Searching for a Bilingual Exit

Daniel W.C. So

Hong Kong is a monolingual (Cantonese-speaking) and ethnically homogeneous (ninety-eight per cent Chinese) society. However, since the late 1950s a growing number of her primary school students have opted to continue their secondary education in English-medium (EM) Anglo-Chinese secondary schools (ACSSs) rather than in Chinese-medium (CM) Chinese middle schools (CMSs). In 1958, as shown in Table 1, CMS students constituted approximately forty-five per cent of the total enrollment in schools at the secondary level. By 1983 the percentage had dropped to nine and is still dropping.

The current educational language policy (ELP) deliberations are no more than endeavours to resolve a dilemma created by the above phenomenon: While more and more ACSSs experience difficulties in using English as a medium of instruction (MOI) especially after 1978 when secondary education was made available to all school-age children, the sociolinguistic and infrastructural dynamics are such that the popular demand for English proficiency and EM education will continue to be strong in Cantonese-speaking Hong Kong.

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1 One of the indicators of ethnicity in Hong Kong is a citizen’s place of origin. According to the 1981 census, citizens with place of origin from either Hong Kong or China amount to ninety-eight per cent of the total population. See Hong Kong Census and Statistical Department, Hong Kong 1981 Census Main Report Vol. I: Analysis (Hong Kong: Government Printer, 1983), p. 112.

2 For example, see Hong Kong Education Commission, Education Commission Report No.1 (Hong Kong: Government Printer, 1984), Chapter 3.

3 The term infrastructure is used here in the same sense as in Harris (1980). It refers to the demographic, techno-economic and occupational structures of a society.
<table>
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<th>Student</th>
<th>CMS School</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Total School</th>
<th>Total Student</th>
<th>% (CMS)</th>
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* The figures in this table refer to enrollment at day grammar schools only.

After more than a decade of deliberations, it appears that some major ELP decisions are afoot. At this juncture of continuity and change, it may be worthwhile to examine again an issue which constitutes the crux of the above dilemma: Namely, the relationship between English proficiency and EM education, and the associated pedagogical issues.

The assessment of the above issue will be carried out by first examining findings from a number of studies from both North America and Europe. Then, the implications of these findings for Hong Kong will be examined.

Using the Target Language as MOI and Target Language Proficiency

The idea that using the target language (TL) as a MOI facilitates its learning is more than twenty years old. In the early 1960s, the desirability of increasing contact hours with the TL by teaching other subjects or conducting extra-curricula activities through the medium of the TL has already been noted (Stern, 1963, p. 82):

The value of this is demonstrated wherever the language is used partially or exclusively as a MOI. This arrangement offers pupils an opportunity to use the language as means of communication without paying too much attention to linguistic processes and in this way to practise the new language in functional situations.

The above is further developed by Dodson (1967) who claims that effective second language learning results only if opportunities for meaningful communication are integrated with the teaching of the structure of the language itself. Dodson makes a distinction between medium-oriented communication and message-oriented communication. According to him, in medium-oriented communication, the

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4 In April 1986, the Department of Education announced that a policy of “positive discrimination” in favour of schools using Chinese as the MOI would be implemented with effect from September 1988. As noted in the Department’s General Administration Circular No. 13/86: “The key feature of this policy is that additional teachers of English and additional resources will be provided, on a scale which will depend on the extent to which individual schools use Chinese as the MOI for subjects other than English.” All ACSSs were requested to inform the Department of their response to this policy in October 1986.
child’s mind is focused mainly on the language itself. In message-oriented communication, the child’s aim is to communicate a message which is not about language, so that language becomes the tool rather than the focus of attention. He then proposes that the latter should be an integral part of every second language activity unit at the infant and junior school levels (Dodson, 1978).

When the Gittens Report recommended the establishment of bilingual schools for Anglophone students in Wales, which would make systematic use of Welsh as a part-time MOI in infant and junior schools, Dodson’s ideas were adopted as the modus operandi in these proposed schools. The modus operandi required that Welsh be used during play activity and as a MOI for peripheral subjects which constituted half of the curriculum. The whole experiment has become known as the Schools Council Bilingual Project subsequently.

After a decade of experimentation, evaluations indicated that the activity approach was more adaptable in infant schools than in junior schools. On the other hand, to the extent that the modus operandi was followed, Welsh proficiency of the students in the project was significantly better than that of their counterparts in conventional programmes. Many of these students were able to enter Welsh-medium secondary schools.

Similar evidence comes from the Canadian immersion programmes. These immersion programmes have their origin in the St. Lambert Experiment conducted by two psychologists, Wallace Lambert and G.R. Tucker in 1965. The experiment involved a five-year study of the effects of French-medium instruction on two groups of English-speaking Canadian children. Starting from kindergarten to first grade, these children’s education was conducted exclusively in French. From grade two to grade four, their education was conducted mainly in French except for two half-hour daily periods on English language arts. The educational and linguistic development of these children were then compared with two control groups: (1) native English-speaking children following a conventional programme of EM education and (2)

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5 Central Advisory Council for Education (Wales) (1967)
6 Price (1978). For a discussion on the Project, see Cummins et al. (198
7 The term “immersion” is used here in the same sense as it is used by Canadian educators. It refers to programmes in which the level of students’ proficiency in the TL—which is also the MOI—is roughly the same. Whereas in the context of U.S. bilingual education, the term refers to the practice of mixing minority language students [who usually do not speak English well] with majority language students who are native speakers of the language [i.e. English] used as MOI.
French-Canadian children following a conventional programme of French-medium education.

Findings on the educational development of the experimental groups will be reserved for later discussion. Here, suffice it to say, there is no evidence of negative educational outcomes. Of the findings on linguistic development of the groups, Lambert and Trucker conclude: “the children have developed a competence in reading, writing, speaking, and understanding French that English pupils following a traditional French as a Second Language programme for the same number of years could not match” (Lambert and Tucker, 1972, p. 152).

The St. Lambert model has since then been replicated throughout North America with variations in entry time of immersion, grade level and in the TL, but the results have been similar (Swain, 1981).

The Culver City Spanish Immersion Programme may be representative of attempts to replicate the St. Lambert model with a different TL outside Canada. The programme was designed for native English-speaking Anglophone children in the western part of greater Los Angeles. The immersion started from kindergarten. Test results indicated that two years into the experiment, the English-speaking students were acquiring competence in understanding, speaking, reading, and writing Spanish while maintaining English-language proficiency (Cohen, 1974, p. 103).

The above and other similar findings prompt Tucker and d’Anglejan to conclude that “the most promising new direction in second language teaching involves the acceptance of the premise that the use of the TL as a MOI for some portion of the school curriculum is both necessary and desirable” (Tucker and d’Anglejan, 1975, p. 71).

With a view to providing a theoretical understanding of the above phenomenon, a hypothesis has been put forth by Krashen. According to him, the language teacher is a person who can make input comprehensible, not someone who only knows the formal structure of language. He posits that, if students understand the message and are interested in it, they will acquire the language it is encoded in. In other words, subject matter teaching, if comprehensible, will promote second language acquisition (Krashen, 1980, p. 176).

In addition to Krashen’s, there are other plausible explanations for the apparent positive relationship between using the TL as a MOI and TL proficiency described above. For example, one of the major predictors of academic performance is time on task. In immersion programmes or Dodson’s bilingual method, the amount of time that students spend on TL-related tasks is much greater than that spent by those
learning the TL in conventional programmes. It should not be surprising, therefore, to find the former performing better in the TL than the latter. What is surprising is that such achievements can be made without apparent harm to the educational development of the students involved.

Moreover, the St. Lambert model has most, if not all, of the necessary ingredients for educational success. The majority of the students involved have been majority language students from middle-class backgrounds, enrolling in the programme on a voluntary basis with substantial parental support. Furthermore, the instructors are well-trained, and aided by clear sets of instructional guidelines. Having said all that, it should be noted that the successful experience of the model has not been restricted to students coming from middle-class families. The successful replication of the model with working-class children in Montreal indicates that more than just socio-economic factors are involved (Tucker, Lambert and d’Anglejan, 1973).

At this point, it may be safe to conclude that the effectiveness of teaching the TL by using it as a MOI has been supported by substantial evidence. Moreover there is much evidence indicating that, under the conditions specified above (often termed additive conditions), the TL could be used as a MOI without apparent negative educational effects. But how does one reconcile these findings with the vernacular hypothesis?

The Vernacular Hypothesis and Non-vernacular Instruction

From many years, it was believed that non-vernacular instruction at primary and secondary levels invariably leads to a host of adverse effects ranging from semi-lingualism to cognitive retardation (Darcy, 1953). One example of such a stand is the vernacular hypothesis, a well-known version of the hypothesis was made in the report on a meeting on bilingualism and education convened by UNESCO in Paris in 1951.⁸

It is axiomatic that the best medium for teaching a child is his mother tongue. Psychologically, it is the system of meaningful signs that in his mind works automatically for expression and understanding. Sociologically, it is a means of identification among the members of the community to which he

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⁸ UNESCO (1953), p. 11. For a more up-to-date version of its stand on the issue, see UNESCO (1977).
属于。教育上，他通过它比不熟悉的语言学得更快。

两个互补的假设可以推导出以上假设。一个积极的假设预测，在他们先掌握第一语言和学习内容之前，如果MOI（母语）转移到第二语言，孩子们将能够获得更丰富的知识。一个消极的假设预测，如果他们的第一语言和MOI在他们上学时不匹配，学生的学习成绩将受到严重影响。

对于少数民族语言学生而言，美国的研究大多支持以上两个假设。杜拉伊和伯特（1978）总结了12项严格设计和执行的实验，结论支持“在美国学校将儿童的第一学得，并且/或母语作为MOI使用”（Dulay and Burt, 1978, p. 3）。

对于相似的研究在美国之外，巴尔（1979）总结了13个涉及直接测试第一语言教学有效性的例子，其中7个研究发现第一语言教学更有效。5个研究没有发现实验和对照组之间的显著差异。只有1个研究发现第二语言的教学效果更好。

然而，当研究的主体是主要语言学生而不是少数语言学生时，情况就不同了。例如，麦克纳马拉（1966）的研究展示了爱尔兰双语教育的早期成就。这一发现被用来支持双语（因此是双语教育）对个人的智力发展是不利的信念，因为爱尔兰的双语学校儿童被发现有较低的分数在语言、数学甚至IQ上。
than their monolingual counterparts. Since the subjects in Macnamara’s study involve majority language students from English-speaking homes learning in Irish-medium schools (i.e. there was a home-school linguistic mismatch in a situation involving majority language students on a mass scale), Macnamara’s study has considerable bearing on the Hong Kong situation and thus will be discussed in greater detail here.

Very few people who have quoted Macnamara’s study have referred to its ideological background. However, without such a background, the findings of the study cannot be fully understood.

In 1934, the Department of Education in Ireland adopted the resolutions of the Second National Programme Conference convened by the Minister of Education at the request of the Irish Teachers’ Organization. It was advocated that the use of Irish as a MOI be extended as far as possible. Since then, doubts had been expressed about the wisdom of teaching children from English-speaking homes through the medium of Irish since, by the 1920s, over ninety per cent of the population in Ireland were already monoglot English speakers.

Therefore, the objectives of Macnamara’s study are: (1) to discover the effect on arithmetic attainment of teaching arithmetic through the medium of Irish to children from English-speaking homes; (2) to discover the effect of the entire programme for reviving Irish in national schools on the level of English attainment.

In other words, Macnamara’s study is assessing the educational and linguistic outcomes of a bilingual educational programme which was a product of a language revitalisation movement not one of existing educational-linguistic and economic conditions.

The study involves more than 1,000 fifth-grade students from 119 national primary schools equally distributed in six groupings categorised on the basis of both MOI and districts:

1. arithmetic taught in English to all classes including infants;
2. arithmetic taught in Irish to infants only;
3. arithmetic taught in Irish to infants and first grade;
4. arithmetic taught in Irish, infants to third grade;
5. arithmetic taught in Irish, infants to fifth grade;
6. arithmetic taught in Irish, all grades.

Groups one to five are from English-speaking districts whereas group six is from Irish-speaking districts.

The criterion measures in the study are skills in arithmetical reasoning, arithmetic computation, Irish and English language skills. There are three covariance control measures: (1) a test of nonverbal
reasoning skill taken by each subject; (2) a questionnaire on socio-economic status of each subject; and (3) a rating of the teaching skill of each teacher in the experimental class by the district inspectors.

In the regressional analyses, a dummy variate representing membership in experimental groups one to five as an ordinal scale is created (data on group six was analysed separately). A second dummy variate taking the value of 0 for groups one to four, and 1 for group five is created to test the hypothesis that performances of children in group five would be too poor to be adequately accounted for by linear regression.

The three pieces of findings that have caught the greatest attention of international experts in language and bilingual education were: (1) group five’s scores in arithmetic reasoning are substantially lower than the other groups; (2) the group six subjects, who are believed to be more bilingual than those from groups one to five, have a poorer performance than their counterparts from English-speaking districts in all criterion measures except Irish; (3) subjects from groups one to five correctly answer only one-third as many items in a standardised English test as their monolingual British counterparts did in the period 1941-1944.

A superficial reading of the above findings prompted a reaction that somehow bilingualism would cause young people to under-perform in academic and language subjects.

However, a more careful reading of the study would suggest that the above findings might have little to do with bilingual education and probably nothing to do with bilingualism at all. For example, with regard to the poor performance of the Irish subjects in English in comparison with their British counterparts, Macnamara advances nine possible explanations. Space constraints do not allow for a detailed delineation of these explanations. Here, suffice it to say that the superior performance of the British students’ performance in English can be accounted for by their having a tremendous edge in test-sophistication, motivation, average academic quality, urban to rural ratio, teaching methods, cultural bias inherent in the test used, time on task, and by the difference between Irish English and British English. Macnamara’s explanations make one wonder how much the poor performance

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9 In recent years, the majority of the findings from studies on the subject indicate that being bilingual is probably beneficial to one’s cognitive development. For example, see De Avila and Duncan (1979).

10 For a more detailed summary, please refer to So (1984b), pp. 216-17.
of the Irish students in English can be attributed to bilingual education
per se.

Also, if it is valid to postulate that the Irish experience shows that
bilingual education is detrimental to educational development is valid,
then one wonders why Macnamara shows his gravest concern for a
group that receives its primary education entirely in its first language
(Macnamara, 1966, p. 138):

The position of children in Irish-speaking districts appears to be the most
serious of all, while their attainment in Irish as measured by a very simple
test of written Irish affords little ground for complacency. For many of
these children, the adult world, in Ireland or in England, will be an
English-speaking one, and they appear to be ill-equipped indeed for life in
it.

The crux of the issue in Macnamara’s study is that Irish-medium
education was promoted in Ireland as a result of intervention from
ideologies and political institutions. The resultant ELP was divorced
from the prevailing sociolinguistic conditions at the time. Conse-
quently, many Irish primary school children ended up learning in a
MOI which was not only a weaker language for them but was also a
language that had limited social relevance and little economic value.
Under such conditions, the effects on the children’s learning abilities
and motivation should be obvious. It is indeed ironic that, when these
students were found performing poorly, so many academicians would
have us believe that it shows what language can do to the brain,
instead of what politics can do to people.

The work of Macnamara has been understood in such a way in
Hong Kong that it has been quoted in the local literature in support of
either an elimination or postponement of EM secondary education.
For that reason, it might be appropriate to conclude this review of his
works with a quotation of his views on bilingual education in Canada,
which may clarify his stand on the issue (Macnamara, 1972, pp. 9-10):

Does a bilingual education involve costs in terms of academic standards?
Many studies suggest that it may unless special efforts are made. However,
results from individual schools suggest that the frequently observed costs
are not necessarily connected with bilingual education. For what it is worth,
my opinion is that normal English-speaking children in Canada have so
much to gain from knowing French that I should be prepared to risk certain
deficits in order to give them such a knowledge. I would at the same
time take every precaution to see that the costs were as low as possible,
and even try to eliminate them altogether.
In the above, Macnamara has underscored the societal aspects of bilingual education. Bilingual education is by definition a more sophisticated and therefore more expensive form of education. It requires justification. There is evidence that, if this justification is congruent with the demographic and economic dynamics of a particular society and if bilingual education is implemented with a sound methodology, it works. The adverse effects predicted by the vernacular hypothesis can be moderated.

Having said all that, the obvious question for Hong Kong educators is whether or not Hong Kong possesses conditions that make bilingual education work, especially on a scale that makes it available not only to the elite.

**Sociolinguistic Dynamics and EM Education**

Bilingual education generally refers to the practice of using two or more linguistic MOI in a school system other than the teaching of the language(s) involved *per se*. Inevitably one of these media is the students’ weaker language. In the foregoing sections, it is postulated that, given favourable sociolinguistic conditions and a sound methodology, there is evidence indicating that instructing students in their weaker language does not necessarily involve significant negative educational outcomes. In this section, the focus is on whether or not sociolinguistic and infrastructural conditions in Hong Kong are favourable to EM education.

In the majority of cases, educational systems that maintain a predominant bilingual character are products of societal bilingualism. Most of the monolingual societies that support a bilingual school system do so out of demographic and economic constraints. Bilingual schooling in many Pacific Island states is a typical example. In this sense, Hong Kong is an anomaly. As already mentioned, Hong Kong is a monolingual society of around five and a half million people. Yet her school system approximates to a sequential bilingual education model: the majority of the students receive CM education at the primary level and EM education at the secondary level.

As I have argued elsewhere, the current system is more a product of infrastructural than ideological and ELP factors (So, 19845b). In other words, the sociolinguistic factors that have generated the dynamic growth of the ACSSs since 1949 are more socio than linguistic.

Briefly, these factors include the isolation of Hong Kong from China
after 1949, the internationalisation and modernisation of the Hong Kong economy in the past thirty years, and the subsequent emergence of English as both an auxiliary language in terms of sociolinguistic function and a mobility language in terms of socio-economic consequence (So, 1984b, pp. 148-66), which has led to a relentless expansion of the market for English-proficient linguistic brokers as Hong Kong becomes more and more a diglossic society without bilingualism.

At the education level, the ACSSs rise both in number and prestige while their CM counterparts fail both to recover from their loss of ties with China and not to adapt to post-1949 conditions, short of switching to the EM stream. Moreover, the EM is the common MOI at local tertiary institutions. Also, more and more students are seeking overseas education in English-speaking countries. Therefore, gradually, EM education has become associated with prestige, quality, mobility and English proficiency.  

Thus, contrary to the Irish experience, infrastructural factors play a larger role than ideological factors in the expansion of the EM sector in Hong Kong’s education system. As shown, the post-1949 socio-economic changes have created an opportunity and wage structure that favours graduates from ACSSs and punishes those from CMSs. Also, unlike Irish in Ireland, English is a socially and economically relevant language used in many strategic, albeit restricted, domains in Hong Kong. As a result, Hong Kong people are motivated to learn it and learn it well.

In other words, although Hong Kong is essentially a monolingual society, it has the historical background and the necessary sociolinguistic and infrastructural conditions to make Anglo-Chinese bilingual education work.

What had been said dose not mean to argue that bilingual schooling, as currently practiced in Hong Kong, is educationally sound. Nor is it

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11 Under the current linguistic conditions in the majority of the ACSSs, the relationship between EM education as actually practised and English proficiency requires further studies. Interested readers may refer to So (1984b), pp. 192-203 for a brief discussion.

12 Actually, the intrinsic value of vernacular instruction and the call for “mother-tongue education” notwithstanding, Hong Kong students are destined to some form of bilingual education. Strictly speaking, neither Modern Standard Chinese (MSC), the normative Chinese written code in schools, nor English is the “mother-tongue” of the majority of Hong Kong students. Their mother tongue is Cantonese and there is no mutual intelligibility between Cantonese Chinese and Putonghua Chinese (the verbal approximation of MSC). Under the current conditions, in order to succeed in schools, Hong Kong students have to master two less familiar languages, albeit, for them, one (English) is more unfamiliar than the other. If the linguistic distance between Cantonese and MSC is acknowledged, then even if EM education is eliminated from Hong Kong schools, a bilingual or bidialectal school environment still remains.
my intention to ignore the educational costs involved and to advocate for the status quo. Rather, the point is that certain findings from second language acquisition/instruction studies and insight from sociolinguistics provide support for the continuation of some form of EM education in the school system so long as the current infrastructural and sociolinguistic dynamics remain unchanged. Indeed, both the sociolinguistic function of English in Hong Kong and the monolingual characteristics of her people underscore the strategic role played by bilingual school, which is to provide the young people of Hong Kong with the only bilingual environment they will experience prior to their careers in bilingual domains.

Educational Language Environment and MOI Research

The meteoric rise of the ACSSs since 1949 has caught the attention of local educational researchers. A number of studies have been conducted to examine the effects of EM instruction although, to date, there have been no published works on the inter-relationship between EM education and English proficiency in local schools. Here, it is hoped that greater attention will be paid to micro-sociolinguistic conditions, especially the educational language environment in schools, in carrying out in such studies.

The relevance of micro-sociolinguistic factors can be seen from a correlational analysis of the relationship between English language skills and academic performance of students at the University of Hong Kong. In this study, Ho found that the majority of his subjects’ English ability was below the requisite standard of university education through the medium of English (Ho, 1979). According to Ho, this finding poses a number of paradoxes, one of which is: while the students’ English proficiency might be “inadequate”, few of them fail to obtain a first degree from the EM university.

Part of the solution to this paradox might lie in the educational linguistic environment. Although the MOI in the lecture halls of the University might be EM, the language outside the halls remains Can-
tonese. Therefore, one might surmise that even if some of the students have problems with the MOI used, they can always seek help in Cantonese from their fellow students, or from those teachers, if they happen to be Cantonese-speaking, as many of them are.

Similarly, at the secondary level, while the official classroom language is English in the ACSSs, the language outside the classroom is Cantonese. Furthermore, a number of studies have confirmed a long-existing situation of extensive use of Cantonese during class in the majority, if not all, of the ACSSs (So, op. cit.; Johnson, 1983). Given such conditions, experimental studies that frame the research question in a dichotomous fashion of “the vernacular vs. English” might not be very helpful in assessing the educational cost involved in EM instruction as actually practised in the ACSSs. (Also, very few serious researchers, if any, would argue against the desirability of vernacular instruction under *ceteris paribus* conditions. This might also explain the plurality in the findings of such studies (So, op. cit., pp. 259-56), contrary to what is predicted by the vernacular hypothesis.

Although the educational cost has yet to be more precisely measured, it is evident that the demand for EM secondary schooling, especially after the Nine-Year Free and Compulsory Education Scheme was instituted in 1979, has exceeded the linguistic capacity of the education system. One indication is the prevalent use of Cantonese in the ACSSs mentioned earlier.

Furthermore, in a survey conducted among secondary school students from six ACSSs and two CMSs in 1983, among the 425 grade 7-10 students and eighty-nine grade 11 students who responded to the question of whether or not they had learning problems associated with the use of the EM, 44.2 per cent of the former and 24.7 per cent of the latter indicated that they did have such problems.

The dilemma faced by ELP-markers is illustrated in the same survey. As shown in Table 2, among the same subjects, only 22.5 per cent of the respondents from grades 7-10 and none from grade 11 would choose to continue their education in CMSs, given a choice (So, op. cit., pp. 148-92).

The common explanation that attributes the above phenomenon to the low status of Chinese among students is not corroborated by the findings of the survey. As shown in Table 3, when the students were asked to rate a number of academic subjects that they deemed they must do well in examinations on a scale of 0-3, with 0 meaning “no opinion” and 3 meaning “very important”, both Chinese and English came out on top.
### TABLE 2
Hong Kong students’ choice of school to continue education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School type</th>
<th>Grade 7-10</th>
<th>Grade 11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government ACSS</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(52.7%)</td>
<td>(43.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsidised ACSS</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(24.4%)</td>
<td>(56.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government CMS</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(18.3%)</td>
<td>(-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsidised CMS</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4.2%)</td>
<td>(-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private ACSS</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.5%)</td>
<td>(-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: So (1984b), p. 186

### TABLE 3
Hong Kong students’ rating on subjects that they must do well in examinations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Grade 7-10</th>
<th>Grade 11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjects (N=414)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chinese</strong></td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>2.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.79)*</td>
<td>(0.75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>English</strong></td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>2.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.81)</td>
<td>(0.72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maths.</strong></td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>1.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.77)</td>
<td>(0.83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average rating on all subjects</strong></td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>1.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.32)</td>
<td>(0.45)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figures in brackets are standard deviations.

Apparently, Hong Kong students opt for EM education not so much because they undervalue Chinese, but rather because they value English proficiency and believe that English standards are higher in ACSSs (So, 1984b, pp. 95-100). 13

If the above observation is valid, the question to ask should be: How can students’ linguistic expectations be met without creating learning problems for them?

Searching for a “Bilingual Exit”

What faces ELP-makers is a challenge to reconcile two apparently conflicting interests. On the one hand, there is a strong demand for English-proficient linguistic brokers in Hong Kong, and there is evidence from overseas that EM instruction facilitates English learning. (Those who argue that a switch to the EM may not lead to a significant drop in English standards should take note of the experience in Malaysia, where the dropping of the EM in the mid-1970s has triggered a persistent decline in English standards among students there.)

On the other hand, although claims of “cognitive retardation” and “semi-lingualism may be excessive,14 there is much evidence indicat-

13 Of course, the unpopularity of the CMSs is due to more than linguistic factors. Traditionally, many CMSs had close ties with the Nationalist Government of China: they modelled their structure and curriculum upon their counterparts in China, received both material aid and supervision from the Nationalist Government and their graduates tended to further their education or develop their career in China or in the Chinese segment of the local business sector. Consequently, the fall of the Nationalist Government in 1949 dealt a severe blow to both the academic and career prospects of the CMS graduates. Locally, CMSs suffer from quite a number of institutional constraints: their students have access to only one of the two local universities (the Chinese University), they offer a smaller number of subjects, especially at matriculation level, for their students to choose, and their smaller number means local publishers do not have much incentive to provide their students with a greater variety of quality textbooks. Therefore, since 1949, it does not need to take an average student to realise that studying in a CMS had “punitive” consequences.

14 See So (1984b), pp. 250-56. Also the validity of semi-lingualism as a conceptual construct in the discussion on the relationship between academic outcomes and bilingual education programmes has been called into question. See Edelsky et al. (1983); Martin-Jones and Romaine (1986).
ing that EM instruction has created learning problems for many students. For example, Siu et al. (1979, pp. 130-31) found that “less capable students” performed significantly better with the CM than the EM though the same was not the case among “better-than average” students. Similarly, in assessing which linguistic code, in terms of printed texts, was the more effective among grade 9 students, Johnson et al. (1985) found that the monolingual English presentation was the least effective. Also, both Lee (1979, pp. 37-38) and So (1984b, pp. 252-55) found that, among other predictors of students’ performance in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination, English proficiency had the greatest predictive power. These findings corroborate the results of the aforementioned survey in which a substantial number of students indicated that their academic performance was handicapped by EM instruction. The problem is that these same students also aspire to bilingual literacy, do not perceive the CMSs as a viable alternative and seek to study in ACSSs, albeit not necessarily in an exclusively EM environment.

A comprehensive discussion on this dilemma is precluded by space constraints. Therefore, in the following, the discussion will concentrate on whether or not an exit from this dilemma can be found through a concurrent bilingual strategy.

The above has shown that Hong Kong students aspire to excel in both Chinese and English. The sociolinguistic and infrastructural conditions in Hong Kong are such that bilingual education in Hong Kong approximates the additive model: Hong Kong students want EM education because they want to add an additional language to their linguistic repertoire. Concerns for language maintenance and language shift, which are common in bilingual communities in the West, are largely irrelevant here. Few, if any, would contend that EM education might cause a language shift from Chinese to English among local students. There is no doubt that Hong Kong will remain a “Cantonese town” for a long time to come. Also, the EM classroom environment in ACSSs is “mitigated” by the fact that the teacher is Cantonese-speaking and may switch to Cantonese whenever the need arises. Therefore, even though Anglo-Chinese bilingual schooling is a more sophisticated form of education, there are a lot of things going for it in Hong Kong.

Actually, many pedagogical difficulties in ACSSs are aggravated by the fact that for a long time the government has not backed up its...
self-professed commitment to bilingual education with the necessary support measures such as educational language planning and research. Indeed, it is doubtful whether or not the government has an adequate understanding of its own bilingual policy.

For a long time, the government has characterised the local school system as being bilingual without highlighting its sequential aspects. That is, the Hong Kong school system is made bilingual by combining two monolingual tracks: CM primary education and EM secondary education. It is assumed that, after studying English for six years at the primary level, students will be able to receive EM education at the secondary level. In short, structurally, bilingual education as practised in Hong Kong involves an abrupt linguistic shift as far as the official MOI is concerned. This sequential linguistic arrangement for the majority of secondary school students is the predominant feature of the local system whereas bilingual education programmes in Europe and North America are mostly subsidiary. Moreover, relatively few North American and European students receive their education in their weaker language beyond the primary level.

Therefore, it is hard to understand how the government in the past brought itself to allow so many students to cross from one monolingual stream to another entirely different monolingual stream all at the same time and could believe for so long that it could work. And it is even harder to understand, in the light of the fact that successful additive models of bilingual education which have shown success in enriching students’ linguistic repertoire have invariably made use of the TL as a MOI early on in students’ schooling, that the government would now believe that EM education will work better if it is postponed to higher levels.\footnote{Department of Education, General Administration Circular No. 13/86, Appendix B.}

More frustrating is the fact that the current deliberation on the MOI issue continues to take place within the sequential and monolingual tracking framework and that the proposed use of both Chinese and English as MOI is confined to the secondary level.\footnote{Ibid.}

Consequently, the Gordian knot remains untied: a predominantly CM system might be pedagogically sound but socially unpopular. The status quo may be socially popular but it is full of pedagogical nightmares.

The crux of the issue is that there are tremendous linguistic de-
mands being made upon a system which simply, according to the present *modus operandi*, does not have the capacity to cope. In view of the way English is being taught in school and the current English proficiency level of students, the ACSSs are over-selected.

A sensible way out, therefore, is to increase the linguistic capacity of the system.

If there is any insight to be gained from the aforementioned findings from North America and Europe, it is that Hong Kong needs, on a mass scale, neither CMSs nor ACSSs. There is no reason why CMSs should not continue to exist and expand. Nor is there reason to force those ACSSs which have demonstrated their ability to provide their students with a sound EM education to switch to CM. What this paper is addressing is the mainstream, which involves between sixty to seventy per cent of the students.

What the “mainstream students” need is the implementation of a *concurrent* bilingual education strategy preferably starting from the primary level. According to the experience in North America and Wales, to promote English proficiency does not require a total EM curriculum at the secondary level. What is needed is that the EM is used in a portion of the curriculum in an immersion fashion preferably starting at the primary level.

In other words, instead of a “CM ➔ EM” or a “CM vs. EM” model, the model for the “mainstream students” should be “CM + EM” at all levels.

Such a model provides an exit from the current dilemma: It enriches the linguistic environment of the entire system, both primary and secondary, and enables the system to meet the linguistic demands of society. At the same time, it permits the use of the CM as the usual MOI in those schools which do not have the conditions to operate a full EM curriculum, but are reluctant to switch to the CM stream for fear of triggering a decline in English standards. In fact, having part of the curriculum offering a genuine EM environment starting from the primary level is a far better guarantee for English standards than having an EM curriculum starting at the secondary level offering the current environment of linguistic mix. More important is the fact that, given the availability of suitable textbooks, CM instruction at higher levels should gain greater acceptance among students when they feel more secure about their English proficiency.

It is the contention of this paper that resolving the dilemma in the MOI issue requires a major conceptual breakthrough. Sequential monolingual tracking does not work and the pedagogical problems
faced by ACSSs today are not a result of students given too much English too soon, but too little too late.

It is believed that an exit from the dilemma lies in using a carefully planned combination of both Chinese and English in the schools as early as possible. As mentioned earlier, bilingual education is, by definition, a more sophisticated form of schooling and the implementation of this strategy involves a host of challenges. (A discussion on such challenges at this stage may be presumptuous.) It is at all events not an easy programme and it is probably expensive. But at least bilingual education is more congruent with the sociolinguistic and infrastructural realities in Hong Kong, and similar experience elsewhere indicates that pedagogically it is sound and therefore should have a better chance of success than other monolingual alternatives.
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