understand your situation so let us speak Cantonese. They understand better and not expect as much." (Mathew)
- * **In English** "I ask someone else, my friends - easier, feel more comfortable to ask friends. I phone up friends to discuss in Chinese." (Derek)
- * **In Cantonese** "If I don't understand my assignment, I will ask friend, or perhaps ask teacher. Most times I would ask teacher." (Stacy)
- * **In Cantonese** "Ask friends or tutor - speak Chinese with tutor." (Michelle)

Additional suggestions which the participants feel can help learners to better understand and to succeed in class include group discussions, visual cues, demonstrations, teaching of vocabulary, and use of Chinese/English dictionaries, as indicated by their responses:

- * **In Cantonese** "In class ask Chinese-speaking friends to explain. If teachers allow time for small group discussion will help." (Tracy)
- * **In English** "Group work - have to be mixed with Canadians

in order to be on task and not talk about other stuff."

(Alden)

* **In Cantonese** "Perhaps they could give more **group work** and also **group work** with English-speaking students - more communication. Because student to student interaction - **understand** is easier, better than the teacher - because using student's point of view to explain, easier to understand alot." (Stephanie)

* **In English** "When sometimes they do lab or some activity, they can do some demonstrations. Reading instructions don't have any problems with me but demonstration really helps. In English class show more videos - give some more reading materials for me to read instead of lecture."

(Tammy)

Nine of the ten participants regard their bilingual dictionaries as an aid to learning.

* **In English** "Bilingual dictionary - I need to learn for myself, eg. look up words in dictionary." (Tammy)

* **In English** "Find the definition from the dictionary - electronic English and Chinese." (Tracy)

Amusingly, one student replied that when she is frustrated in class, she asks to leave the room.

* **In English** "Ask to go to the washroom. Let me settle down, you know." (Stacy)

Strategies That Help

Question asked in this section included:

33 - Over the years, what has helped you to learn
English ?

Participants were asked to reflect on what has helped them to learn English over the years. They stated that listening to the radio and watching television programmes such as the Knowledge Network Channel, MTV (Much Music), fashion, sports, entertainment shows, news, and commercials as opportunities for them to hear English in context. Reading books, newspaper, and magazines, as well as having older siblings and tutors to help with their assignments were also suggested by a number of participants. Most of the participants also recommended having more contact with English by getting involved in school activities such as the Annual club, the volunteer club, and selling merchandise in the school store. They feel that these activities will provide listening and speaking opportunities.

As stated by the participants:

- * **In English** "Watch more TV - English movies, and also sports programs can help you. Try to read more books or newspapers." (Aaron)
- * **In English** "Practice your English more. Know more Canadian friends, don't be stick around the Chinese circle. If you do, you never learn English." (Alden)

- * **In Cantonese** "Speak English with friends from other cultures." (Stephanie)

Three of the participants emphasized that working with friends using Cantonese, and another two stated that renting videos with Chinese sub-titles have also helped them to learn English.

Participants' Attitude Toward Use of L1 and L2

Questions asked in this section included:

- # 26 - *How do you feel about using Cantonese in school with your friends ?*
- # 27 - *How do you feel about others speaking their own language in school ? For example, others speaking Mandarin or Japanese.*
- # 28 - *Should students be allowed to speak their own language in school ?*

Overall, participants are in favour of themselves speaking Cantonese in school; other students speaking their first language; and teachers speaking Cantonese to students in class to aid in comprehension (if they can).

All but one of the participants expressed good feelings about using Cantonese with their friends, since they felt they

can communicate easily and fluently. Their comments are:

- * **In English** "Most of my friends are using Chinese, so I think in order to talk with them, I should use Chinese. I feel pretty good about using it. I think maybe I would choose Chinese if there is a choice. (Derek)
- * **In Cantonese** "Comfortable. There are only four people in our group who don't speak Cantonese. If I speak **English**, my **Cantonese** friends would tease me. In fact, my English-speaking friends want to learn Cantonese."
(Stephanie)
- * **In English** "In front of Canadians, you better speak English - more respectful. We have a choice, they don't have a choice." (Alden)
- * **In English** "Feel fine, but not in class. If in class, should whisper and not too loud. But you know there are some people who like shout out Chinese in the class, that's kind a annoying and unfair for Canadians too cause they don't even understand what we talking about." (Eric)

One female participant (Tammy) stated "No" to the above question, but had admitted to using more Cantonese with her friends now than when she first arrived in Canada. As Tammy puts it:

- * **In English** "Now, it's less English. I think when I first came, I think I have to be involved with the community, and have to learn more English, and have to get more practical

experience. But like now, I can't learn anything from speaking English. I want to be comfortable when I talk."

Eight of the participants agreed that students should be allowed to speak their own language in schools. As they explained:

- * **In Cantonese** "Human rights to speak whatever they wish. It is not illegal." (Michelle)
- * **In English** "Yes, everybody has their right to choose. I like to speak in Cantonese. Others like to speak in English. Sometimes I find a little bit frustrated when my French class and my teacher say Only French and English is allow in the classroom. Well, we are learning French right. Why he say allow English to be in classroom but not Cantonese. I don't think that's fair." (Tammy)
- * **In English** "Fine. Everyone has their own culture. People can speak whatever language they are comfortable with it. Everyone has freedom." (Tracy)
- * **In English** "Yes, a group of people know the language - it's the language in common." (Aaron)
- * **In Cantonese** "Yes, but outside of class. In class - teacher speak English. If speaking Cantonese, not respectful of the teacher and teacher may not be comfortable." (Mathew)
- * **In Cantonese** "Yes, they are speaking about their own personal business, so even if they speak in **Cantonese** or

English, no use for me to listen to them. In class, teachers speak **English**, but we can discuss school work after class in **Cantonese**." (Stephanie)

- * **In English** "Yes, to a certain extent. Like language is something you born with it. It's like it's really hard to overcome it. I have to face it, I am a Chinese immigrant. For many friends I have to speak Chinese with them, that's like the natural way. It's really hard to explain why. It's just the natural way. But if we are like abusing it, like really don't speak English - or don't try to talk to Canadians, I think that's not really good. You know what I mean?" (Eric)

The two participants who replied that students should not be allowed to speak their own language in schools cited the "official language of Canada" as their main reason. They commented:

- * **In English** "I don't think so. Maybe it's not fair to the teachers. I think we should increase our skills in English. Maybe I think that in Canada the official language is English, so the school like should be in English." (At this point, I said, "This is what you think, but that's not what you do." He laughed and replied, "Yeah.") (Derek)
- * **In Cantonese** "Living in Canada - official languages are English and French. I know I should speak English, but

still I will speak Cantonese. Situations not allowed, eg. Mom speaks Cantonese only." (Stacy)

Participants' attitudes toward others using their L1 in school was very positive, as shown by these comments:

- * **In English** "If they are talking about maybe their school work, maybe pretty good, talking about their own thing. But, if they are talking with their friend about you in his own language, then it's bad." (Derek)
- * **In Cantonese** "No problem. I don't mind. Since you don't understand them anyway, no use thinking about it." (Stacy)
- * **In English** "I like to speak Cantonese with my friends, so do they." (Tammy)

Students' View of Teachers' Use of L1

Question asked in this section included:

32 - Would it be helpful if your teacher spoke Cantonese to you in class to help you understand ? Why ?

When participants were asked what they thought of teachers being able to communicate with them in Cantonese, the majority thought it would be great, once they overcome the strangeness of teachers being able to speak languages other than English in Canada. Initially, all of the participants were taken by surprise and replied that they have not had teachers who could

speaking Cantonese with them. After rephrasing the question to suggest that if they had a teacher who could communicate with them in Cantonese, would they feel the use of Cantonese in class as beneficial, half of the students thought the use of Cantonese would help them to better understand; two thought it would be helpful but had conditions for Cantonese to be used by the teacher; and the remaining three felt that only English should be used since they have to learn English in Canada. Yet, these three participants felt that asking friends to explain or studying with friends, using Cantonese, was beneficial. The three sets of opinions are illustrated by participants' replies:

- * **In Cantonese** "Yes, at first - Biology concepts and vocabulary. Connect what's learned in Cantonese to English. Save time from looking up in dictionary and better understanding." (Stephanie)
- * **In Cantonese** "To help in Physics and Chemistry. Need to understand the concept before doing assignment." (Mathew)
- * **In English** "Yes, Sometimes you need explanation and have someone tell you in Cantonese. Much more easier to understand." (Aaron)
- * **In English** "It would help, but teacher has to be really strict - just to explain only what we can't understand." (Eric)
- * **In Cantonese** "No, you have to try to understand in English and not rely on the teacher to explain in Cantonese." (Alden)

- * **In Cantonese** "No, not fair. Others might feel that there is favouritism. Should be forced to learn English."
(Stacy)
- * **In English** "No, teachers can get another student who can speak Cantonese to help others. I'm not used to teachers who can speak Cantonese. If teachers can discuss like friends, then it would help." (Tammy)

Perceptions of Peers, Parents, and Teachers

Questions asked in this section included:

- # 29 - What do your school friends who don't speak Cantonese think about you speaking Cantonese in school ? How do they react ? Do they say anything to you when you speak in Cantonese ?
- # 30 - How does your teacher react when you speak Cantonese in school ? Do you think they approve or not approve ? How do you know they feel this way ?
- # 31 - What do your parents think about you speaking Cantonese in school ? Do they approve or not ?
How can you tell ?

Participants' responses regarding their perceptions of how their peers and parents viewed their use of Cantonese in school indicated that they have not had many negative experiences. One participant (Eric) cited an incident at school:

- * **In English** "There was this time I was hanging out with these two girls, Canadian girls, and they were talking in this really weird language I didn't know what they were talking about. And I was like -What? and she goes like yeah, and that's how we feel when you people speak Chinese in our school. That was kind of hurt me but still it's their point of view. But most of them (the other students) they just ignore it. They understand it is a very natural thing too."

The majority of the participants did not perceive any parental pressure for them to speak more English. As stated :

- * **In English** "I think maybe they would prefer I speak English, they don't really force me to do so." (Derek)
- * **In English** "It's like totally fine for her. I don't think any parents will say Don't speak Chinese." (Eric)

The one exception (Stephanie) to the majority of the group stated her parents had asked her to speak more English:

- * **In Cantonese** "They say speak more English because you come to Canada, you must learn more English. We plan to stay here, if learned English, easier to communicate and easier to find a job in the area of business."

All of the participants reported having received negative comments and reactions from teachers when they speak Cantonese

in school, in situations where participants are engaged in classwork or socializing. Students who have felt teachers' disapproval when they spoke in Cantonese received directives such as:

- * **In English** "This is Canada. English is the official language. You have to speak English in order to survive in this society." (Alden)
- * **In Cantonese** "Teacher will say Speak English - no Chinese. No respect for me." (Mathew)
- * **In English** "They always say 'No Cantonese in classroom, or I will deduct your participation marks' and stuff. They don't like us speaking Cantonese, most of the teacher, especially language teacher, but Math, Physics, and Chemistry they are fine. Allow us to use Cantonese in class as long as we understand the material." (Tammy)
- * **In English** "Some said you should speak English in the class. One said the more you speak, the fluent you are. Another said - you must speak English in the class, or else will deduct marks." (Stephanie)
- * **In English** "It's funny because in ESL, the teacher will be like mad, he will be like - Don't speak your own language, speak English. But right now in regular class, those teacher they don't really care. They probably don't like it but they just didn't say a word." (Eric)
- * **In English** "I don't think they like it. Several teachers would tell us - Don't speak Chinese, speak in English."

(Derek)

When I asked Derek whether teachers would say this if students were socializing, he replied:

* **In English** "For both school work and for socializing because the teacher won't be sure whether we are speaking about school work."

It appears that school personnel advise ESL students to speak English at school for the purpose of learning English faster, in order to integrate into the mainstream society. The notion of conforming to the dominant society at the expense of one's use of the heritage language is very prevalent. This in turn, greatly influences and shapes how students value their L1.

While on the topic of teacher reactions to students using their L1 in school, half of the participants revealed that they have experienced what they perceived to be forms of racism. According to the Evaluation Report on Vancouver School Board's Race Relations Policy (1989) [hereon referred to as VSB Report] 64% of the students in the survey chose 'Not Very Often' when responding to the question of whether they feel they had been treated unfairly by their teachers because of their racial/ethnic background. Interestingly, the report further states that "Although the figures are not conclusive ESL students do feel discriminated against to a greater extent than regular

students whether they speak English at home or not" (p. 104).

Four female and one male participants from this study have given examples of situations where they have perceived that comments and actions by teachers directed at them were mainly due to their language and cultural background. These include:

* **In Cantonese** "I feel that some of the teachers are really **racism**. Eg. Very evident in a class of students, the class is divided, students sit in two halves (of the room), **Chinese** on one side, Westerners on the other side. Very evident when he/she speaks, he/she faces the Westerners. Treats us like we are invisible, like we don't know **English**. But, **actually** when we are in the class, we wouldn't purposely speak Chinese. The opposite, we would listen."

"And then, he/she is sometimes very insulting. Eg. You, the group of **Aberdeen**, please **shut up**. You, the group of **Parker Place**, just like that, and then say **Dim Sum club**. This makes us as students **feel** badly. Why does he/she have to say things like that about us? He/she won't call us by our names, only calls us by this (Aberdeen, Parker Place, Dim Sum)."

"In this school, the **ESL teachers** are very nice. But it's with the **regular teachers** that we have the (above-

mentioned) experience. The **ESL teachers** are very patient to teach us. They would make sure we understand whatever it is we don't understand. They are really very good."

(Stephanie)

* In **Cantonese** "Really, I want to **emphasize French** class - he/she wants you in the classroom to use **two language, English and French**. I feel the teacher only knows **English and French**, so he/she doesn't want us to use Chinese. I **understand** but the question is you are **humiliating other language-speaking** students. In front of so many **English-speaking** students, Canadians, say - 'I don't think you should speak Chinese, because I think you are speaking about me. I don't like it.' I feel he/she gave us a very bad impression. He/she thinks that if we speak, we must be talking about him/her."

This student continued to speak at great length and in detail about these issues and how they were manifested in several different subject areas, including reading and physical education.

"I feel that all of the teachers **emphasize** the most on **Cantonese and Mandarin**, must not speak in school, because there are so many Chinese students in this school. Another issue is the **reading period**. Our **reading period** is twenty minutes every day and everyone bring

their own books to read. Suppose to be any kind of reading materials, but many of the teachers won't allow us to read Chinese books. I think, **Why not** Chinese? I feel you (teachers) want me to learn **English**, but if I want to learn **Cantonese**, I want to learn Chinese, then I should read Chinese books. They suggest we read more English books to learn English, then if I want to learn Chinese, then I should read more Chinese books. For example, I was learning how to write Chinese characters in short form, so my mommy told me to read more books with these types of characters in it, then the more you read, the better you will understand. So I was reading them, but the teacher came by and took my book and closed it. He/she asked - **Aren't you suppose to be reading English books?** I told him it's because I want to learn how to write these characters, that's why I have to read these books. The teacher said during silent reading, I have to read **something interesting**, not a text book to learn something. It's true that I didn't find the Chinese book that interesting, but I also don't find English books that interesting, either. Instead, I would rather read **magazines or comics** for something interesting. I think that they want to **emphasize English Silent Reading**, I want to know why not read Chinese. I think this is why it's not **fair**."

"I have a male teacher who is firstly prejudiced against girls, and secondly Chinese because he feels the Chinese students' **physical ability** is not good, always worse than **Canadians** by a lot. I think this is because Hong Kong people don't have the opportunity to exercise as much, when you (teacher) say that, then what about our academic - it's better than Canadians, so you can't say things like that (comparing students). When I was in that class, I feel he hated us, very much. For example, you stand around while the others are **setting up the net**, you really want to help but there are so many helping already, or you just finished doing something else and he sees you standing there, then he will say - 'What are you standing around for? You are useless.' He makes you feel incompetent, worthless, and don't dare in the future to stand around again, and very afraid of him. Afraid of him not because of what he asks us to do during classes but afraid of him and therefore, we don't go to class. I know he wants us to participate, to do well, not fool around, but he never thought the way he treats us, how we would feel. Because if he doesn't like us, then we won't like him either. I think he feels it's **okay** for him not to like us, but not **okay** for us not to like him. You can't not like me, because I am the teacher. I don't think that's **fair**. It should be that no comparison be made with other students. Not to say you are better and you are not as good because

in this class, there is no **test**, just observing **participate** what you do in class."

"But like in English class, I really want to participate but too many **English-speaking** students and the teachers always ask them to answer. Even though you put up your hand and the teacher asks you to respond, someone else will yell out the answer instead and the teacher will then turn his/her attention to that other person and you are ignored and you just sit there. So then you feel inferior and think if the others are so smart - I better not speak anymore."

For this participant, public spaces other than classes are also settings for concern:

"Some teachers when you say 'Hi' to them in the hallway, they just ignore you. They could at least smile or say Hello or Good Morning back, this is good manners. If they are in a good mood, they might acknowledge you, if in a bad mood, they ignore you."

The issue of plagiarism was also raised by the same participant:

"I have a feeling that all the teachers here feel that Chinese people are very sly and they cheat. For example, they think that Chinese students have other people write their essays, Chinese students skip classes, they

lie. I know for a fact that **English-speaking** students do these things as much as Chinese students. We are not copying or **plagiarism**, but would **share ideas**. You wouldn't be so stupid as to hand in assignments exactly the same. You look at each others, discuss and learn from their way of doing things. Yes, you should learn to do it on your own, but even if you look and share ideas, you still have to write it out yourself, so you are learning. I think everybody copies from something some of the time. For example, in English, I use Coles Note for **Shakespeare** to do summary for every scene. Sometimes the sentence that you wrote is the same as the answer key, eventhough there is only one way of answering, that doesn't mean I copied from the answer key. For example, on one of my assignments - ten pages long, the teacher underlined one sentence that was exactly the same as in Coles Note, and he/she failed me. I have to repeat English again. I know other students who have also used Coles Note but they didn't fail the course. I think he/she was picking on me." (Tammy)

When I suggested that she should have gone to the teacher and discuss the matter, Tammy replied,

"He/she is the teacher, I can't argue with him/her."

- **In Cantonese** "Last year there was a student teacher who I feel was prejudiced against Chinese people. He only

scolded Chinese for talking and not other students because we would not talk back."

"English teachers usually give Chinese students low marks, rumour is that it's prejudice against Chinese. They (students) say if you are Chinese, there is no way you could get a B. There was a student who got a B, but he/she bought the teacher a present." (Michelle)

* **In English** "Some of the teachers are very good but some are racism. When they teach some regular English courses, they always saying all the other classes the regular students how good they are. Not an English teacher, some other teachers, like some of the Science teacher, they treat the Canadian in a different way. For example, if both of them are late, they give the Chinese a detention and I find that when they are marking our project, we work very hard and always get lower mark than the Canadian."

"When they are assigning us something they just the brand new things they give it to Canadian first. When we ask them for another for exchange if the old one doesn't work, and the teacher ask us just to use it, just ignore us. For example, for an experiment for the battery, the old one doesn't work." (Aaron)

* In Cantonese "ESL teachers they understand your situation and so let you speak in Cantonese so we can better understand. The English teacher, the regular ones always want us to speak in English, but sometimes if we don't understand, how can we express in English?"

"ESL teachers have no discrimination but the regular ones, some have (discriminations). The ESL teachers understand about Chinese students, their habits, traditions, they understand better. The regular teachers feel that Chinese students are 'out of it'. Once we were in P.E. class, us Chinese couldn't run as fast as the Westerners, the teacher said, - You Chinese garbage, run so slowly. That was in Grade 10."

"In terms of marks, I feel my quality of the content is the same as the Westerners, but the marks are higher for the other by a lot, and on top of that, the teacher makes remarks that are negative. Our main points are the same, but I have a lower mark. This kind of incidents is in the minority, maybe two to three times." (Tracy)

As cited in the VSB Report (p.99) some secondary school teachers have expressed frustrations with the large number of ESL students being integrated into the regular academic programme. Teachers have found it difficult to hold class

discussions when many of the ESL students would not participate voluntarily. At the same time, it was reported that "ESL students did not always feel comfortable with regular class teachers. Most ESL students said they were "too scared" or "too embarrassed" or thought the teachers uninterested.

Whether the comments provided by the participants in this study constitute racism is left to individual interpretation. It is obvious that these students do perceive and interpret these negative attitudes and comments as being racist. It is imperative that school personnel be sensitive as to how their attitudes, comments, and actions can be interpreted by students, in order to eliminate any form of perceived or real racism.

Activities Outside of School

Questions asked in this section included:

- # 34 - What activities do you do outside of school ?*
- # 35 - Who do you participate these activities with ?*
- # 36 - How often do you speak English during these times ?
For what reasons ?*
- # 37 - Do you feel these activities help in your learning
of English ?*

In an attempt to analyze the language pattern used by participants, and to learn circumstances in which participants

choose to speak Cantonese or English, they were asked to list activities they do outside of school; with whom they participate in these activities; how often English was used during these activities and for what reasons; and whether participants felt these activities help in their learning of English.

It is evident that participants prefer to converse and socialize in Cantonese outside of school. While they play many sports (tennis, basketball, hockey, bowling, badminton, table-tennis), join school clubs (Chinese chess, volunteer, robotic), attend community centres (swimming, fitness, skating, library), and watch movies, participants used predominantly Cantonese during these times. The following responses typify their preference:

- * **In Cantonese** "These activities we use mostly Cantonese - more comfortable. Have been speaking Cantonese for a long time." (Aaron)
- * **In Cantonese** "I go with my family members or sometimes with my Chinese-speaking friends. We speak very little English, only when necessary like booking time or buying food." (Mathew)
- * **In English** "I speak English 40% of the time - more Chinese friends. When there are many Canadians, don't want to speak Chinese, don't want to feel different." (Alden)

Three participants (Eric, Tracy, and Stephanie) stated that they speak English approximately 50 % of the time at these activities, choosing whichever language is easier to express themselves.

In terms of whether these activities help them to learn English, participants were divided in their response. Besides going to English movies, which provided them with opportunities to listen to English and to learn about the North American culture and slang, a few of the participants felt that these activities did not help them learn English. Approximately half of the participants agreed that outside activities allow them to speak and listen, and to practise using English in real life situations, but added that the English used is simple.

For many students learning a new language, they are very conscious of their speaking ability, as indicated by the participants' responses regarding the most difficult thing about learning English:

- * **In Cantonese** "Oral presentation because feel embarrassed since my English is not that good. When the teacher asks questions in class, I know the answer, but don't know how to express it in English." (Mathew)
- * **In English** "To speak probably. I don't mean the ability to speak but to have the courage to speak, that's the big thing, I think. Some kid they go to like really good

school in Hong Kong and they have a really good knowledge of English but then when they came over they don't dare to speak - I think they are embarrassed and they have an accent and they can't express what they want to say, just like in my case." (Eric)

- * **In Cantonese** "Making friends and carrying on a conversation in English." (Michelle)

These comments illustrate clearly the reason ESL students tend to gather in common-language groups, which in turn creates mistrust and fear among staff and regular students.

At the end of the oral interview several of the participants (all five male and one female) expressed general feelings on the issue of learning English as a second language.

- * **In English** "New immigrants should try to adapt to new environment - hang out with Canadian kids." (Eric)
- * **In Cantonese** "I feel that if you are here to learn English and you want to learn, then you will learn well. Some people can learn four languages. It's really up to yourself if you really put in the effort to learn. They say that speaking too much Chinese can harm the learning of English, than I don't think that is true. English, if you really want to learn, you can." (Stephanie)
- * **In English** "ESL students feel that they are not as good as regular students. Their English is not that good, they

are afraid to speak English and embarrassed that someone will point out their mistake." (Aaron)

* **In English** "If you respect people, people will respect you." (Alden)

* **In English** "If teachers are patient, it take off the pressure when you talk to the teacher. Maybe I would be more active because I won't be afraid of the teacher."
(Derek)

* **In Cantonese** "ESL students should speak to parents or counsellor about problems. I didn't do it before - embarrassed because of lack of English and not know who to go to." (Mathew)

Having completed the transcripts of the interviews, an analysis of participant responses for each of the categories showed that on the whole, there are no significant differences in terms of gender. Approximately the same number of responses (10) were quoted for both female and male participants, with the exception of one female (Stephanie) having 14 quotes, one male (Eric) having 13 quotes, and one female (Michelle) having 5 quotes. There are two areas which showed a difference in gender: comments regarding racism (4 females and 1 male), and general feelings about ESL learning (all 5 males and 1 female).

Summary of Data

- * Cantonese is used extensively throughout the day.
- * Half of the participants prefer to study alone for concentration reasons; the other half felt working with friends, using Cantonese in discussion was beneficial.
- * Cantonese is used for: communication and cultural affiliation at home and in school; assistance in comprehending class work; school work and socialization outside of school.
- * Most felt it would be beneficial if teachers themselves can use Cantonese as a transition to help students learn English.
- * The majority are in favour of using Cantonese in school for ease, comfort, and fluency in communicating.
- * Most agreed that other languages beside English should be allowed in school citing freedom of rights and common language groups as reasons.
- * The majority did not receive negative comments from their peers when they speak Cantonese in school, nor did they receive parental pressure to speak less Cantonese.
- * All have been advised by their teachers in various subject areas to speak English instead of Cantonese.
- * Half of the participants perceived some of the teachers' comments, attitudes and actions as racist.

- * Many encountered difficulties in understanding vocabulary and teacher instructions, lacking in content knowledge, and adjusting to teaching styles.
- * Suggestions for teachers were: provide small group discussions, both in English and in Cantonese; teach specific vocabulary; provide visual cues.
- * All but one participant cited the use of bilingual Chinese/English dictionaries as one of the learning tools.
- * Suggestions for ESL students were: participate in sports, clubs, community activities; listen to English radio, music, and watch television and movies; read in English; and make friends from other cultures in order to speak English.
- * Half of the participants (four females and one male) voluntarily commented on the issue of perceived teacher racism towards Chinese students.
- * There were no gender differences in participant responses in all of the categories except in comments made regarding racism (4 females and 1 male) and general feelings on ESL learning (5 males and 1 female).

Chapter 5

Discussions and Reflections

The goal of my study is to contribute information, from the perspective of a group of ESL students, on whether the use of students' L1, in this case, Cantonese, is helpful in their acquisition of English. The research I conducted indicates that this group of participants viewed the acquisition of English in terms of how well they performed in various subjects. During the interviews, when the students spoke about their progress in English, they stated that they are better able to comprehend and complete assignments now as compared to when they first arrived in Canada. For these students, it is the comprehension of knowledge and concepts, as well as the ability to communicate in English, which are important when measuring progress in English language acquisition. Data from this study clearly shows that participants perceive the use of Cantonese as helpful in acquiring English, and with no restrictions placed on the participants to speak English-only in school, they freely choose to converse in Cantonese for academic discussions and socialization. Similar findings were reported by Pease-Alvarez and Winsler (1994) and Early (1992) in their research with elementary and secondary students, respectively.

Participants in this study reported encountering difficulties in understanding vocabulary, teacher instructions,

and content knowledge; they also noted difficulties in adjusting to diverse teaching styles. They whole-heartedly believe that the use of their L1 is beneficial in helping them to understand new vocabulary, new concepts, and teacher instructions in class, and thus, eliminates some of the frustrations which most of the participants have reported having experienced at least some of the time. It appears that for these participants, the use of L1 is critical for their academic, psychological and social integration within the Canadian society.

The study also affirms what many prominent researchers in the field of bilingual education have found (Cummins & Swain, 1986; Early, 1992; and Medina & Escamilla, 1992): the promotion of L1 is crucial to the development of the academic and social L2, and that L1 is a frame of reference rather than an interference to the acquisition of a L2 (Duquette, 1993). This is illustrated by data which indicates that Cantonese is used extensively throughout the participants' daily lives, with an average of 92% at home, 64% at school, and 74% with their friends. Although all of the participants' use of English has increased, they use more Cantonese than English in oral communication in situations where English is not mandatory. As reported, Cantonese is used for: communication and cultural affiliation at home and in school; assistance in comprehending class work; studying and socialization outside of school. To illustrate ways Cantonese is used to aid in comprehension,

students provided the following examples: interpretations of concepts and vocabulary from English to Cantonese by peers or use of bilingual Cantonese/English dictionaries; having peers explain what was said in English during class or studying time; and having older siblings assist with homework or assignments using Cantonese. In these ways, Cantonese builds a bridge for students to understand English in much the same way that Cantonese subtitles do in English movies.

The majority of the participants are in favour of using Cantonese in school for socializing and academics because of ease, comfort, and fluency in communicating. Their responses showed that they tend to socialize with other Cantonese speaking students, which I feel is their way of belonging to a group. According to the VSB Report (1989), it is noted that ESL students often feel they are separated from the regular student body and that there is a definite lack of social integration between the two groups. The single most important cause of this separation is language, specifically students' speaking ability, which creates an invisible line. Having established a comfortable group of friends, it is very difficult for students to cross the line to make new friends, using English. This is similar to findings reported by Kanno & Applebaum (1995) in that one of their subjects found friendship with other Japanese-speaking students when she did not have success in making friends with native English-speaking students.

All but two of the participants in my research agreed that other languages should be allowed in school, citing freedom of choice and common language for a group as reasons. It is of interest to note that the two participants who felt that other languages should not be allowed in school have indicated using Cantonese both in and out of class and had given reasons to support their use of Cantonese. Their opinions that languages other than English and French should not be allowed in schools might be attributed to their view of what is considered by the general population to be proper. My interpretation is that for the participants' psychological well-being, they rely on the familiarity of Cantonese to enable them to be active participants in school. However, they might have been told by "someone" that in order to learn English, they must use English only. This assumption is very evident in many of the participants' responses regarding their perceptions of how their peers and teachers regard the use of languages other than English in schools.

While Cantonese is used extensively by the participants, some of their comments indicated uncertainty as to whether they should use Cantonese, as they have experienced negative reactions from most of their teachers. This ambiguous feeling places pressure and stress on students and might hinder their academic learning as well as their social well-being. These negative attitudes stem from the false belief that the use of L1

is a hindrance to the learning of L2 (Cummins, 1989). It is interesting to note that even in an environment which seems so generally unsupportive of L1 usage, it is nevertheless considered by these students to be so beneficial that they continue to use it. It is imperative that educators not view ESL students from a "deficit" view; of being linguistically, academically and culturally deficient. This deficit perspective tends to devalue students' language and cultural heritage, which could lead to racist behaviour within the learning environment (VSB Report, 1989).

Moll (1992) argues against school programmes solely remediating students' English language deficiency; stating that schools must emphasize students' L1s and prior knowledge as resources, not deficit. This sociocultural approach should be considered as a possibility when creating instructional environments for the students' academic development. This is supported by the declaration made in the Multiculturalism Policy of Canada, which states that schools should "make use, as appropriate, of the language skills and cultural understanding of individuals of all origins".

Most participants felt it would be beneficial if teachers were to use Cantonese or provide opportunities for small group discussions in Cantonese as a transition to helping them learn English and subject content. For many students, it is often

beneficial to work cooperatively, especially for ESL students who are joining our school programmes mid-way through their education. Allowing the use of students' L1 in the classroom as a teaching tool or peer translation or tutoring strategy, helps to bridge student learning by providing them with the comprehension required. The use of this transitional method helps them to identify and recognize knowledge and concepts that they may already have in their L1; all they lack is the English to help them connect. When new knowledge is presented, Cantonese can be used to explain the new ideas and vocabulary and to help students to relate new information to prior experiences and knowledge. As stated by Saville-Troike (1991):

When students begin learning a second language, they do not start learning all over again, but interpret meaning in terms of what they already know - not just about language, but about the context in which it is being used and about strategies for social interaction. This means . . . L2 learning is heavily dependent on prior experience and . . . the nature and level of L1 development. (p.8)

The use of L1 as a support for students to discuss and learn new information is necessary to ensure students are receiving equal opportunity in learning environments.

Participants' positive attitudes toward others using their L1 in school seemed to illustrate their acceptance and understanding of ESL students' need to use their L1. Their

opinions appeared to be reflective of their personal experiences in learning a new language and culture, and in encountering difficulties. Their attitude confirms observations made by D'Onofrio (1993) that bilingual children are socially more flexible and less prejudiced with regard to other cultures.

Most of the participants have not received negative comments from their peers when they speak Cantonese in school, nor have they received parental pressure to speak less Cantonese. However, all of them have been advised by their teachers to speak English instead of Cantonese, and fifty percent (four females and one male) of the participants perceived some of the teachers' comments, attitudes and actions as racist. Although the issue of racism is not part of my intended research question, I feel it has significance for educators of ESL students. The inclusion of examples of participants' perceived racist experiences in their school is not intended to expose individual schools, but to bring out a concern that could be focussed upon and addressed by educators. Systemic racism encompasses "prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behaviour of fellow students and teachers" (Beynon & Toohey, 1991), with far-reaching consequences for the lives of the students. This systemic racism can take the form of schools failing to provide sufficient academic language support and/or declaring schools English-only, excluding the use of L1s.

Following the introduction of Bill 39, the Multiculturalism Act in 1993, the B.C. Ministry of Education published the document - Multicultural and Anti-Racism Education in Schools, which suggests that one of the ways for integrating multicultural and anti-racism awareness across the curriculum is to "provide opportunities for students to communicate in their first languages". This is in direct contradiction to what some schools are doing when declaring schools to be English-only. In order to effect positive changes and to eliminate these participants' negative perceptions, educators must develop the understanding that classrooms are organized around beliefs and practices which affect students psychologically and, in turn, influence them academically. This is supported by policy #9.D.123 of the Members' Guide to the BCTF (British Columbia Teachers' Federation) (1994-1995) which states that school boards "recognize the developmental nature of language learning (L2 learning as well as L1) and provide a continuum of services to meet the changing needs of ESL/ESD (English as a Second Dialect) students as they progress in their language development".

It is critical for educators to develop appropriate concepts and knowledge regarding the learning of a second dominant language. It is for this reason that learners' perceptions regarding how they view their own learning experiences should be considered when developing and

implementing potential educational possibilities. As suggested by Beynon & Toohey (1995), the school as an institution, parents, teachers, and students are necessary agents to bring about positive changes to our present educational system.

Currently, a small number of researchers have begun to elicit students' perceptions on how they think they can best be educated, and to find possible solutions to the many difficulties they experience while learning a second dominant language. More ethnographic studies designed to explore factors which can influence learners' success are needed. The benefits of using L1 as a bridge to learning L2; maintenance and valuing of L1; and promoting self-esteem need to receive more attention in the near future in discussions concerning how best to support ESL learners.

As Baker and de Kanter (1981 & 1983) suggest in Cziko (1992), developing truly effective ESL programmes can only be done by carefully recording different approaches which have made positive impacts on the academic achievement of language minority students. From this study, the notion of valuing and using students' L1 as a transition could be seen as a possible alternative to existing approaches now used with ESL students in their learning of a L2. This is based on the research that promotion of L1 is a key to developing communicative competence and academic success in English if English is taught through the

content areas. In addition, L1 needs to be accepted and valued by the community in order to facilitate students' adjustment into society, since a positive identity is related to one's need for self value and acceptance by peers, and developing a sense of belonging (Duquette, 1993).

Conclusion

This research study reinforces my teaching experience that the use of L1 by ESL students can be beneficial in assisting them to adjust to a new learning and living environment. Students' ability to communicate with peers who speak their L1 increases their confidence and sense of belonging to a group. Use of L1 for educational purposes also benefits ESL students by providing them with a bridge to connect concepts and ideas to prior knowledge and learnings. Valuing and maintaining L1 literacy and promoting bilingualism also enhances students' self-esteem and self-worth, in addition to benefiting our society economically. When seeking alternate programmes for ESL students, we must consider the learners' perspectives on how they think they can best be educated.

The issue of using students' L1 in the school environment continues to be a conflict between the two groups, English-Only and English-Plus, with both groups holding widely divergent views. It is hoped that with more ethnographic studies delving

into ESL students' perceptions of their learning experience and their use of L1, educators can gain a better understanding of the issues and factors influencing students' learning, and thereby, better assist ESL students in their language, cognitive, and social development by providing other possibilities and alternatives to our present English-immersion model of educating ESL students.

This research could be replicated in future using a larger, random sample of subjects. My study has focussed on secondary students and it would be of importance to look also at elementary students, possibly using classroom observations for data gathering as it is more difficult to get elementary students to reflect on how they learn. Information from this and subsequent studies could provide ideas for possible alternatives in educating a large portion of the Lower Mainland's ESL population, and may be of interest in the many large urban centres that are also experiencing a growth in immigration. These students' perspectives regarding how they think they can best be educated lend insights and valuable information to decision-making discussions on this issue.

Extensions

This study raises other questions for future consideration in the teaching of ESL. Is the present model of immersion in

English-only programmes the best method of enabling ESL students to acquire English? What alternatives and resources are available to educators? What impact does "English-Only" instruction have on ESL students' perception of the value of their L1 and their self-esteem, and consequently on their learning of English? Would the use of L1 positively affect the rate of students' English learning? How can educators improve the current system of providing ESL service to immigrant students and not have students and their parents perceive receiving support in ESL as a negative reflection of students' academic ability? These are all issues which require a coordinated effort from students, parents, educators and researchers to explore and resolve.

Appendix A
Administrator's Letter of Approval

Name of School

October 16th, 1996

To Whom It May Concern :

I, -----, Principal of ----- Secondary School, hereby give permission for Lanny Young to conduct a research project on the premise of the above-named school with selected Grade 12 students.

I understand that this project will take place between October 16th to December 20th, 1996. Prior to students participating in this research project, parental consent will be obtained.

-----, Principal

Appendix B

Informed Consent for Minors by Parent/Guardian to Participate in a Research Project : Ethnography of Cantonese Students' Perceptions on How They Acquire English as a Second Language

This project will examine English as a Second Language (ESL) students' perceptions on how they acquire English and whether the use of Cantonese in the school is beneficial. Information regarding situations and circumstances where students use English or Cantonese, the frequency and with whom they speak Cantonese or English, how students feel about the use of Cantonese in school, and their perceptions as to the benefits of having instruction and content explained to them in their first language will be explored. In addition, questions addressing how students feel they are perceived by their peers and teachers when they do speak their native language in the classrooms, halls, and outside will be of interest.

As (parent, guardian) of (name of student) _____, I hereby give consent for him/her to participate in an oral interview, conducted at school, only if he/she so wishes, for the above research project.

I understand that participation in this project, and the data collected, will be totally separate from the teacher's assessment of the above-named student. All audio tapes used to record the interviews will be destroyed when data collection and interpretation are completed.

I understand that any documentation resulting from this study will guarantee the anonymity of the above-named student and that his/her name will not appear in any publication. Results of this study can be obtained by contacting Lanny Young.

I understand that the above-named student may withdraw from the project at any time. Any questions and concerns might be directed to Lanny Young at 731-4167, or Dr. Kelleen Toohey at 291-4418, or to the Dean, Dr. Robin Barrow, of the Faculty of Education.

I certify that I understand the procedures outlined in the participant information sheet and have fully explained them to the above-named student.

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

Appendix C

Informed Consent of Subject to Participate in a Research Project : Ethnography of Cantonese Students' Perceptions on How They Acquire English as a Second Language

This project will examine our (English as a Second Language (ESL) students) perceptions on how we acquire English and whether the use of Cantonese in the school is beneficial. Information regarding situations and circumstances where we use English or Cantonese, the frequency and with whom we speak Cantonese or English, how we feel about the use of Cantonese in school, and our perceptions as to the benefits of having instruction and content explained to us in our first language will be explored. In addition, questions addressing how we feel we are perceived by our peers and teachers when we speak our native language in the classrooms, halls, and outside will be of interest.

I understand that the interview will be conducted orally in a one-to-one situation at school, and that all audio tapes used to record the interview will be destroyed after the collection and interpretation of data.

I understand that confidentiality will be guaranteed and that my name will not appear in any publication.

I understand that I may withdraw from the project at any time, and I will only participate in this study with consent from my parent/guardian.

I fully understand the procedures outlined for this research and I willingly consent to participate in this research.

Any questions and concerns might be directed to Lanny Young at 731-4167, or to the Dean, Dr. Robin Barrow, of the Faculty of Education.

To access research results, please contact Lanny Young at 731-4167.

Signature of Subject

Date

Appendix D

Questions For The Oral Interview With Selected Students

1. Where did you live prior to coming to Canada ?
2. How long have you been in Canada ?
3. What grade did you complete in (country of origin) ?
4. Who do you live with ? List the members of the household.
5. What language(s) do you speak at home ?
6. Do you know how to read and write in Cantonese ?

	Fluent	Some	Little
Read	_____	_____	_____
Write	_____	_____	_____
7. How would you describe your academic ability in Hong Kong ?

Excellent	_____	Good	_____	Fair	_____	Poor	_____
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* **Look at report cards from home country**
8. How well did you speak English before you came to Canada ?

Fluent	_____	Some	_____	Little	_____	None	_____
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* **Find OROC initial assessment records.,**
9. Have you ever had tutoring - privately or by school ? How often ?
10. How would you rate your academic ability in English now?

Good	_____	Fair	_____	Poor	_____
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 - **Examine school records since their arrival and note academic path and length of support eg. ESL, transitional/modified/regular**
11. How much time do you spend daily doing homework ? _____
How much time on studying and reviewing ? _____
12. Do you do your homework/ studying by yourself or with a friend ? In English or Cantonese ? Why?
13. Are your parents able to help you with your homework ?
If yes, in what language _____
how often _____
14. Do you understand your teacher when he/she gives instructions in class ? If no, why not ?
15. Do you ever feel frustrated in class when your teacher gives instructions or when you try to express yourself in

English ?
Always ___ "Often ___ Sometimes ___ Never ___

16. Name some of the situations where you were frustrated .
17. What do you do when you are frustrated ?
18. What would help you to better understand your work in class ?
19. What percentage of your friends have as their first language
English _____ Cantonese _____ others _____
20. Do you speak Cantonese with your Chinese friends in school?
When - Outside of class _____ In class _____
For what purpose - eg. socializing, learning content, communicating **OR** Why not ?
21. How often do you speak Cantonese ? (percentage of a day)
at school _____ at home _____ with friends _____
22. How often do you speak English ?
at school _____ at home _____ with friends _____
23. What reasons do you have for choosing one language over the other ?
24. How comfortable are you in switching from one language to another in different situations ?
25. Have your pattern of language usage changed over the years ? eg. more English, less Cantonese - How and why ?
26. How do you feel about using Cantonese in school with your friends ?
27. How do you feel about others speaking their own language in school ? For example, others speaking Mandarin or Japanese?
28. Should students be allowed to speak their own language in schools ? Why or why not ?
29. What do your school friends who don't speak Cantonese think about you speaking Cantonese in school ?
How do they react ?
Do they say anything to you when you speak in Cantonese ?
30. How does your teacher react when you speak Cantonese in school ? Do you think they approve or not approve ?
How do you know they feel this way ?

31. What do your parents think about you speaking Cantonese in school ? Do they approve or not ? How can you tell ?
32. Would it be helpful if your teacher spoke Cantonese to you in class to help you understand ? Why ?
33. Over the years, what has helped you to learn English ?
34. What activities do you do outside of school ?
eg. sports, clubs, community centres, movies, etc.,
35. Who do you participate these activities with ?
36. How often do you speak English during these times ?
For what reasons ?
37. Do you feel these activities help in your learning of English ? In What Ways ?

Appendix E
Ethics Committee Approval Letter

September 23, 1996

Ms. Lanny Young
Graduate Student
Education
Simon Fraser University

Dear Ms. Young:

Re: **Ethnography of Cantonese Students' Perceptions on How They
Acquire English as a Second Language**

I am pleased to inform you on behalf of the University Research Ethics Review Committee that the above referenced Request for Ethical Approval of Research has been approved contingent upon this office receiving a letter of acknowledgment and approval from each school involved authorizing your research to be conducted. Once these letters have been received by this office, you may proceed with your research.

This approval is in effect for twenty-four months from the above date. Any changes in the procedures affecting interaction with human subjects should be reported to the University Research Ethics Review Committee. Significant changes will require the submission of a revised Request for Ethical Approval of Research. This approval is in effect only while you are a registered SFU student.

Best wishes for success in this research.

Sincerely,

Bruce P. Clayman, Chair
University Research Ethics Review Committee

c: Kelleen Toohey, Supervisor

BR/hme

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