

Chapter 2

Tertiary English Language Teaching and Learning in Hong Kong

2.1 Introduction

Hong Kong's universities have an increasingly diverse student body. One result of this trend is that universities now have to accommodate students with both linguistic barriers and cultural conflicts between newly arrived Mainland students and existing local students. This research, with a focus on teaching strategies in the discipline-based English studies, should contribute to a broader understanding of the current context of the tertiary education sector in Hong Kong where educators are integrating Western and Eastern approaches to teaching and learning. This chapter prepares the way for the empirical component of the research with a literature review that covers three key areas: the reform in higher education after the handover in 1997; the change of language policy and its impact on English language education; and English language teaching in Hong Kong's universities.

2.2 General Review on the Higher Education of Hong Kong

More than a decade has passed since the handover of Hong Kong from the United Kingdom (UK) of the sovereignty of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Having been under British colonial regime for over 150 years, Hong Kong was reunited with the People's Republic of China in 1997 under the "One Country, Two Systems" framework. The framework gives Hong Kong a high degree of autonomy. For at least 50 years Hong Kong can maintain its capitalist principles, its own currency, and laws and border controls (Petersen and Currie 2008; Shive 2005). However, changes are inevitable. In reality, great changes have taken place in the last decade.

Hong Kong's relations with the UK and PRC have changed since the handover. As a special administrative region of the PRC, Hong Kong people ruling Hong

Kong people has replaced the British style of administration. As a result, its relationship to the PRC is much closer than that to the UK. However, despite its return to China, the British style of administration and influence on political, economic, social and cultural aspects of Hong Kong still remain.

On the other hand, the central government of the PRC takes every opportunity to impose its influence on politics, economics and culture of this newly established Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR). Whilst Hong Kong's distance from the UK continues to lengthen, the distance towards Mainland China is shortening. These changes have resulted in challenges to the HKSAR as a newly founded government of Hong Kong. How will this enhance the city's international reputation around the world as an international financial centre and commercial hub while strengthening Hong Kong's relations with Mainland China?

The relationship between Hong Kong and Mainland China is now closer. The HKSAR government's intervening policy of public services has also been strengthened. In response to the government's call for "quality culture and cost-effectiveness to improve the provision of public and social services in Hong Kong" (Mok and Lee 2000, p. 373), a set of public sector reform programs in health care, social welfare and education have been conducted and reviewed. As an international financial center and cosmopolitan city, Hong Kong is also challenged by the growing impacts of globalisation with the emerging knowledge-driven economy and rapid development of information technology in general (Mok 2005; Mok and Cheng 2002).

Education, as one of the main public services, is not immune from this tidal wave of review and reform. The University Grants Committee (UGC), a local funding body that sponsors its funded institutions and offers expert advice to the Government on higher education in Hong Kong, has focused on a series of higher education reviews in Hong Kong during the last decade to examine quality in education and enable universities to become more competitive in the global market (Petersen and Currie 2008; UGC 2004a, b; EDB 2007). Due to the fact that Hong Kong has witnessed "the different regimes of higher education" (Mok 2005, p. 284), a number of significant review reports have been published such as *Hong Kong Higher Education: To make a difference to move with the Times* (UGC 2004a); *Hong Kong Higher Education: Integration Matters* (UGC 2004b), and *Legislative Council Brief: Developing Hong Kong As A Regional Education Hub* (EDB 2007). These reviews generally introduce strategic development reforms and recommendations to enhance Hong Kong's international competitiveness in the university sector and encourage more collaboration among universities.

Shive (2005) has shown that many offshore study programs offered by universities from the United Kingdom and Australia have been set up in Hong Kong to cater for graduates' needs. All these offshore program providers need to be registered with the Hong Kong Council of Academic Accreditation (HKCAA). Hong Kong now has more than 1000 offshore postsecondary education programs. This indicates that the Hong Kong government wishes to keep its international status in higher education. In particular, the UGC Higher Education Review (HER) report, which sets out a broad strategic direction for the development of higher education in

Hong Kong, highlights that the Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) aims to broaden and deepen collaboration with the Mainland across all fronts, including education (UGC 2004a). The goal of attracting and retaining high quality non-local students to study and live in Hong Kong to further internationalise its higher education sector has been set out in the education hub policy. The Focus Group on Trade and Business advised that attracting more Mainland Chinese students should become one of the Hong Kong's strategic development policies. This is shown in the report on Economic Summit on China's 11th Five-year Plan and the Development of Hong Kong (Hong Kong Government 2006). Such initiatives not only echo the SAR Government's push to establish a steering committee to promote Hong Kong as a regional education hub, but they also call for a sector that produces graduates who are highly employable, mobile and versatile to foster manpower needs of Hong Kong and enhance its long-term economic competitiveness (EDB 2007; UGC 2004a).

While the Hong Kong government is concerned with the internationalisation of higher education, there is also a trend towards "localisation". Hong Kong and Mainland China's economic relationship has been further integrated since 1997 as Mainland China's economy has been booming. Hong Kong as an international economic centre is vital for the economics of Hong Kong and the Mainland (Shive 2005). When Mainland China began its market economy, Hong Kong had been included as one of the "four tigers" or Newly Industrial Economics (NIEs) in Asia for its strong and rapid economic growth since the 1970s.

Furthermore, China now has Normal Trade Relations (NTR) with the United States. This should attract many talented people in Hong Kong to move to the Mainland searching for potential commercial and work opportunities. Over the past decade the number of Hong Kong students sitting for an admission examination to Mainland universities has seen a tenfold rise (Lo 2016). Hong Kong not only seeks to lure elite students from across the border to study in Hong Kong, but its universities also have developed partnerships with the Mainland to export their programs to the Mainland (Shive 2005; Zou 2006). Hong Kong's universities have made efforts also to benchmark with the top universities in the world (Mok 2005). The efforts expended by the higher education sector in Hong Kong shows that it is one of the most competitive and open markets in the world.

In order to understand the moves towards both internationalisation and localisation, it is necessary to review the current education system in Hong Kong. Hong Kong currently has 20 local degree-awarding institutions of higher education, eight of which are publicly-funded by the UGC. These 8 institutions are: The University of Hong Kong (HKU), The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST), The Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU), The Hong Kong Polytech University (PolyU), City University of Hong Kong (CityU), Lingnan University (LU) and The Education University of Hong Kong (EdUHK). The first seven universities are more research-led comprehensive universities of world-class standing while the latter, conceived in the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd, now Education University of Hong Kong, EdUHK) in 1994, is a leading university on education in the Asia Pacific Region.

In spite of the fact that Hong Kong's sovereignty was returned to China, "the Hong Kong culture is hybrid in nature, with dominant Chinese culture mixed with British elements, which differentiates Hong Kong from the Mainland" (Yu and Zhang 2016, p. 302). One of the most influential aspects of British colonisation can be seen in Hong Kong's education system which resembles that of England. Before 2009 the education system in Hong Kong including its schooling structure and examination system followed the British "3-2-2-3" model, which consists of three-year junior secondary education (S1–S3), two-year senior secondary studies (S4–S5) leading to the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE), two-year matriculation courses (S6–S7) leading to the Hong Kong Advanced level Examination (HKALE), and then three-year undergraduate degrees. However, only one-third of HKCEE test takers each year could succeed in promoting to Secondary 6 and continue on to take the HKALE as a requirement for university admissions (Inoue 2013). Therefore there were debates about this schooling structure and the examination system, which were considered to be much more streamed than that of England in terms of future employment opportunity (Sinn 2010).

It was not until 2009 that this education system was shifted from the original "3-2-2-3" to the current "3-3-4" model. Under the "3-3-4" education reform by the Hong Kong Education Bureau, the length of higher education undergraduate degrees were increased from three to four years while senior secondary education was reduced from four to three years (Garcia et al. 2016). The two high-stakes examinations (HKCEE and HKALE) were reduced to one set of exams, the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE), which takes place by the end of senior education (S6). As noted by Ma (2008), initiating the new "3-3-4" reform which requires three-year junior secondary, three-year senior secondary and four-year undergraduate studies is not only in line with four-year first degrees in Mainland China, North America and Europe but also provides students with a more flexible and coherent new senior secondary and higher education curriculum. Sinn (2010) supports the implementation of the new academic structure which is more aligned with international education standards as "the A-Level examination is streamed but the baccalaureate-style diploma emphasizes on breadth" (p. 1). The new education systems began at senior secondary in 2009 and was implemented at university level in 2012 after the first exam of HKDSE. Within the government's expectation, the compressed secondary education from 7 to 6 years resulted in a double cohort of graduating students in 2012 (Inoue 2013). In other words, the eight baccalaureate-granting universities have been engaging in the process of migrating their three-year British-style system to an international four-year system to cater for more graduates' needs.

Although the higher education of Hong Kong has undergone the transition phase of education system change, the eight universities still remain highly competitive due to its Western-style education, high academic rankings around the globe and generous scholarships (Zhao 2013). In spite of a remarkable social change and close connections to the Chinese education system, Hong Kong has still maintained a British-style higher education convention which is reflected in the fact that English-medium education and Western-oriented pedagogy are widely accepted.

Besides, the grading system for assessment follows five Western-style standards: Fail, Pass, Satisfactory, Good and Excellent. Moreover, its academic degrees are split into five divisions: First Class Honours, Second Class Honours One, Second Class Honours Two, Third Class and Pass on the basis of the British university standards (HKU 2017). Mok and Tan (2004) state that the ways in which Hong Kong manages its public sector retain a strong association with the United Kingdom's ideology and practices. As a result, the higher education system in Hong Kong is still affected by corporate managerialism and market forces. This is reinforced by Petersen and Currie (2008) who highlighted that Hong Kong's universities have been impacted "by diverse forces including Western notions of academic freedom" (p. 589) because of over a century of colonisation. However, researchers such as Zeng (2006) and Sit (2013) argue that both China and Britain have influenced the current higher education in Hong Kong. As Petersen and Currie (2008) support that Hong Kong is historically a blend of Western and Oriental cultures and traditions, its universities are also affected by the Confucian ideology of the scholar's role in society.

In terms of language used in Hong Kong's public sector, English as an official language of Hong Kong is widely used in the business sector and in higher education, while Cantonese, the local Chinese dialect, is the most used language for daily communication (Gao et al. 2010). In the majority of Hong Kong's universities, using English as the medium of instruction is a common policy. Some can use a mix-code (English-Cantonese) and offer courses in both languages. But with a closer relationship with the Mainland, the SAR Government has promoted trilingual (i.e., capable of speaking Cantonese, English, and Putonghua) and biliterate (i.e., capable of writing Chinese and English) as a required language policy for students since the handover (Wang and Kirkpatrick 2015). Putonghua (Mandarin) has been attached to greater importance and is also used in some courses in some universities (Jackson 2005; Li and Bray 2007).

In addition, the composition of academics of universities in Hong Kong has also undergone a shift in the past twenty years, although the institutional environment is still very international. A migration movement affected Hong Kong several years ago before its return to Mainland China. According to Wong (2009), a large number of people, including many native speaking university teachers, returned or migrated to Western countries such as the UK, the US, Canada, and Australia because of "97 Phobia". They were anxious about any political changes that might cause political turmoil. Some courses in some faculties could not be delivered because of a lack of teaching staff in many of Hong Kong's institutions in the period of the Handover.

Since 1978 more and more Chinese mainland Chinese students have studied overseas following China's economic reform and open policy. The number of outbound students increased to 523,700 in 2015, bringing the number of Chinese overseas students to over four million. The Ministry also notes that each year an increasing number of Chinese students (roughly 70–80% of the student population) return to China as well as its special administrative regions due to China's attractive job market and more positive career development after their overseas studies (MoE 2016). Likewise, many outstanding Chinese scholars want to teach and conduct

research work in Hong Kong's institutions of higher education where East meets West. Given that the employment benefits offered by Hong Kong's universities is relatively higher than those in Western countries, competitive salaries and welfare benefits attract talented educators and researchers. As a result, both mainland Chinese and international scholars have replaced the previous teaching and research task force which before 1997 consisted mainly of British scholars and local Hong Kong scholars.

After the handover, many of those who immigrated because of fears of a changed Hong Kong have found that Hong Kong still offers a stable environment and good development opportunities. Statistics show that about 300,000 people in Hong Kong emigrated overseas in the late 80s and up to 1997, but more than 300,000 people returned to Hong Kong after 1997 (Wong 2009). The higher education sector now is comprised not only of native English speaking teachers and local teachers, but also a number of Mainland Chinese scholars. The characteristics of academic staff have been a salient international feature of Hong Kong's universities as most of the academics gained their doctorates in Europe, North America and Australia (Postiglione 1998). This would also be a reason why the workplace in Hong Kong remains highly competitive in a global education market and open-minded with an international outlook. In this sense, the teaching staff members are of a blend of Western and Oriental cultures and traditions.

In terms of the student resources of Hong Kong's higher education, a significant change has also occurred. After becoming part of the PRC, Hong Kong attempted to do whatever it could to reinforce its link with the Mainland including in the area of education. According to Shive (2005), in the 1990s several hundred talented Mainland Chinese undergraduates on scholarship offered by the Jockey Club were brought into Hong Kong's universities to study. Since that time, more Mainland students have been recruited by many local graduate programs. Initially Hong Kong's universities tended to establish relationships with a few prestigious universities on the Mainland, such as Tsinghua University, Peking University, Nanjing University and Fudan University.

With the impact of the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, the Hong Kong SAR Government wanted to curtail the deficit. One of its strategies was to promote self-financed higher education programs. A series of budget cuts occurred and many graduate programs were run on a self-financed basis (Shive 2005). As a result of internationalisation in higher education and rapid economic development in China, a large number of Chinese students pursued English-medium higher education (Li and Bray 2007; Gao and Trent 2009). As English-medium higher education is one of Hong Kong's strengths, it has attracted a large number of Mainland students. Hong Kong began to regard "the Mainland as a zone of potentially vast opportunity to export higher education services" and considered its "English language university programs in a Chinese socio-echoes sitting on China's doorstep" (Shive 2005, p. 14). Therefore, there has been an attitudinal shift to find the best talent in China and to sponsor them to study at universities in Hong Kong.

It is noticeable that Mainland students are the majority non-local component in Hong Kong's higher education. Some relaxation in the policy on Mainland students

coming to Hong Kong for university study has occurred since 2005. For example, the non-local student quota for publicly funded programs has increased from 10% to 20%. Immigration control has been relaxed to allow a non-local graduate to do part-time work and to apply for work upon graduation by granting a 12 months' stay without any restriction. Such schemes have enhanced the attractiveness of Hong Kong's higher education to non-local students and enabled them to stay and enter the workforce in Hong Kong (EDB 2007). As mentioned in Chapter One, Mainland students has become the largest non-local student component in the current higher education institutions in Hong Kong. This provides students with more opportunities to experience the city's multicultural and multilingual environment. Nevertheless, the rising recruitment of non-local students studying in Hong Kong has implications for language requirements in Hong Kong's universities.

2.3 English Language Education in Hong Kong

When the term "One country, Two systems, Three languages" (Kirkpatrick and Chau 2008; Wright and Holmes 1997) was proposed, it indicated that the soci-olinguistic context in Hong Kong is as complicated as its political changes. Following the political guideline of "One country, Two systems", a new Government's language policy of "Biliterate and Trilingualism" has been put forward. This language policy aims to enable the local people to be trilingual in speaking fluent Cantonese, Putonghua (Mandarin) and English, and biliterate in mastering written Modern Standard Chinese (MSC) and English (Education Commission 1997).

Hong Kong used to be identified as a special bilingual society where English and Cantonese were the two main languages. They functioned in different domains and coexisted during the former colonial period (Lin 1997; Tang 2006). Inevitably, the transition from the British colonial rule to current local government has made the linguistic situation more complex and complicated. Putonghua (Mandarin), China's official language, has emerged as a competitive language to both English and Cantonese.

Hong Kong is a society where the local vernacular Cantonese, a regional dialect of Chinese, is the mainstream language used in daily communications. The statistics show that about 89% of the population inhabitants in Hong Kong are Chinese and 98% of them speak Cantonese as their mother tongue (Howlett 1997; Peng 2005). Cantonese Chinese differs greatly from Putonghua *syntactically*, lexically and phonetically. Cantonese refers to the dialect of Canton (Guangzhou) and Canton delta (Pierson 1992). Unlike Modern Standard Chinese with the simplified Chinese characters as its written form, Cantonese is basically spoken with its unique written form of traditional Chinese characters appearing in local televisions, advertisements, newspapers, magazines, comic books, etc., but not widely accepted outside southern China (Lau 2009). As Ho (2008) describes, most Hong Kong Chinese are

native Cantonese speakers, although the language of school literacy is Modern Standard Chinese (MSC) together with the written form of the traditional characters used in Hong Kong and Taiwan only.

In 1968, a local Chinese Language Campaign in Hong Kong pressed the British government to give recognition to Chinese (Bolton 2000). It was not until 1974 that Chinese was designated as a co-official language. During the preparation of the handover, the status of Chinese was strengthened by the published Article 9 of the Basic Law of the HKSAR, PRC. It stated that in addition to the Chinese Language, English could also be used as an official language by the executive authorities, legislature and judiciary of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (Chinese Government 1992). Hence, Cantonese was increasingly used in Legislative Council Speeches and other related departments in the years just prior to 1997. A large proportion of the written laws of Hong Kong have also been translated into Chinese through the Bilingual Law Projects in 1998 (Bolton 2000; Peng 2005).

It is notable that although English, originally brought in by the British colonial government in 1841, has been the official language to date, its use has been criticised as a mirror of the colonial rule in Hong Kong (Peng 2005). During the colonial era, English was first positioned as “the official language of government, the official language of Law, and was by de facto the most widely used medium of secondary and university education” (Bolton 2000, p. 270). It indicates that English enjoys a high status in Hong Kong because its primacy of use is reinforced by many formal domains such as government administration, legal and judiciary, education, business, and commerce. Tang (2006) argues that although Cantonese functions as a predominant language “typically reserved for the inner domain” like family friends and traditions, English is “maintained as the medium of communication in the outer domain” (p. 3) such as these formal situations.

As a global language, English in Hong Kong serves as a vehicle for an individual’s upward social, economic, education and occupational mobility. Lau (2009) observes that the end of the British colony did not mean that most Hong Kong people thought English should be purged as a colonial legacy. Rather, they regarded it pragmatically as the international language that increases their opportunities in the world and a vital element for preserving the Hong Kong system under the policy of “One country, Two systems”. The importance of English has been emphasised. As So (2000) comments, “whether one likes it or not in the next millennium the English language is going to be a *lingua franca* of members of international communities in trade and commerce as well as in science and technology” (p. 22). She further highlights the importance of using English as a mark of membership of communities. It would be challenging for people without such a mark to gain access to these communities (So 2000).

In addition to Cantonese and English which were the two main languages in Hong Kong before 1997, Putonghua (Mandarin), that is, the national language of the PRC, is now spoken in Hong Kong. The first government officers of HKSAR used Putonghua to give a speech in the swearing-in ceremony on 1 July 1997. This event showed that Hong Kong was part of China. The event also indicated that a linguistic change was to occur in Hong Kong. Nowadays learning to speak

Putonghua has become desirable. Putonghua is commonly heard in the streets. In some employment institutions such as schools, law firms, and financial institutions, speaking and understanding Putonghua has become one of the admission priorities apart from the minimum requirement of speaking fluent Cantonese and English.

Notwithstanding, research by Ho (2008) examining tertiary students' language code choice among these three languages found that verbal exchanges in pure Putonghua was rated the lowest (2%) alongside mixed Putonghua (6%). Despite the small numbers, factors that would motivate university students to learn and use Putonghua were identified by the qualitative data. Most Hong Kong students see its pragmatic importance because of the close social and economic relationship between Mainland China and Hong Kong. In addition, code-mixing is seen as fashionable. The study suggests that although most tertiary students want to be proficient in both English and Putonghua, it still needs time to accomplish the goal of trilingualism in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, biliteracy and trilingualism cannot be achieved overnight. One of the most important approaches is to use language education from the primary level to the tertiary level. The proposal for biliteracy and trilingualism puts major linguistic burdens on Hong Kong students. At the same time, Hong Kong teachers at all levels are facing arduous tasks of language education. The difficulties of language education can be seen in current debates about how to implement the language policy.

Soon after 1997, the policy introduced by the SAR Government encouraged most secondary schools to switch the language medium of instruction (MOI) from English to Chinese, the mother-tongue of most Hong Kong students (Education Commission 1997). Before that, English was predominantly used as the MOI from the secondary school up to the tertiary level. All subjects were taught in English except for Chinese language, literature and history (Evans 2000). The action, taken by Education Department to achieve the goal of promoting students as future biliterate and trilingual personnel, "represents a fundamental change in the nature of language education in Hong Kong" (Evans 2000, p. 185). This policy of "mother-tongue language education to replace English teaching" has remained controversial.

The mother-tongue education policy, which replaced the former British colony's *laissez-fair* approach of allowing individual secondary school authorities to decide the suitable medium of instruction used for its school (Hong Kong Government 1974; Evan 2000), resulted in 114 secondary schools (out of 460) granted permission to continue teaching in English (Education Commission 1997). This implied a major change in English language education. Before the introduction of this policy, 90% of schools were English-medium schools, 6% were Chinese-medium schools, and 4% were English-medium and Chinese-medium combined schools (Boyle 1995). As a consequence of the publication of the *Medium of Instruction Guidance for Secondary Schools (Guidance)* in 1998, the statistics were significantly reversed: Chinese-Medium of Instruction (CMI) schools increased dramatically from a previous 6–70%, while English-Medium of Instruction (EMI) schools dropped from 90% to nearly 30% (Lau 2009; Peng 2005).

There were two main reasons for the shift from English-medium to mother-tongue teaching. First, there was a decline in English proficiency of local students, including university students, because of poor quality English-medium education (Johnson 1994; Lu 2002). Moreover, there was the mixed use of English-Chinese. For example, Bolton and Luke (1999) found that 81% of students' subjects were conducted by code-switching mode, but the use of mix-code teaching in Hong Kong's English medium schools limited students' academic and linguistic skills (Education Commission 1995; Evan 2000). It was anticipated that Hong Kong would produce sufficient English teachers to implement bilingual education in Hong Kong. However, it was argued that there was a lack of teachers trained properly in this field due to the local government's negligence of teacher education (Lu 2002). The shortage of qualified English teachers with sufficient English skills in bilingual education was severe, which led to the result of falling English standards in Hong Kong and students' failing to master English.

Second, in spite of the fact that English is a second language in Hong Kong, it is not the mainstream language used by the majority of people, especially people from a low socioeconomic background who usually communicate in vernacular Cantonese. Most Hong Kong students learn English in educational settings and may gain some exposure to English at work (Bolton and Luke 1999). Since English is rarely spoken outside schools, government, well paid civil service jobs and prestigious professional careers, only elite students are able to compete for such jobs or careers (Hyland 1997; Lau 2009).

In addition, at least 30% of secondary school students had learning problems when following the curriculum using pure English or even code-switching mode (Kwo 1997). Most primary schools use Chinese as MOI for children. Hence, mother-tongue education aimed primarily to better facilitate students to learn knowledge common-sensibly, educationally and technically through their first language Chinese (Halliday 1999), as the primary language, is believed to be the best MOI for meeting students' needs, enhance their development of literacy and bring merits rather than hinder their English proficiency (Education Commission 2003). The decision to allow schools to keep using English as the MOI was based on "their fulfillment of the three prescribed criteria, namely student ability, teacher capability and support measures" (Education Commission 2003, p. 20). Even though the objective of mother-tongue teaching was to help students who had difficulties learning English, it has had an impact on English language education (from primary to tertiary level) in Hong Kong.

Secondary schools in Hong Kong were inevitably classified into two categories as a consequence of the two-language dichotomy (Tang 2006): English Medium of Instruction (EMI) schools (30%) and Chinese Medium of Instruction (CMI) schools (70%). The bifurcation of EMI and CMI threatened bilingual education in Hong Kong (Legislative Council 2008). Although parents generally supported this policy, they were dissatisfied with the labeling and even doubted whether learning good English was the primary objective of education. Students attending EMI schools were considered to be relatively proficient enough to gain English-medium education compared to those in CMI schools. Thus about 30% of the students selected

by EMI schools would easily be labeled as the best based on their English performance, but the remainder with CMI schools might not be thought so at this point.

The two-language dichotomy also has affected the Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) mechanism (Education Commission 2003). Primary school graduates are divided into three bands based on their academic performance. Students are judged and selected by secondary schools based on their English abilities. Band One school students are more competitive than those from a lower Band and have a greater likelihood of being selected by the best schools, which are predominantly EMI schools. This also created public resentment. Parents claimed that their children's right to receive an education in English was removed (Lau 2009). They were anxious about their children's declining English standards because they could not enter an EMI school. Students in CMI schools were unhappy that they could not learn most subjects in English. Staff at CMI schools complained that their autonomy in recruiting students was hampered. They wanted to be recognised as qualified English-medium teaching schools to compete in attracting the best students.

The impact of the two-language dichotomy reached students' tertiary study. There has been constant criticism of the "linguistically ill-prepared" (p. 77) English skills of Cantonese-speaking students (Hyland 1997). Local students complained about poor English proficiency. Particularly, there was a growing dissatisfaction with graduates' English proficiency expressed by influential sectors such as business, commerce, and professional organisations where better English language skills are needed (Berry and Lewkowicz 2000; Evans and Green 2003, 2007).

Mother-tongue teaching accelerated variations in English standards among local students. The good might become better, but the poor might also become worse. Research conducted by the Chinese University of Hong Kong followed groups of students enrolled in 1998 and 1999 respectively over a period of eight years. It demonstrated that the likelihood of CMI school graduates entering university was far lower than that of their EMI counterparts because of poor competence in English. Moreover, students' English passing rate in the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE) has been decreasing (Singtao Daily 2008). After a 10-year implementation of mother-tongue teaching, this result has alarmed the government and the public who suspected mother-tongue teaching was the cause of declining academic performance.

The Chief Executive of the HKSAR and his administration suggested that more autonomy be returned to schools in 2009 to decide which MOI should be used. The Education Bureau has proposed a fine-tuning of the mother-tongue teaching policy aimed at enhancing students' English proficiency. Changes have been implemented at secondary schools from September 2010. Similar to the rather *laissez-fair* approach before 1998, schools now can choose their MOI, but there is one pre-condition for teaching in English: at least 85% of pupils allocated to the school need to be in the top 40% of their age group academically (Legislative Council 2009).

In contrast with the language education in secondary schools, high English proficiency always has been emphasised at the tertiary level. The colonial education

system has been maintained and English as the second language medium is imposed in most Hong Kong's universities (Hyland 1997; Lu 2002). At least 80% of lectures and 60% of tutorials are conducted in English. English competence is extremely valued. Good English skills gained from secondary education can increase students' opportunities to get access to higher education and smooth their adaptation to English-medium education in universities (Littlewood and Liu 1996; Peng 2005).

There appears to be two types of Hong Kong students at tertiary level: top students with higher English proficiency tend to use English more on campus; while those with lower English proficiency tend to communicate more in Cantonese. Lai (2001) identified that the two types of Hong Kong students, the middle-class elite and the working class low achievers, have different attitudes towards language. The former prefer to use English while the latter are more inclined to communicate in Cantonese. The situation has become more complicated with the arrival of a large group of elite mainland Chinese students who do not speak Cantonese but Putonghua and English, creating an obstacle to easy communication between Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students. Nevertheless, English proficiency is vital for success in higher education for both groups of students.

2.4 English Language Teaching in Hong Kong's Universities

There are two phases to English language teaching in Hong Kong's universities. The first phase is concerned with the pre-academic language assistance available at self-access language learning centres within universities. Universities can help students acquire language and study skills relevant to their needs and interests either through intensive language training programs or by independent language practices (Detaramani and Chan 1999; Klassen et al. 1998). Like language education in many other English-speaking countries, the establishment of English language support centres occurs in the Hong Kong's higher education sector. These centres not only provide students with professional and continued English support via formal study, but also contain self-access facilities, services, and on-line support.

Inadequate English proficiency makes most undergraduates feel anxious about studying in Hong Kong's universities which are pre-dominantly English-medium of instruction. Interviews with CMI school students have highlighted a number of language problems compared with their English-medium counterparts (Evans and Green 2007). Even so, tertiary education in Hong Kong will have a larger percentage of CMI school students than EMI school students for at least another decade as the mother-tongue teaching policy in secondary education was discontinued only in 2009.

Despite Mainland students emerging as the largest non-local student resource in the universities of Hong Kong, there has been limited research of this phenomenon.

Gao (2007) investigated language learning experiences of Putonghua-speaking Mainland Chinese in Hong Kong and found that most of them attempted to improve their English proficiency by seeking English-medium education. Even though most selected Mainland students' language competence is described as high in their pre-university education, they face a new instructional and institutional environment in Hong Kong's universities. As a result, student preparation for linguistic and institutional adaptation is necessary.

Although students are supposed to have developed English language skills for a higher level of academic study in pre-university education, there are problems with productive writing and speaking in English upon entering universities (Evans and Green 2007; Hyland 1997). To provide students with a smooth transition from pre-university study to university education, English language enhancement programs (English for Academic Purposes), offered by English Language Centres within universities, are made available to most first-year undergraduates across various disciplines. In providing intensive EAP courses, students are expected to improve their linguistic proficiency and to adapt to a new teaching and learning culture of university. A general overview of language enhancement courses provided by the eight UGC funded institutions in Hong Kong is presented in Table 2.1.

To help students meet the university's English Language Requirement, the language centres provide all students enrolled in the four-year curriculum a mandatory, credit-bearing English language enhancement course (CityU 2016; UNIVERSITY A 2012). As Chase (1998) notes, "language courses might be considered one foundation upon which a university must be based" (p. 100). They help students study in English-medium tertiary education. Along with language teaching, they also prepare students to adjust culturally and academically to the teaching learning environment of tertiary study in Hong Kong. Hong Kong promotes a self-directed learning context that requires students to demonstrate self-reliance and self-regulation (Bakx et al. 2006; Hyland 1997).

Apart from a broad introduction to studying at the tertiary level in Hong Kong, the objective of language courses across various disciplines is to equip students with the necessary language skills for specific academic disciplines. This type of English provision has attracted much interest (e.g., Allison et al. 1995; Flowerdew 2003; Littlewood 2001; Peacock and Ho 2003) on discussing English for specific purposes (ESP) (Bhatia and Candlin 2001; Jackson 2005; Swales 2001). For example, Jackson (2005) conducted a cross-disciplinary analysis of business education in Hong Kong. It found there was a need for discipline-specific ESP courses for senior students. Each academic discipline has its unique nature and demands on students. Becher (1987b) conducted research in Britain and the United States and created four different academic disciplinary categories based on the development of other studies, namely, the pure sciences (i.e., Medicine), the humanities (i.e., history), the technologies (i.e., mechanical engineering), and the applied social sciences (i.e., education). From this scheme, a simple signpost to the academic territory as reflected by the table above can also be identified. However, not many universities' language centres have provided comprehensive and thorough discipline-based English courses so far.

Table 2.1 Language enhancement courses offered by each institution in Hong Kong

UGC-funded universities	Language supporting unit	Conducting forms of language courses	Discipline-specific requirement courses
Mission: To provide support services to the university and enable students to use English effectively in the universities' English-medium academic contexts			
University A	Centre for Applied English Studies (CAES)	Mandatory credit-bearing core university English	EAP courses sorted by faculties (e.g., English for Arts, English for Education, and Academic communication for Business and Economics, etc.)
University AST	Centre for Language Education (CLC)	Mandatory credit-bearing English for the core curriculum	English courses for undergraduates sorted by departments (e.g., English for University Studies, English for Business, Engineering and Science Students respectively, etc.)
PolyU	English Language Centre (ELC)	Mandatory credit-bearing language and communication requirement subjects	Discipline-based courses for English language development in academic contexts (e.g., English for Scientific Communication, English for Technical Project Writing and Professional English for ITC Students, etc.)
CityU	Chan Feng Men-ling Chan Shuk-lin English Language Centre (ELC) (ELC)	Compulsory credit-bearing university English course	English courses for new bachelor and associate degree students (e.g., English for academic purposes and English foundation course for associate degree students, etc.)
CUHK	English Language Teaching Unit (ELTU)	Compulsory, core university English	Discipline-based English course (e.g., English for Arts, Education and Business administration, etc.)
HKBU	Language Centre (LC)	Compulsory credit-bearing English general education courses	English enhancement programs (e.g., English through films and short

(continued)

Table 2.1 (continued)

UGC-funded universities	Language supporting unit	Conducting forms of language courses	Discipline-specific requirement courses
			stories and Advanced business English, etc.)
LU	Centre for English and Additional Languages (CEAL)	Compulsory credit-bearing courses English for Communication (I & II) for first-year students and English for Communication III for second-year students	Elective English courses to all students (e.g., Public Speaking and Presentation Skills; English through Language Arts, etc.)
University B	Centre for Language in Education (CLE)	Mandatory English Enhancement Program for undergraduates	English enhancement courses (English for early childhood education and Advanced academic preparation, etc.)

Source Course information based on the university websites of HKU, HKUST, PolyU, CityU, CUHK, HKBU, LU and EdUHK

Most discipline-based English courses are conducted in a mandatory, credit-bearing module. The course length is generally around 42 teaching hours over a single semester or throughout the first or second year of study. Evans and Green (2007) argued that due to time constraints, this would be rather difficult to organise, especially when specifying language items for students. Despite this, the research indicates that university language support is essential for the majority of undergraduates and argues that more academically-oriented and specialist language courses should be designed (Evans and Green 2007; Hyland 1997; Jackson 2005). In addition to English, many language centres also offer both credit-bearing and non-credit bearing courses in other languages to meet student' needs for third languages. Putonghua and Cantonese are popular choices. By teaching other languages, the universities are addressing the government's push for biliteracy and trilingualism.

After this brief description of how English language centres help students with language proficiency for transition and pre-communication training purposes, the next step is to examine post-language centre English learning. After students finish EAP or ESP courses, they must learn specific discipline matters through English-medium in their departments. Language centres emphasise four inclusive academic or general English skills, namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing. Discipline studies on the other hand require students to study using advanced integrated English language skills. Successful academic performance is driven by good English competence.

Departmental teaching staff members focus on specific subject content. Content-driven teaching and learning of English has been reported in some studies. For example, O'Brien (1993) discussed the development of a model effective for English for special purposes for engineering courses while Jackson (2002) held L2 discussions in business. Since many academics across various disciplines do not experience training in inclusive language teaching training as language teachers do, they are more concerned with how subject knowledge is to be taught and learnt rather than students' language enhancement. It is argued that "the language learning outcome is subordinated to academic achievement" (Lyster 2007, p. 6). There is however no achievement without good language competence because they are interrelated.

In general, most Hong Kong teachers teaching EAP or ESP courses are trained in the field of teaching English as a second or foreign language. They usually teach English based on some commonly used approaches to language teaching such as the situational approach, a comprehension-based approach, cooperative language learning, content-based instruction, or communicative language teaching (Celce-Murcia 1991; Nunan 2000; Richards and Rodgers 2001). In particular, a communicative, process-based or task-based approach has been adopted in Hong Kong's education system since the 1980s because it promotes communicative competence in English which has been a priority of Hong Kong's education department (Education commission 1994; Wong 2009).

At this point, some terms in language education need to be clarified. Approaches to and methods in language teaching have been the subject of studies (e.g., Anthony 1963; Brown 1973; Celce-Murcia 1991; Howatt 1984; Richards and Rogers 2001). According to Anthony (1963), three levels, approach, method and technique, were hierarchically identified and arranged. An approach was defined as a paradigm or a theory at the broadest level; method was a specific set of procedures for teaching a language precisely; and technique, the narrowest term of the three, was a series of classroom activities used to accomplish an objective.

Richards and Rogers (2001) have revised and extended this model. They argue that the original model fails to spell out how an approach is realised in a method and how method and technique are connected. They regard approach and method as *design* level in which the design of objectives, syllabus and content is determined, while instructional materials and the role of teachers and learners are specified. They use a comprehensive term, *procedure*, which incorporates scheduled classroom techniques, strategies and behaviors in language teaching within a type of method. Hence, there are three dimensions in describing any language teaching method that is "theoretically related to an approach, organisationally determined by a design, and practically realised in procedure" (Richards and Rodgers 2001, p. 20).

Literature on language teaching has confirmed that an established method should have a specified set of classroom practices that are guided by a set of theoretical principles (Nunan 2000; Kumaravadivelu 2005). As Kumaravadivelu argued (2005), much research concentrates on language teaching method but ignores other factors "such as teacher cognition, learner perception, societal needs, cultural and institutional contexts" (p. 165) that can affect classroom processes and practices.

Such factors have a significant impact on language education by shaping and reshaping the content and character of teaching and learning. Nunan (2000) has investigated the role of learner and teacher by analysing classroom management and teacher-student interaction to address issues related to English language comprehension skills and to analyse language teaching methods. Some early classroom studies have revealed that it is difficult for teachers to use theories and practices in everyday teaching consistently (e.g., Kumaravadivelu 1993a, Nunan 1987). Later Kumaravadivelu (2005) suggests that language educators understand language teaching from macro-strategies to micro-strategies. The former involves general plans in accordance with theoretical and pedagogical knowledge in L2 teaching and learning. The latter involves classroom procedures that realise the objectives of a specific macro-strategy. Each macro-strategy can have any number or type of micro-strategies to suit local learning and teaching situation. As a result, the appropriate strategy use should be drawn from English language teaching.

In Hong Kong, the study method used in language centres is primarily tutorials or workshops in which interactive teaching practices such as discussion, group work, role play are employed to help students engage in independent learning (Nunan 2000). Teaching methods for discipline study have also been investigated (Ho et al. 2001; Kember and Kwan 2000; Murry and Macdonald 1997). For example, Kember (1997) identified approaches or orientations to teaching in the disciplines, “teacher-centred/content-oriented” and “student-centred/learning-oriented”.

Students focus on English language attainment at the first phase where specific language assistance with clear tasks is offered. They then shift from a language preparation level to an applied level of real communication in their respective discipline departments. Confidence and competence in English is essential for their disciplinary studies. Students have to become more independent advanced English learners when engaging in their major study. Students new to university experience a different teaching culture. Effective teaching methods including teaching strategies can facilitate students' adaptation to university study. Good teaching methods and appropriate strategies can help students become competent in English, and at the same time, enable them to boost their academic performance. For this reason, an investigation of effective strategies in the level of *procedure* that can be used to facilitate students' learning is warranted.

Teaching strategies are activities initiated by teachers to help students to learn. Effective teaching practices have been the focus of many studies (e.g., Good and Brophy 1991; Killen 2007; Richards and Rodgers 2001; Trigwell and Prosser 1996b; Westwood 2008). There is substantial literature on this topic within disciplines such as healthcare, science, economics, and teacher education (e.g., Baldwin et al. 2006; Gullason 2009; Norman 2009; Vogel et al. 2009; Zhao et al. 2009). Researches in Hong Kong have examined lecturers' conceptions of good teaching, their approaches to teaching, and relevant educational practice mainly through a mix of academic disciplines from social sciences, engineering, technology, paramedical, business and management departments (Ho et al. 2001; Kember and Kwan 2000; Murry and Macdonald 1997). However, there is little investigation of

effective teaching strategies in English studies as a discipline (Sit 2012). Furthermore, specific procedures that help realise the “teacher-centred/content-oriented” and “student-centred/learning-oriented” approaches to teaching in higher education have not drawn as much attention as teaching methods in Hong Kong’s higher education.

On the other hand, many studies about English language education mainly focus on how to upgrade students from elementary to academic level in accordance with approaches and related techniques in language teaching. Nevertheless, there is little published literature in this area which focuses on English major students at the higher education level in Hong Kong. Overall, a set of teaching strategies especially for teachers and trainers have been systematically described by elaborating intensive examples taken from a variety of subjects that are considered to be effective in some situations in any subject area across all institutional settings including higher education (Killen 1998, 2003, 2007). That is to say, those effective teaching practices may be also applied to English studies as a subject in Hong Kong’s higher education sector. Although they are commonly used across various disciplines in Australian universities, no detailed examples or evidences can demonstrate whether they are applicable for other institutional settings like Hong Kong. Since little research has not as yet touched on this field, this study attempts to establish a clearer picture of the use of specific teaching strategies for English major students as advanced language learners using the effective teaching strategies proposed by Killen as a framework for analysis in terms of research design.

2.5 Summary

This chapter discusses the research development in three areas: the reform in Hong Kong’s higher education as a result of social changes since the 1997 handover; the change in language policy by the SAR government and its consequences for English language education in local elementary and secondary schools; and research on the current situation of English language teaching in Hong Kong’s universities. The rapid social changes in Hong Kong since 1997 have resulted in reforms to higher education and have established a closer relationship with Mainland China. The trends of both internationalisation and localisation in Hong Kong’s higher education have affected the composition of both academics and students. The increasingly number of Mainland students have become a challenge. Academics must deal with a diverse range rather than a relatively homogenous group of Hong Kong local students.

Second, the inevitable social change has brought about a change in language policy. The “Biliterate and Trilingualism” policy intends that Hong Kong students will be trilingual in speaking fluent Cantonese, Putonghua (Mandarin) and English, and biliterate in written Chinese and English. As such, the linguistic requirements for Hong Kong students at all levels are very high. The policy has affected language teaching in both elementary and secondary education, creating a gap between English-medium schools and Chinese-medium schools.

Third, local graduates from the two types of secondary schools, EMI and CMI, have emerged with different levels of English language proficiency. Additional linguistic and cultural complexity has been created by new arrivals from Mainland China. Although students are provided with reinforcement programs for English language proficiency in their university language centres, few have taken steps to improve language proficiency within English discipline studies. Research has shown that an interaction problem exists between Hong Kong local and Mainland students. Therefore, an investigation of the types of inclusive teaching strategies that enhance language attainment and class interaction is warranted. The design and methodology of the research framework are detailed in the next chapter.

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