



# Investigation of Language Identities, Ideologies and Linguistic Landscapes of Minority Languages in Hong Kong: Pilot Study in Chungking Mansions

LAM Tsz Ching Jasmine <sup>a\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> *The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China.*

## **Author's contribution**

*The sole author designed, analysed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.*

## **Article Information**

### **Open Peer Review History:**

This journal follows the Advanced Open Peer Review policy. Identity of the Reviewers, Editor(s) and additional Reviewers, peer review comments, different versions of the manuscript, comments of the editors, etc are available here: <https://www.sdiarticle5.com/review-history/111368>

**Original Research Article**

**Received: 20/11/2023**

**Accepted: 25/01/2024**

**Published: 31/01/2024**

## **ABSTRACT**

Hong Kong is renowned as a multicultural cosmopolitan that is linguistically diverse and embraces various cultural elements. Yet, in reflection on the local context, the minority languages are rather invisible, and it arouses concerns about language equity. Given that language identities and language ideologies are both influencing and influenced by one another. Language identities relate to self-perception while language ideologies may cause social impacts. The pilot study was conducted in Chungking Mansions since it is a cluster of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. The major groups include traders, shop operators and employees, asylum seekers and tourists. A semi-structured interview with a participant from the domain of 'shop operators' is conducted to study their language beliefs. With the support of linguistic landscapes, the researcher discovered the ideologies of Neoliberalism, Englishization and Multilingualism which echo the self-portrayed identities of the group as both a Hong Konger and the hybrid recognition of oneself.

\*Corresponding author: E-mail: [jasmine201514@gmail.com](mailto:jasmine201514@gmail.com);

**Keywords:** *Chungking mansions; language identities; language ideologies; linguistic landscapes; minority languages.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Hong Kong is a cosmopolitan city, renowned for its financial center and multicultural population. The majority of its population is of Chinese descent, with Cantonese and Mandarin as the most commonly spoken languages. However, there is a significant number of people from other Asian countries, such as Indonesia, the Philippines, India, Pakistan, Nepal, and others. English and Chinese (Traditional and Simplified) are prevalent in Hong Kong, while minority languages such as Hindi, Punjabi, Nepalese, and Tagalog are rarely seen in public. This raises concerns about potential marginalization and linguicism, where people of different nationalities may not have equal rights and opportunities due to a lack of proficiency in the dominant languages of English and Cantonese. It is crucial to recognize and address instances of linguistic inequity in Hong Kong and strive towards a more inclusive and respectful society that values linguistic and cultural diversity. Chungking Mansions, a culturally diverse area in Hong Kong, can serve as a microcosm to examine language identities and ideologies among ethnic minority groups and review the overall situation of language equity and preservation efforts in contemporary Hong Kong.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Chungking Mansions

Prior research has explored the dynamics and ecologies in Chungking Mansions through the spectacles of anthropological and social science perspectives. Mathews ([1] p.2) considered Chungking Mansions a place with 'low-end globalization'. 'Low-end globalization' is the 'transnational flow of people and goods involving relatively small amounts of capital and informal, sometimes quasi-legal or illegal transactions, commonly associated within the developing world'. Chungking Mansions embraces 'the intensification of global interconnectedness' [2] that it includes a variety of businesses like the low-priced guesthouse, restaurants, retail and wholesale in which the shop owners usually came from sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and other developing areas to seek for employment and business opportunities [1,3].

The traders who took up the major population were usually from sub-Saharan Africa, Bhutan,

Yemen, the Maldives, France, Israel, and Jamaica [1]. Many African traders bought goods from Hong Kong and China and resold them to their home countries. Another dominant group was the shop operators and workers. Chungking Mansions, home to mostly African residents, is predominantly owned by Chinese who migrated from mainland China years ago and now run guesthouses. South Asians are hired as managers to oversee operations, and they, in turn, hire fellow countrymen to work for them. Indian or African workers are usually ineligible for permanent residence in Hong Kong and hold tourist visas, requiring them to return home every two months. Some even work as illegal workers in Hong Kong due to higher wages [1]. A significant number of asylum seekers from South Asia and Africa also reside in Chungking Mansions and claimed to be 'genuine, fleeing torture or death threats' [1] that face persecution while others are tourists drawn to the low cost or adventurous atmosphere.

### 2.2 Language Ideologies and Language Identities

Generally, language ideologies and language identities perceived by individuals and particular communities construct people's use of language. The pattern of language use is ever-changing, depending on one's cultural affiliation, inheritance and development of social identities. Language ideologies are the 'values, practices, and beliefs associated with language use by speakers, and the discourse which constructs values and beliefs at state, institutional, national, and global levels' ([4], p.29). Language ideologies are rarely neutral, having developed within specific sociopolitical and cultural contexts [5], and influenced by complex hierarchical, social, and historical processes [6,7]. Linguistic minority groups are often required to learn the dominant language recognized by mainstream society, resulting in most of them being bilingual or even multilingual [8].

People nowadays are immersed in a hybrid community where one could have multiple and overlapping identities which creates tension to understand and negotiate the positions. Mercer [9] proposed the concept of diaspora that 'everyone's identity has been thrown into question, the mixing and fusion of disparate elements to create new, hybridized identities

points to ways of surviving, and thriving, in conditions of crisis and transitions'. In addition, Hall [10] proposed another concept of 'translation' that people who have been dispersed forever from their home countries might retain strong links with their origin or local customs, yet, do not possess any illusion to return to the past. This demonstrates the identity formation in which the home culture intersects with the host culture. They are less likely to be 'unified in the old sense, because they are irrevocably the product of several interlocking histories and cultures, belong at one and the same time to several "homes"' [8]. In this case, the immigrants embrace the 'lost' of cultural purity or ethnic absolutism as they are encountering and inheriting multiple identities.

The use of language is viewed as the perception of continuity, change and relationship among social networks. The perception can be reflected by language expertise, affiliation and inheritance. Language expertise refers to the proficiency level of people to master a particular language while affiliation relates to the 'attachment or identification they feel for a language whether or not they nominally belong to the social group customarily associated with it' [8]. Lastly, inheritance means 'the ways in which individuals can be born into a language tradition that is prominent within the family and community setting whether or not they claim expertise in or affiliation to that language' [8].

### **2.3 Linguistic Landscape**

Linguistic landscape (LL) serves an increasing significance in the research of language policy, language ideology and identity, and multilingualism across different spaces [11,12,13,14]. It can be defined as 'linguistic objects that mark the public space' ([15], p.14). LLs are 'all physical spaces where people leave visible and non-verbal signs which all communicate meanings and intentions in one way or another' [16]. LLs involve visible items like signposts; photographs and videos; billboards; public roads and safety signs; slogans and commercials; lighting and printed materials; names of buildings, streets, shops and areas of major tourist attractions; instructions, warning notices and prohibitions; graffiti; tattoos; and cyberspace.

Shohamy [15] divided LLs into two dimensions: the top-down approach and bottom-up approach. Top-down LLs are 'signboards, billboards, and

other forms of signs created by governments and related agencies' [17] at the macro level while bottom-up LLs are 'signs created and emplaced by non-governmental entities, groups, and individuals. Signboards, commercial advertisements, and notices in shops, private buildings, cafés, clubs, and restaurants' are at the micro level.

Multimodal approach is a way to analyze LLs. According to Kress [18]'s social-semiotic theory of multimodality, 'the social' involves the generation of meanings, of semiotic processes and forms. The core unit of semiotics is the sign portrayed as a combination of form and meaning. All modes will be considered for their contribution to the meaning of such sign-complex.

### **2.4 Empirical Studies**

Phyak and Ojha [19] explored language inequalities in Nepal. Given that Nepal is a linguistically diverse area with 123 languages reported as 'mother tongue', the dominant languages include Nepali (44.6%), Maithili (11.7%), Bhojpuri (5.98%) take up the majority usage. This illustrates that minority languages have insufficient space to thrive or sustain. They face language marginalization or undergo a language shift.

Another language ideology is neoliberalism, which embraces the commodification of goods (including language), deregulated market and privatization as key principles of national policy [20,21]. Its consequences in the widespread of English usage in various public spaces like mass media, foreign-aid agencies and non-governmental organizations, and even in education settings (e.g., private and missionary schools) [19].

Tajrobehkar [22] studied how language could shape Iranian-Canadian as racial 'others' in the local supremacy community. The Iranian immigrants found it difficult to 'blend in' to the 'white' community due to their limited fluency in English speaking – not being Canadianized. This echoes Phyak and Ojha [19]'s claim of linguistic nationalism and language hegemony that prioritizes national language or mainstream language over others.

Song [23] investigated Hong Kong's neon signs with the multimodal translation approach. Language use and the semiotic images could reflect cultural hybridity and identity. Similar to Phyak and Ojha [19]'s idea of neoliberalism,

bilingual signs serve commercial purposes, the proportion of content to be translated into English or remained in Chinese depends on the potential customers.

Researchers have conducted empirical studies on the role of minority languages and language use of ethnic minorities in school settings and linguistic landscapes. Despite Hong Kong's status as an international hub for immigrants, foreign workers, and entrepreneurs, little up-to-date research has been conducted. This study aims to use Chungking Mansions as a case study to explore language identities, ideologies, potential linguistic racism, and linguistic landscapes.

### 3. METHODOLOGIES

#### 3.1 Research Design

A qualitative exploratory is adopted to investigate language identities and ideologies as the existing information in the field is insufficient [24], fragmented and contradictory [25]. It can 'raise questions rather than to answer them' which reveals novel possibilities after the research – hypothesis-generating [26]. Tentative hypotheses propose concepts that 'may' be true, 'appear' to be legitimate or with 'some evidence' to prove the validity [24]. An exploratory study can be used to call for afterthoughts [26] and determine if the initial ideas seem robust [27]. Due to inadequate and scattered data on the topic, the study aims to build theoretical ideas based on empirical data.

#### 3.2 Research Site

Chungking Mansions is one of the most globalized buildings worldwide located in one of the busiest and most diversified districts in Hong Kong – Tsim Sha Tsui. There were 130 different nationalities in its guesthouse logs which embraced a great diversity of clientele within the crowded cluster (Mathew, 2020). It is an

architecture that serves three major purposes i.e., guesthouses, restaurants and residences. Most businesses are concentrated on the first and the ground floors. Many shop owners are Pakistani, Indian and African. It is considered cosmopolitan in which cross-cultural interactions are inevitable under podium-structured architectural settings. People who come in and out of the building must get through the podium which results in its globalism.

#### 3.3 Research Instruments

This research combines the linguistic landscape approach and semi-structured interview to gather the data for further analysis. The bottom-up linguistic landscape approach is adopted, the researcher took photos of the inner settings, promotional materials and commercial signs in front of retail shops, restaurants and other service-related businesses. This study involved taking digital images of various kinds [28] without preselection on G/F and 1/F.

Furthermore, a semi-structured interview is conducted to explore the participant's language ideologies and identities. The researcher would elicit elaborative information by rephrasing questions and making changes [29] based on the actual interview situations which allow a greater degree of clarity, flexibility and interactivity. It allows inquiries risen to further discuss 'the participant's experiences and a constellation of human relationships, institutional structures and discourse, and broader socio-political considerations' [29] and create room for negotiating the underlying meanings of the data through different angles of vision.

#### 3.4 Data Collection

The stores and restaurants would be examined in terms of the facade, inner settings, notice boards, signboards, banners and promotional materials. The researcher took 86 photos, breakdown as below Table 1:

**Table 1. Various types of linguistic landscapes collected**

Nature of Linguistic Landscape	No. of Linguistic Landscape
Restaurant and Food Store	60
Retailer e.g., Grocer, Electronic gadgets	10
Accommodation	6
Currency Exchange Store	4
General Notice	4
Service-related shop e.g., Salon	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>

The researcher invited the shop owner who oversees four Indian restaurants in Chungking Mansions to attend the interview as he is demonstrating a higher tendency for self-disclosure and a positive attitude towards the request. He adopts a balanced and equal proportion of bilingual languages – Chinese and English in the menus, food banners and facade, which is more linguistically diverse. The 25-minute interview was recorded and transcribed.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

The linguistic landscapes are analyzed using multimodal approach. The researcher read the images through 'their size, position, placement, statement, as well as the implied message on the background and setting of the image' [30] and interpreted the message conveyed. The transcribed interview is studied by bottom-up thematic coding. The researcher identified distinct concepts and themes for the preliminary group, filtered and organized the informant's interview responses and gather similar key points in broad thematic domains. Then, refine, align and categorize the themes in open coding. Lastly, select and integrate the grouped themes to form cohesive and meaning-filled expressions [31].

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section will report on the interview findings of the shop owner's linguistic ideologies and identities, including their language background, proficiencies, and social affiliations. The researcher will also examine the linguistic landscapes of the shops and restaurants on the ground and first floor of Chungking Mansions to provide further evidence.

### 4.1 Linguistic and Cultural Identities

The researcher explored the language proficiency and attitudes of the focal case participant (pseudonym - Joe). He is an Indian born in North India, moved to Hong Kong at a young age with his family in 1969 and initiated the catering family-operated business in the 1980s. The researcher will discuss Joe's perception of language expertise, cultural attitudes, and linguistic heritage.

#### 4.1.1 Language proficiency

The participant considers himself an advanced user of Punjabi, English, and verbal Cantonese

and tends to use Punjabi (i.e., dominant language from North India) with customers from Southeast Asia, Pakistan, or India.

The participant used Hindi and Punjabi with family, but at work, English is used more frequently. He considers himself a mixed language user, with no dominant language. He uses English for ordering and talking with tourists and may switch to Mandarin or other languages to explain menus.

*'No. So like maybe 7% to 8% they speak Chinese person, like I speak very good Cantonese, you cannot find over here like I can. Same guy like me. I tend to be very rare.'* (interview data)

Learning a new language at an elder age is challenging, as exemplified by the participant's inability to read and write Chinese and his basic Mandarin skills due to his middle age. He relies on a local friend to write and translate food menus. The participant's children attend primary school and are learning English, Cantonese, and Mandarin, with English being seen as a core language. The participant values the importance of learning Chinese and English for future job opportunities, particularly in government departments. He believes his children speak fluent English, Cantonese, and Mandarin due to school training, but did not mention their proficiency or frequency of use in Hindi or Punjabi.

#### 4.1.2 Language heritage

He uses Punjabi and Hindi at home, but mentions Punjabi more frequently, likely using it more frequently as it's the dominant language in North India.

*'Punjabi, this is the North side, the Pakistani language okay. Okay, Punjabi is not side language. This Hindi is like our first language in India.'*

The participant values Punjabi as a general language, reflecting a preference for a smaller and specific community identity rather than a broader one.

#### 4.1.3 Language/cultural affiliation and attitudes

The participant was born in North India but lives and works in Hong Kong, he declined the

possibility of setting up businesses in North India and is attached to Hong Kong. He would not consider sending his children to study overseas or relocate as he is content with Hong Kong.

**Identity as a Hong Konger:** The participant identifies strongly as a Hong Konger and frequently mentions it when discussing language use and his life. He chose to speak Cantonese when first contacted for the interview. He has lived in Hong Kong for most of his life, raised a family there, and owns four restaurants in Chungking Mansions.

*'Because I eat from here. My life is just grown up I grew up here and The researcher make money from here. Everything Hong Kong give to me why The researcher proud to say Hong Kong people.'* (interview data)

He has also collaborated with the local government as a food supplier for public events. The participant helped the needy and upheld righteousness in the community, being interviewed by a local newspaper. He takes pride in being part of Hong Kong and likes to help those in need.

**A Hybrid Identity:** Given that he is emotionally and socially affiliated with Hong Kong, he is open to interacting with people all over the world. During the interview, he used the word 'mix' repeatedly when he was describing his social networks and daily encounters.

*'My friend have Hong Kong people have Indian people have Pakistani people. I mixed with them together. The researcher make friendship with everybody.'* (interview data)

He not only took orders but also chatted with the customers about the dining experiences at different Indian restaurants. Customers varied from residents of Chungking Mansions, local students, office workers, and regular customers. Our participant talked to people of different nationalities according to their language preferences.

*'Mostly The researcher speak Cantonese in this area now. Like Indian customer. The researcher speak Punjabi, English, Hindi with them.'* (interview data)

The participant demonstrated openness in interacting with people of different cultures and

prioritized language competency in communication. He adopted languages other than his mother tongue to cater to the needs of interactants. He values his identity as a business owner, enhancing mutual understanding with customers and attracting business opportunities. He also sees himself as a global citizen, using various languages to deal with individuals of various backgrounds, forming and maintaining friendships.

## 4.2 Language Ideologies

This section explores language ideologies and their influence on language use within sociopolitical and cultural contexts.

### 4.2.1 Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism relates to the commodification of goods and languages. It usually leads to the dominant language, especially for English to be applied in a wide range of occasions, for example, in mass media [19], social media and local schools. The participant owns four Indian restaurants in Chungking Mansions, including a vegetarian restaurant and two serving local Indian food. When asked about using a single language on menus, he emphasized the need for English and Cantonese (Traditional Chinese) as major communication mediums to attract potential customers. He communicates in their familiar languages to enhance their dining experience and increase the possibility of repeat visits. Multiple languages can cater to a diverse clientele to attract and retain customers.

*'Like European people. The researcher speak with him in England English.'* (interview data)

The participant code-switches frequently when chatting or taking orders from customers to make them feel more comfortable. Since there are relatively fewer Indian restaurants in Hong Kong, locals may feel distanced from Indian culture. To encourage more locals to visit and promote the restaurants, the shop owner wants to create a more people-friendly and localized brand image, sustaining and thriving the businesses. The participant does not consider using Hindi in menus since Hindi-speaking customers are from his home country and already familiar with serving items and regular habits, not needing to read menus before ordering.

Due to the pandemic, tourism in Hong Kong decreased from 2019 to 2022, so the participant shifted focus to local Hong Kong citizens. He used more Cantonese in communication and menus and adjusted food flavors to suit local tastes. He prioritized native Hong Kong citizens as the target audience, referring to them as the 'customer' and assuming they were less familiar with the food items. This shows a prioritization of consumers with higher purchasing power over others, as well as a strategy to attract more locals to visit and sustain the businesses during the pandemic.

*'Actually we're doing with Indians mostly before and then now The researcher are three year before The researcher start with the Hong Kong people because that time tourists are not coming.'* (interview data)

*'The researcher try to mix with Hong Kong people. That's why The researcher start for Hong Kong food lifestyles like not so chilly little chilli and then make people to know The researcher have like very good tasty food'* (interview data)

*'From Hong Kong mostly now, like 80% from Hong Kong, like 10% from Europe customer 15% in Europe, urban customer. And then 5% in local customer.'* (interview data)

*'The researcher have to do very clear otherwise. Customer don't know what is that'* (interview data)

Regarding the way of publicity, the participant promotes them through common platforms in Hong Kong and also nationwide like Openrice and Youtube, the subscribers are not only local citizens but also available for viewers around the globe.

*'The researcher do like Openrice. Deliveroo. The researcher do it in like interviews. They put it in YouTube for us.'* (interview data)

*'Because I can get the European customer if you write in English. If you write in Cantonese I got Hong Kong customers. That's why I wanted to write it in both language.'* (interview data)

He prioritizes Cantonese and English as the two abundant languages in Hong Kong and

worldwide, respectively, due to profit-making and commodification.

#### 4.2.2 Englishization

The participant considers English the most important language to acquire in Hong Kong due to its use as a lingua franca in different countries and cities. He suggests his Indian friends and relatives learn and use English daily, despite not mastering Cantonese or Mandarin. When discussing language teaching for his children, he mentioned English as the first language, followed by Cantonese and Mandarin. During the interview, he demonstrated his fluent English skills and was proud of his proficiency. His prioritization of English reflects its importance as a global language and its correlation with business success.

*'Hong Kong people like to learn English. My nephew my cousin brother, my niece all speak English.'* (interview data)

*'They need you to write so you can get a government job.'* (interview data)

The education system in Hong Kong places extra emphasis on developing English skills, and all local universities use English as the medium of instruction. The participant associates English proficiency with future achievement and job opportunities. Fluent English is deemed mandatory to handle tasks in working positions and climb up the social ladder.

Apparently, Weyers [32] proposed that English is a draw to their potential clientele's desire for more significant social status and Tan and Tan [33] considered that English is 'a status marker'. Both research echo with the one conducted by Lanza and Woldemariam [34] in Ethiopia which concludes that 'prestige intersect with English'. Yet, the use of English is not simply 'symbolic rather than information-giving in nature' [33]. It serves greater significance than just 'decorative or attention-grabbing devices' [35] but has more 'functional purposes' to deliver messages effectively by facilitating the mutual understanding between the shop owner and the customers in this case. It is a representation of economic and cultural globalization [36]. Since English is the second language in Hong Kong, the skills required to speak, read and translate the menus reflect a higher education level and international exposure of the individuals. Hence,

this would indicate a sense of superiority over others. In short, English is correlated to the prestigious status and branding of the industries.

#### 4.2.3 Multilingualism

The participant values multilingualism by including multiple languages in menus and promotional materials.

The participant is confident in mastering multiple languages including Hindi (i.e., the national language of India), Punjabi (i.e., the major language in North India), English (i.e., the international language), Cantonese (i.e., the native language in Hong Kong) and Mandarin (i.e., the official language in mainland China). He values multilingualism in his customer- and service-oriented job, language use is key to bridging communication and facilitating mutual understanding, broadening social networks by sustaining both local and intercultural relationships.

*'I speak Indian language. Cantonese English mixed together.'* (interview data)

The participant's children are learning English, Cantonese, and Mandarin at schools, with further opportunities to acquire foreign languages like Japanese, French, or German. Despite a slight preference for English, the participant believes it's common to learn multiple languages instead of being monolingual or bilingual. The only obstacle he faces is age limitation, as he believes it's difficult for people aged 15 or above to learn a new language, especially for reading and writing skills, due to declining memory.

The findings align with Lee [37] that individuals would like to achieve 'linguistic accommodation' by employing the use of more languages in places like promotional materials, banners and notice boards. This could help with consumers' understanding and attract more potential visitors. The multilingualism ideology could be resulted from the tendency of globalization. When talking about the use of language in the food menus, the participant insists on keeping Chinese and English to help people from both Hong Kong and overseas read the content. As repeatedly mentioned by the participant, he wants his children to learn more languages at school and he perceives multilingual ability as a social tendency shared by people in Hong Kong and in the modern world. It would be difficult to have

outstanding achievements or get a stable job if the individuals do not have sufficient language proficiencies.

Apart from the practical reasons, the use of multiple languages undermines certain symbolic significance and political preferences. For example, Song [38,23] stated that Hong Kong possesses a higher tendency to use Chinese over other foreign languages because shop owners usually place more exaggerated and ranked Chinese words on the top of the neon signs and make them more eye-catching in terms of color, font style and font size. The potential of domestication is observed, which reveals 'positive connotation in Chinese translation' that fantasizes the Chinese sociolinguistic cultures and the prevalence of Chinese language ideology in the naming of streets in Hong Kong in general. The participant shows a slight tendency towards the use of Chinese over English. For the food posters, he uses a brighter color (e.g., yellow and red) for Chinese titles and a dimmer color (e.g., black and white) for English ones. The Chinese food items on the menus are visibly larger than those in English. Some of the information displayed on the promotional pamphlets, most of them are in both English and translated Chinese, but still, some key information like the address is in pure Chinese.

Similarly, Guinto [39] suggested that minority languages like Tagalog are not as salient as the mainstream language because of the lower perceived status of ethnic minorities – that is because a large proportion of Filipinos work as domestic workers in Hong Kong, which is a job that requires relatively lower skills and fewer professional qualifications. Therefore, their social status is less significant, and the business operators will be less likely to target this group of consumers, in particular, leading to lower visibility in our daily lives.

### 4.3 Linguistic Landscapes

#### 4.3.1 Restaurants

Restaurants are a dominant business in Chungking Mansions, with a balanced use of English and Chinese and a moderate emphasis on Chinese translation content. Waiters and shop owners stand outside to promote their restaurants using short Cantonese phrases with simple English support, such as "Have you had lunch? Try our Indian food." And distribute pamphlets to the passers-by.





Fig. 1(A, B, C). Restaurant promotional pamphlets



Fig. 2(A, B). Restaurant Promotional Posters

Chinese titles usually have a larger font size with more exaggerated font styles to outline the words. For the restaurant 'Khybet-Pass Mess Club' (Fig. 1), the size of the Chinese words is at least three times larger than the English names while for the restaurant 'Tajmahal Club' and 'Monti Palace' (Figs. 1B and 2) place the Chinese words with the unique black and white highlight on the top of the design. For the slogans, most of them are Chinese only about the gimmicks— e.g., the pleasant environment, reasonable prices and delicious cuisines. As for graphics, the celebrities and customers are Hong Kong locals in general (Fig. 2B), for instance, the shop owner had taken a photo with 'ERROR' (i.e., a well-known male idol group in Hong Kong) (Fig. 1C). Regarding the conveyance of information, there is no full translation of both Chinese and English. Joe suggested that he target outsiders who have not been to Chungking Mansions, for example, the subtitles of 'Contact number' (Fig. 1) and 'Shop address' (Figs. 1A and 1C) are written in Chinese only.

Many restaurants in core districts of Hong Kong, including Tsim Sha Tsui where Chungking Mansions is located, are adopting Simplified Chinese to accommodate mainland visitors or immigrants. However, many leaflets in Chungking Mansions still use Traditional Chinese, reflecting a prioritization of identity at the city level versus the country level while the use of English creates an international image and attracts overseas consumers. This demonstrates the complex language needs and attitudes towards identity and globalization in a multicultural setting like Hong Kong.

Shop banners usually include English and Chinese, some also include Hindi, but less eye-

catching. The menus usually use English with Chinese translation instead of Hindi or Punjabi. In Figs. 4A & 4B, the Chinese words are bolded, and the size is slightly larger than the English expressions. Some include an English description, mentioning the cooking methods or ingredients. Some food items e.g., 'North Thali' and 'Bhei Puri' (Fig. 4C) are not accompanied by the Chinese translation or written in pure English (Fig. 5) probably due to the limited language proficiencies or no identical/equivalent term in Chinese. The shop owners match the items with the pictures to ensure easy recognition.

The restaurants usually do not include lots of Indian features in the inner settings. Owners try to avoid local visitors stereotyping the restaurant as Indian-specific. They may feel distanced from the unfamiliar culture and lower the likelihood of visiting. Instead, the inner design reflects the combination of various cultures. For example, the decorative banner 'Happy Birthday' (Fig. 6), uses the tips box as a traditional British culture and the wine glass rack (Fig. 7) as Western-liked. In addition, several shops use the 'Cola fridge' which is a signature item for much cha chaan teng (i.e., local restaurants in Hong Kong) and 'Fai Chun' (i.e., decorative banner to be hung up during Chinese New Year that means good luck) (Figs. 7A and 7B). They also use the 'Slippery Floor' and 'No Liquor under 18'signs in Chinese. As shown in the cashier, they accept different payments e.g., credit cards and WeChat Pay (i.e., a common payment method in China). Yet, they retain some Indian features, for instance, the lotus statue and incense burner. Indians treat lotus as a symbol of dignity and sanctity, which represents auspiciousness, peace and enlightenment while the incense burner relates to religious faith.



Fig. 3. Restaurant banner



A

B



C

Fig. 4(A, B, C). Menus with chinese translation



Fig. 5. Menu in pure English

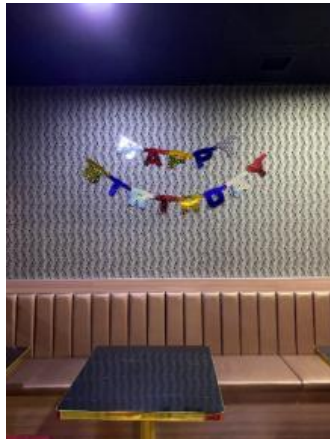
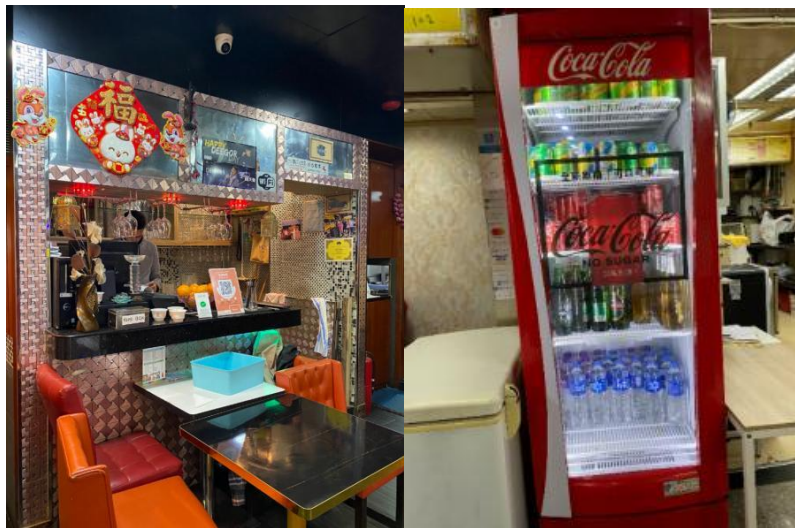


Fig. 6. Inner setting in the restaurant



A

B

Fig. 7(A, B) Inner settings in the restaurants



Fig. 8. Fast food shops

#### 4.3.2 Fast food shops

The shops serve takeaway meals and offer just a few dine-in seats. The shopkeepers communicate with customers in Hindi and Punjabi and sometimes in English, and rarely any food labels (Fig. 8). The banner has the local (i.e., Hong Kong) and Southeast Asian country national flags (e.g., Malaysia, India, Nepal, Indonesia) printed on it. As the research is taken place around the Mid-autumn festival in Hong Kong, the Chinese-style red lanterns were hung on the ceiling around G/F and 1/F, indicating the preference for being culturally diverse, the putting up of national flags and adapting to the local Chinese festival reflect an open attitude to different cultures. Another possibility would be the indication of target consumers as the identity of the business owner, like welcoming the target audience by displaying their national flags.

**Implications:** Language identities and ideologies are closely related, influencing and being influenced by one another. They are not static but change with the social environment. The participant in the study had a hybrid identity, immersed in different communities as a businessperson. This reflects Neoliberalism, which sees language as a commodity for profit. The participant prioritizes learning English, followed by Cantonese, due to social trends and access to opportunities. Englishization and Neoliberalism may erode cultural heritage, as seen in the participant's shift away from his Indian culture. He also shows a lower tendency to pass on his home culture to future generations due to prolonged residency in the host country. The case study serves as a macrocosm of the situation regarding minority language preservation in Hong Kong. The study highlights that minority languages are often overlooked, forcing minority groups to adopt dominant languages to fit in. This leads to oligopoly by the dominant languages, English and Cantonese, which alienate the immigrants and obstruct them from climbing up the social ladder due to their limited language proficiencies, which will hinder social mobility. It will deteriorate Hong Kong's international image of multiculturalism.

The government should allocate more resources to preserve and develop minority languages, ensuring balanced language development by reviewing educational objectives, curriculum, and course design. This could include adding more languages to the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination despite the

five existing languages (e.g., Japanese, French, Spanish, German and Korean) and abolishing restrictions or weighing of English or Chinese for college majors.

## 6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper features a semi-structured interview with one participant, which allowed for in-depth questioning and elaboration. However, the participant only represents the relatively more well-off group of shop owners in Chungking Mansions. Future research could broaden its scope by engaging participants from different groups through questionnaires or group interviews. Longitudinal ethnographic research or follow-up interviews could also be conducted to compare changes over time in language attitudes and identities.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This study explored language identities and ideologies among ethnic minorities in Chungking Mansions, revealing attachment to Hong Kong, openness to different cultures, and prioritization of language competency. Neoliberalism and Englishization are dominant ideologies. Hence, concerns arise over the marginalization of minority languages and its impact on Hong Kong's international reputation. Linguistic landscapes are associated with self-perceived identities and target audiences. Minority languages are often invisible, limiting career development and deterring migration, which may harm Hong Kong's global reputation as a multicultural hub.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that they have no known competing financial interests or non-financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

## REFERENCES

1. Mathews G. Chungking Mansions: A Center of 'Low-end Globalization'. *Ethnology*. 2007;46(2).
2. Inda J, Rosaldo R. Introduction: A world in motion. *The Anthropology of Globalization*; 2002.
3. Mathews G. *Ghetto at the center of the world: Chungking Mansions, Hong Kong*. University of Chicago Press; 2011.

4. Blackledge A. Discourse and power in a multilingual world. *Discourse and Power in a Multilingual World*. 2005;1-262.
5. Woolard KA, Schieffelin BB. Language ideology. *Annual review of anthropology*. 1994;23(1):55-82.
6. McCarty TL. *Dangerous difference: A critical-historical analysis of language education policies in the United States*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum; 2004;71-93.
7. Tollefson JW. *Planning language, planning inequality*. New York. 1991;12.
8. Leung C, Harris R, Rampton B. The idealised native speaker, reified ethnicities, and classroom realities. *Tesol Quarterly*. 1997;31(3):543-560.
9. Mercer K. *Welcome to the jungle*. London: Routledge; 1994.
10. Hall S. The question of cultural identity. In S. Hall, D. Held, & T. McGrew (Eds.), *Modernity and its futures*. Cambridge: Polity Press/Open University. 1992;274-316.
11. Blackwood R, Lanza E, Woldemariam H. (eds.). *Negotiating and contesting identities in linguistic landscapes*. London: Bloomsbury; 2016.
12. Lou JJ. *The Linguistic Landscape of Chinatown: A sociolinguistic ethnography*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters; 2016.
13. Niedt G, Seals CA. (eds.). *Linguistic landscapes beyond the language classroom*. London: Bloomsbury; 2020.
14. Peck A, Stroud C, Williams Q. (Eds.). *Making sense of people and place in linguistic landscapes*. London: Bloomsbury; 2018.
15. Shohamy E, Ben-Rafael E, Barni M. (Eds.). *Linguistic Landscape in the City*. Buffalo: Multilingual Matters; 2010.
16. Pütz M, Mundt N. Multilingualism, multimodality and methodology: Linguistic landscape research in the context of assemblages, ideologies and (in) visibility: An introduction. *Expanding the linguistic landscape: Linguistic diversity, multimodality and the use of space as a semiotic resource*. 2019;1-22.
17. Phyak P, Sharma BK. Citizen Linguistic Landscape, bordering practices, and semiotic ideology in the COVID-19 pandemic. *Linguistic Landscape*. 2022;8(2-3):219-232.
18. Kress GR. *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. Taylor & Francis; 2010.
19. Phyak P, Ojha LP. Language education policy and inequalities of multilingualism in Nepal: Ideologies, histories and updates. In *The Routledge international handbook of language education policy in Asia*. Routledge. 2019;341-354.
20. Harvey D. *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2005.
21. Holborow M. *Language and neoliberalism*. New York: Routledge; 2015.
22. Tajrobehkar B. Orientalism and linguisticism: how language marks Iranian-Canadians as a Racial 'other'. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*. 2021;1-17.
23. Song G. Hybridity and singularity: A study of HK's neon signs from the perspective of multimodal translation. *The Translator*. 2021;27(2):203-215.
24. Swedberg R. Exploratory research. *The production of knowledge: Enhancing Progress in Social Science*. 2020;17-41.
25. Coleman James. *Nigeria: Background to nationalism*. Berkeley: University of California Press; 1958.
26. Merton, Robert K. "Age, Aging, and Age Structure in Science". in Robert K. Merton (ed.), *The Sociology of Science: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1973;497-559.
27. Young Christobal, Holsteen Katherine. "Model Uncertainty and Robustness: A computational framework for multimodal analysis." *Sociological Methods and Research*. 2015;46(1):3-40.
28. Gorter D. Introduction: The study of the linguistic landscape as a new approach to multilingualism. *International journal of multilingualism*. 2006;3(1):1-6.
29. Galletta A. *Mastering the semi-structured interview and beyond: From research design to analysis and publication*. NYU press. 2013;18.
30. Mulyawan IW. Reading visual design of outdoor signs in Kuta (A case study of multimodal linguistic landscapes). *Cogent Arts & Humanities*. 2020;7(1):1748987.
31. Williams M, Moser T. The art of coding and thematic exploration in qualitative research. *International Management Review*. 2019;15(1):45-55.

32. Weyers JR. English shop names in the retail landscape of Medellin, Colombia. *English Today*. 2015;32(2):8–14.
33. Tan SX, Tan Y. Examining the functions and identities associated with English and Korean in South Korea: A linguistic landscape study. *Asian Englishes*. 2015; 17(1):59–79.
34. Lanza E, Woldemariam H. Indexing modernity: English and branding in the linguistic landscape of Addis Ababa. *International Journal of Bilingualism*. 2014; 18(5):491–506.
35. Inagawa M. Creative and innovative uses of English in contemporary Japan. *English Today*. 2015;31(3):11–16.
36. Bolton K. World Englishes and linguistic landscapes. *World Englishes*. 2012;31(1): 30–33.
37. Lee JS. Multilingual advertising in the linguistic landscape of Seoul. *World Englishes*. 2019;38(3):500-518.
38. Song G. Conflicts and complexities: A study of HK's bilingual street signs from functional perspective on translation. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. 2020;41(10): 886-898
39. Guinto N. The place/s of Tagalog in HK's Central district: Negotiating center-periphery dynamics. *Linguistic Landscape*. 2019;5(2):160-178.

© 2024 Jasmine; This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

*Peer-review history:*

*The peer review history for this paper can be accessed here:*  
<https://www.sdiarticle5.com/review-history/111368>