

## **Macau or Macao? – A case study in the fluidity of how languages interact in Macau SAR**

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### **Abstract**

Macau is a small Special Autonomous Region (SAR) of China, located on the Pearl River Delta, adjacent to Hong Kong. Unlike Hong Kong, its colonial heritage is Portuguese, rather than British. Macau's official languages are Portuguese and Standard Chinese and the most widely spoken local language is Cantonese. With the influx of gaming finance into the city, English has also come to a role of increasing prominence. There are also substantial number of Filipinos working in the city who speak Tagalog as a first language in many cases. As a small state with a highly fluid linguistic situation, Macau can provide insights into how languages rise and fall in use and status. Macau can also be a useful tool for re-evaluating such concepts as linguistic imperialism and the concentric circles model of World Englishes. As well as evaluating the existing literature, this paper presents the results of a questionnaire survey into language attitudes amongst students at Macau Polytechnic Institute. The results reveal that students attach a higher status to English than Portuguese, despite the latter being the former colonial and current official language. Evidence, however, indicates that Portuguese is likely to continue to be important as a distinguishing feature of Macau SAR.

**Keywords:** Macau, World Englishes, Portuguese, Chinese

### **Introduction – the Macau context**

This paper describes the existing language situation in Macau in the light of some of the existing debates within World Englishes. It will examine where, and if Macau fits into Kachru's (1985) concentric circles model and discuss Macau's possible connection with notions of linguistic imperialism. It will describe how languages mix in Macau, as well as touching upon ideas of translanguaging, and present attitudes towards four of the principal languages (English, Portuguese, Cantonese and Putonghua/Mandarin), which are in play in the territory. Throughout this paper, the name Putonghua, rather than Mandarin will be used, except in direct quotations. An exception to this is in the primary research, where students expected the term Mandarin to be employed.

Macau is a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China, located in the South East of the country, at the mouth of the Pearl River Delta (Yee & Young, 2009, p. 480). Like a very close neighbour, Hong Kong, Macau is governed under the “one country 2 systems” concept which was instituted after the return of the territory to the People’s Republic in 1999 (Lam, 2010, p. 660). A detailed analysis of “One country two systems” is outside the scope of this work, but the local government has autonomy, under the control of the People’s Republic of China. The official government factsheet ([www.gcs.gov.mo](http://www.gcs.gov.mo)) lists the population as approximately 648,500, of whom 88.4% were Chinese, with 1.4% Portuguese. In addition immigrant Filipinos made up 4.6%, other immigrant groups include Vietnamese and those from Myanmar and Nepal. Lee and Li (2013, p. 819) describe a small grouping known as the Macanese, often of mixed Portuguese and Asian heritage. Formerly, this grouping spoke the creole known as Patua, though this is now an endangered language, with just “a handful of fluent speakers” despite attempts to keep it alive (Simpson, 2013, p. 32). Due to the fact that this creole has very few speakers in Macau, it is not a subject of this paper because this work is concerned with describing the contemporary situation in the SAR. According to Lee and Li (2013, p. 819), the grouping known as Macanese are chiefly bilingual in Portuguese and Cantonese, also with some knowledge of English. Unlike Hong Kong, the colonial power in Macau was Portugal, hence the influence of Portuguese.

Bray and Koo (2004, p. 229) describe the language situation succinctly, saying that “[t]he complexities of language policy in Macao have all the ingredients of Hong Kong, that is, Cantonese, Putonghua and English, plus the additional ingredient of Portuguese.” Jeong (2002, p. 76) concretises this in two ways. First of all, nobody is sure how Macau (or Macao) should be spelt. Macau is from the Portuguese tradition and Macao is supposedly the Anglicised version. They are used almost interchangeably and I am most likely using Macau because I spent a long time in Portugal. Jeong (2002, p. 76) also describes how her own name has four different variations, according to which of the language is being used. Zhang (2013) mentions that Chinese and Portuguese are the official languages of the territory, but this itself is problematic. What does the writer mean by “Chinese”? Hok-Shing Chan (2015, p. 284) quotes official census figures from 2012, which state that 85% of people in Macau use Cantonese as their “normal language” with only 5% using Putonghua (Mandarin). Several other Chinese dialects are also used amongst other languages. Yet it is common to hear the term Chinese used in Macau even though Cantonese and Putonghua can be mutually unintelligible. Standard Chinese in its written form will be discussed below in the section on Cantonese and Putonghua. A separate government factsheet ([www.gcs.gov.mo](http://www.gcs.gov.mo)) lists English as being spoken by 2.8% and Filipino at 3.0% (Filipino does not exist, the most widely spoken language is Tagalog amongst Filipinos in Macau but there are speakers of several other Phillipine languages).

Botha (2013, p. 462) describes English as a “de facto working language” in Macau. Bray and Koo (2004, p. 216) state that English is more influential

than Portuguese in the territory, and likely to remain so. Noronha and Chaplin (2011, p. 421) also point out that many local Chinese employ full-time Filipina helpers, who communicate with their children in English on a daily basis, implying a generational shift towards English.

All of these themes will be returned to, later in the paper, in more detail, after a discussion of some key themes in World Englishes. Moody (2008, p.14) makes the point that “Macau’s small size offers unique insights into how languages can grow in status and functions in a very short time, insights that are difficult to examine in larger communities”. This is why there is value in a descriptive paper of Macau’s language situation. It is Macau’s highly dynamic and constantly shifting situation which I wish to explore in this paper.

### **Concentric circles/language imperialism and English as a lingua franca**

Kachru (1985), in describing the spread of English worldwide, created a model of three concentric circles. Kachru (1990, p. 3) describes the Inner Circle as L1 countries, such as the United States and the United Kingdom. The outer circle are described as “ESL varieties” (often former British colonies) and the expanding circle as “EFL varieties” (countries such as Germany, Thailand or Brazil, where neither Britain nor America has ever been a colonial power). In his 1985 article, perhaps unsurprisingly, Macau does not feature anywhere on the list. Its size alone might account for that. Possibly more surprisingly, Hong Kong also does not feature. Groves (2009, p. 56) notes that a British imperialist presence is a feature of Outer Circle countries, but suggests that the lack of agreement about whether Hong Kong English exists, might be the reason for the territory’s absence. Even critics of Kachru’s (1985) three-circle model such as Rajudarai (2005, p. 113) acknowledge that it has played a valuable role in legitimising versions of English, such as Indian English. Nevertheless, Rajudarai (2005, p. 113) also points out that this model leaves many “fuzzy areas”. Kachru (1990, p. 4) mentions the difficulty in placing Jamaica and South Africa within the framework and it is possible that Hong Kong is another “fuzzy” area. This is worth mentioning because Hong Kong certainly has some elements of an outer circle territory, and Macau would certainly be expanding circle, yet Moody (2008, p.10) argues that “it is not clear whether or not there are any clearly identifiable differences between English in Macau and Hong Kong English”. Modiano (1999, p. 24) a proponent of the lingua franca model, in his critique of Kachru takes issue with what he sees as the Kachrovian model’s tendency to see the spread of English as resulting from “the historic exploits of specific peoples”. If there are indeed more similarities than differences between Hong Kong and Macau in their adoption of English, then it calls into question the usefulness of the three circles model for this region.

Melchers and Shaw (2011, p. 10) highlight the role of the British and American empires in the spread of English. Phillipson (1992) in his book “Linguistic Imperialism” describes how, in his view, English was used systematically as a tool to dominate local populations. In this work and others he sees English as a tool of oppression, controlling local populations and a way of fostering elites at the expense of indigenous people (Phillipson, 2009, p. 336) Phillipson (2009) argues that spreading English is a way of consolidating power in the hands of the Americans, and to a lesser extent the British, to the detriment of local cultures and linguistic traditions. For Phillipson (2009), languages spread very much as a result of conscious actions. It is interesting, at this point, to briefly return to the context of this paper, namely, Macau. Macau has no lasting tradition of British colonialism but was a former Portuguese dependency. It is instructive to evaluate the relative statuses of English and Portuguese in modern day Macau, and relevant literature will be reviewed later in this paper, alongside the presentation of some small-scale primary research. Pennycook (1998, p. 114), while valuing some of Phillipson’s analysis, criticises the linguistic imperialism model for negating the role of individual choice in whether to learn or use English. Any attempt to fit Macau into a notion of linguistic imperialism with regards to English would also be complicated by two other factors. Firstly, Bray and Koo’s (2004, p. 217) bold statement that Macau is “almost a colony” of Hong Kong (owing to the larger SAR’s economic dominance) holds some sway. Phillipson (1992) seems to over-emphasise one Empire (the British Empire) but there are winds blowing from different directions in Macau, particularly since the handover of the territory to the People’s Republic of China. The second is the dynamic at work between Putonghua and Cantonese, other Chinese dialects and the use of standard and simplified Chinese characters (Chan, 2015, p. 291). All these factors ensure that Macau does not fit well into the linguistic imperialism model as advocated by Phillipson (1992).

House (2003, p. 560) takes a very different view of the spread of English and sees the language as a useful tool, rather than a symbol of ideology, or something designed to deliberately create elites. In supporting the concept of English as a lingua franca she does not see the language as an identity marker and describes it as “bereft of cultural capital”. Seidlhofer (2009, p. 242), cites empirical studies which demonstrate that “ELF is a vibrant, powerful, and versatile shared resource the enables communication across linguistic and geographic boundaries”. This is a view that contrasts sharply with Phillipson’s (1992). Returning to the context of this paper, student motivations for learning English will be discussed later in this piece of work. However, if one accepts Seto’s (2004, p. 49) point that Portuguese is of diminished importance compared to English in Macau, it is challenging to support the notion of linguistic imperialism applying in the SAR. Portuguese and Lusophone (Portuguese speaking countries including Brasil, Mozambique, Cape Verde, Angola).culture is still very present in Macau in the form of food, street names, a cultural centre, and yearly cultural festivals (Morais, 2009, p. 7). It is indeed,

far more visible than British or American culture. This raises the question of why, if Portuguese culture is still present in Macau, is the day-to-day use of the Portuguese language declining in relation to English? (Lee & Lok, 2010, p. 449).

### **Language policies in Macau and Laissez-faire education policies**

Botha (2013, p. 462) notes that Chinese and Portuguese are the official languages of Macau SAR. When the term “Chinese” is used, it refers to standard Chinese written characters. DSEC (2011) official statistics put Cantonese firmly in first place as the most used L1 (83%), with Putonghua trailing at 5%. The same census figures show a higher proportion of English first language speakers (2.3%) than Portuguese (0.7%).

Beyond what is theoretically “official” Moody (2008, p.4-5) provides a language analysis of official websites of the Macau government. While all provide information in Chinese script, some provide information in English, others in Portuguese and some in all three languages, sometimes as a result of a seemingly random decision. While Portuguese was far more prevalent in the legal area (all legal proceedings in the SAR must be conducted in Chinese and Portuguese), for most other areas, including culture and transport information there was near parity between the use of English and Portuguese. On an anecdotal level, it is also common to hear non-Portuguese speakers using Portuguese acronyms, such as DSEJ (the local government education department) without knowing what the letters stand for.

To add to this very fluid situation there is the debate about what constitutes standard written Chinese. Chan (2015, p. 291) describes how simplified characters are the standard in mainland China whereas in Macau traditional characters are still used. Chan (2015, p. 292) in his study of social media in Macau suggests that this is still an important identity marker in Macau, used to distinguish locals from mainland Chinese. Later in this paper, I will briefly look at the attitudes of students in my own institution (Macau Polytechnic Institute or IPM to give it its Portuguese acronym) towards Cantonese and Putonghua.

This non-standardised attitude to languages extends to the local education system – an education system which is described by many as laissez-faire (Bray & Koo, 2004, pp. 223-225; Zhang, 2015, p.55; Jeong, 2002, p. 4; Moody, 2008, p. 8; Morrison & Tang, 2002, p. 290). Young and Yee (2006, p. 479) speaks of a clear lack of direction in education policy. Leong and Li (2012, p. 68) mention the lack of a uniform approach to teaching in Macau, which extends to each school choosing its own materials, often from Hong Kong and non-standardised assessment material. As Li and Bray (2007, p. 806) remark, tertiary institutions have had no standard English level entry requirements, even though some courses use an English medium of instruction. Currently, there is an effort to move in the direction of a standardised test.

Li and Bray (2007, p. 806) point out that one reason for the lack of

standardised English tests is that the medium of instruction in Universities is often Cantonese and/or Putonghua. Tertiary institutions lack a standardised language of instruction policy when it comes to their courses (Botha, 2013, p. 466). Botha's (2013) research was conducted at Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST). It is interesting that only by questioning the students themselves could he determine what language was used to deliver content. Incidentally, at least officially MUST "emphasise the use of English as the medium of instruction" (Young & Yee, 2006, p. 482). Li and Bray 2007, p. 800 suggest that the reality is a little different, and describe MUST as "dominated by Putonghua" At my own workplace, Macau Polytechnic Institute the same situation applies. In order to find out which languages were used as the means of instruction by students in their majors in my own workplace it was necessary to ask for the information from students. That information will be presented in the research section later in this paper. One of my students Rose (not her real name) is a speaker of Putonghua, who describes her Cantonese as poor. Despite here limitations with the language her design major is delivered in Cantonese. Incidentally, she did not consider this to me much of a problem. As Li and Bray (2007, p. 800) also mention there are also a smattering of courses in Macau, which use Portuguese as their main medium of instruction.

### **Attitudes to different languages in Macau**

This section will focus on English, Portuguese, Putonghua and Cantonese, which are the main languages at play in Macau. It will not examine Patua, which was a creolised version of Portuguese, spoken by some local Macanese in the past. This language is barely relevant in Macau today (Chan, 2015, p. 282, p. 286), except for historical and cultural reasons. The interplay of the four languages is highly dynamic and constantly shifting (Jeong, 2002, p. 77), as will be seen in the following section.

Portuguese, along with standard Chinese is one of the two official languages of Macau. Bodomo (2012, p. 72) quoting official census figures, mentions that only 5% of people who live in Macau are able to speak Portuguese. Bodomo (2012, p. 86) also projects that this figure is likely to go down in the future. Seto (2004, p. 49) already spoke of the "diminished importance" of Portuguese following the handing back of the territory to China in 1999. Panell (2008, p. 365) describes vestiges of Macau's colonial past as anachronistic and Lee and Lok (2010, p. 449) argue that the Portuguese language has been replaced by English. If true, that would be an interesting development, as it is Portugal, and not Britain or America which was the colonial force in Macau. However, things are perhaps not quite so clear-cut as to support the idea of a steady decline into oblivion for Portuguese. It continues to be the case that street signage in Macau is bilingual (Chinese and Portuguese) and sometimes tri-lingual (English in addition to the aforementioned). Buses have pre-recorded announcements in English, Cantonese and Portuguese. Yan and Lee (2014, p. 434), in their tourism study found that visitors enjoyed this,

as it added to Macau's unique flavour. Bray and Koo (2004, p.2 35) make a similar point that the presence of the Portuguese language is bound up with Macau's identity. It is what makes Macau what it is (and not Hong Kong). As the geopolitical situation shifts, Macau has once again found itself in an interesting position. The People's Republic of China, keen to develop markets and exploit natural resources in Lusophone Africa (Mozambique, Angola and Cape Verde for example) and Brazil now see Macau as a valuable tool in promoting contacts with those territories (Bray & Koo, 2004, p. 231; Lam, 2010, p. 672). Silva (2016, p. 91) states that Portuguese is increasing in daily use in Macau (we may have to wait for the next census to confirm or refute this assertion) and also points out that it is an increasingly attractive language for mainland Chinese to learn, and he cites the same geopolitical reasons as above. A final point, which is instructive about the complexity of the interaction between different languages in Macau, Morais (2009, pp.7-10) makes the point that, for Africans resident in Macau the Portuguese speakers (from Mozambique, Cape Verde, Angola and Guinea-Bissau) have much higher prestige than the English speakers (principally from Nigeria). This development is well-illustrated by the fact that in my own institution about one hundred students of Brazilian and Luso-African origin are enrolled to study Putonghua and are somewhat disappointed that when they go out on the streets of Macau, everybody speaks Cantonese.

The other official language in Macau is Chinese, but as with many of the factors described in this paper, this is not a straightforward concept. Poon (2010, p. 7) describes "Chinese" as "ill-defined" but is taken to mean Modern Standard Chinese. Written Cantonese is not accepted in formal writing. Though Mak (2015, p. 258) feels able to describe Cantonese as a minor dialect (albeit one with more L1 speakers than Italian), Moody describes it as the language of preference for those resident in Macau (2008, p. 6). Lai (2011, pp. 257-261) describes how the Cantonese language is strongly bound up with local identity in Hong Kong. On an anecdotal level, in my University in Macau an official celebration for two visiting mainland teachers who only spoke Putonghua was entirely conducted in Cantonese, which lends credence to the idea that Cantonese is also bound tightly with Macau's local identity. The Putonghua speaking teachers could not understand any of it. Luo (2013, p. 62), in a study of foreign academics and staff working at a Macau University found that for this group Putonghua was considered to be the high prestige form of Chinese. Yan (2015, p. 568) describes the backlash against McDonalds, when they put up a sign in Macau which used simplified Chinese characters. Traditional Chinese characters are seen as an identity marker in both Hong Kong and Macau. In his study of web-based responses to this occurrence he made the following observation. "It is interesting to note that many netizens seem to turn a blind eye to the wide use of English, Portuguese, and other foreign languages in the Macao linguistic landscape" (Yan, 2015, p. 568). He makes the point that local people are more emotionally invested in Chinese, but it is also interesting that one of Macau's official languages (Portuguese) is dismissed as a foreign

language.

Turning to English, Yeung, Lee and Kee (2008, p. 314) describe a key event in Macau history, in 2001, when the casino franchises in Macau were opened up to large foreign gambling corporations, such as Wynn and Sands. (Moody, 2008, p. 9). This raised the profile of English in the SAR, leading to some describing English as the “de facto working language” in Macau (Botha, 2013, p. 462). Jeong (2002, p. 82) argues that attitudes to English are positive in Macau and suggests that it should be more important than Portuguese. Yee and Young’s (2006, p. 488) extensive study of Macau university students also found that students’ attitudes to English were much more positive than their attitudes to Portuguese. Talking about Hong Kong Lai (2001, p. 115) suggests that in the other SAR the burgeoning popularity of English is for reasons of pragmatism, in effect greater study and work opportunities. Yee and Young’s (2006) study of Macau students seems to suggest that this also applies to Macau. This would lend weight to Feng’s (2012, p. 366) assertion that “the need to use and learn English in Macao (note spelling variation) is purely driven by its economy”. Moody (2008, p. 10) also ascribes an increased demand for English to increased international investment in the territory. Reporting on studies of students language use at MUST Botha (2014, p. 9) concludes that English is an “inextricable part” of Macau students’ lives.

Another possible reason why English is developing in Macau is, as mentioned earlier in this text many local Chinese parents in Macau also employ Filipina helpers, who communicate with their children exclusively in English, and local kindergartens frequently employ Filipina staff. Both these phenomena may have been factors in any increased in the use of English in the SAR (Noronha and Chaplin, 2011, p. 421). Shi (2017, p. 468) points out that the number of migrant domestic workers in Macau has increased from 4800 in 2002 to 25,086 in 2016, a very significant rise in a small territory such as Macau. Tse et al. (2009, p. 57) in their study of nearby Hong Kong found significantly higher attainment in reading for those school children whose families employed English speaking domestic helpers. This suggests that the increased prevalence of Filipina domestic helpers may be a contributing factor to the spread of English in Macau.

As to whether there is any “variety” of English in Macau, as some argue there is for Hong Kong English (Hung, 2000; Groves, 2009; Moody, 2008, p. 10) points out that there has been very little research into this question in the Macau SAR. The same lack of research made it impossible at that time to judge whether there were any discernible differences between Macau English and Hong Kong English. I believe that is still the case at the time of writing so there is a gap here for future research.

Later in this paper, attitudes of undergraduate students at Macau Polytechnic Institute (MPI or IPM depending on which of the two interchangeably used acronyms you select) will be presented, based on the results of a questionnaire based small scale study. While acknowledging the limitations of generalising from a small scale study, the results support Lee and

Lok's (2010, p. 449) assertion that "the gradual replacement of Portuguese by English as the most popular foreign language is no longer a threat but a reality", yet to write Portuguese off completely would not correspond to the current socio-political reality in Macau (Bray & Koo, 2004; Silva, 2010; Lam, 2010).

### **How languages mix in Macau**

In Macau there is a very pleasant apartment building. The name of the building is Edificio Pik Tou Garden. Edificio is the Portuguese word for building and a colleague translated Pik Tou for me as jade wave. Three different language in four words is quite striking and one of the things which makes Macau unique. While this is anecdotal, Noronha and Chaplin (2011) present a detailed analytical study of the interplay between English, Portuguese, Cantonese, and, in a few cases, even Patua in local speech. One example extracted from the study is the following sentence:

*hai-loh..playstation, game boy..daan ngo **sobrinha** waan **mais de bonecas-loh***

In the above extract (Noronha & Chaplin, 2011, p. 422) a lady is talking about her nieces preference for playing with electronic gadgets. Portuguese words are in bold, Cantonese in italics and English fairly easy to establish. Is this an example of diglossia (or triglossia?) which Lewis, Jones, and Baker (2012, p. 656) define as "where two languages of a bilingual have different uses and functions? Not so, as elements of various languages are mixed within the same utterance and the speaker is probably unaware of which language they are using at each moment. Wei (2017, pp. 10-11), supporting the idea of translanguaging raise the question in another context (Singapore) of "which language is this person thinking in?). In the example they discuss, they suggest that it is impossible to determine. Lewis, Jones, and Baker (2012, p. 667) are talking about the Welsh minority language context when they explain that a translanguaging perspective moves from "considering languages as separate to integration, from a diglossic to a heteroglossic view". Heteroglossic does seem a concept which has some resonance in the Macau context.

Wei (2017, p. 11) defines translanguaging as "using one's idiolect, that is one's linguistic repertoire, without regard for socially and politically defined language names and labels". Cangarajah (2011, p. 1), in his article on translanguaging in the classroom asserts that in the case of multilinguals "languages are not discrete and separated, but form an integrated system for them; multilingual competence emerges out of local practices where multiple languages are negotiated for communication". Cangarajah (2011, p. 5) cites Khubchadani (1997), describing translanguaging as "creative improvisation according to the needs of the context and local situation", which would seem a good description of the short sample presented above.

Chan (2011, pp. 290-291), in his study of social media use amongst University of Macau students, found what he framed as hybridity of language use in postings, with them mixing Standard Chinese, written Cantonese and English. Below is a sample post:

佢有電話,有MAIL,可以問下佢

Interestingly, Chan (2011, p. 302) found that none of the students in his sample mixed Portuguese words into their postings. However, it is also doubtful that students see the English and Chinese words as “discrete codes” (Creese & Blackledge, 2015, p. 26). Lacking the time and resources to do a large scale study of social media posts, I included a question on whether students mixed languages in their social media postings in my small scale study, which is presented in the next section.

Yan and Lee (2014, pp. 434-435) detail the origins of Macau street names, some of which had their origins in Portuguese, and some in Chinese. Street signs in Macau are bilingual and in some cases tri-lingual, with English adopted as the third language (Yan & Lee, 2014, p. 435). Romanized versions of Chinese origin street names follow Portuguese, rather than English spelling conventions. Anecdotally, it can be said that Portuguese street names are not known by the local Chinese population, even the names of main streets. A more recent phenomena has been that some building developments, such as Fishermen’s Wharf (a local entertainment and gambling area) (Clarke, 2007, p. 400) have been given English names directly, which are then translated into Chinese, leaving out Portuguese entirely. A study by Neves (2016, pp. 59-60) of four locales in Macau found the Portuguese language was still very prominent in those areas, and in her interpretation of her data, unaffected by any encroachment of English.

Zhang and Chan (2017, p. 42) studied translanguaging in multi-modal posters in Macau. In their study of 300 posters they divided the posters into two categories, namely separate multilingualism (where there was clear delineation between the languages used on a poster and flexible multilingualism (where there was no clear dividing line between the languages. They found that 73% of the posters had clearly defined boundaries between the languages and 27% had the languages mixed within the same columns or items of the poster. As with much of the prevailing language situation in Macau they remark that there is “more room” for further investigation (Zhang & Chan, 2017, p. 54). Further research is required in this area, to see whether the situation is static or evolving. Ansaldo (2010, p. 622), in his paper on Macau and Malaysia, speculates that “it may be the case that the natural state of human communication is to be found in multilingual, creative negotiations, in which different codes are used simultaneously”, yet Zhang and Chan’s (2017) study (though not without its limitations as the posters were chosen randomly) would appear to indicate that the ideology of separating languages still persists.

### **A small scale study of undergraduates at Macau Polytechnic Institute**

Macau Polytechnic Institute (MPI or IPM) was founded in 1991 and provides a range of courses, including social work, computer studies, visual arts and design (Tang & Bray, 2000, p. 481). The main questions I wanted to investigate were as follows:

1. What are students' attitudes towards the importance of the four most significant languages in Macau? (Putonghua, Cantonese, Portuguese and English)?
2. How do the students rate their own ability in the same four languages?
3. What do students think should be the official language policy in Macau?

Additionally, students were asked to self-report about whether they mixed languages in social media posts and their ability to practice their English outside class.

While realizing that the results of such a small scale study are not generalizable, I was interested to see how the status of English and the colonial and still official language of Portuguese compared. Also interesting would be attitudes to Putonghua and Cantonese. Finally, on a professional note I felt that it was important to know what languages students' majors were instructed in, finding it somewhat surprising that this needed to be researched.

A total of 62 students were given a 19-item questionnaire, based on a 4-point Likert scale, written in English but with the researcher present as they were completed. All were undergraduates, some from Mainland China originally, and some from Macau. I considered it might be of interest to see if attitudes were different. As a sample of convenience, drawn from visual arts and design students was used these two populations were somewhat asymmetrical. A total of 45 students were from Macau and only 17 from mainland China. From the total sample, 49 of the students spoke Cantonese as their main language at home and 13 spoke Putonghua. Of the Macau students only two spoke Putonghua as their main language at home.

Further, 35 of the students reported that their majors were delivered in Cantonese, 14 reported that they studied in Putonghua, three said that the medium of instruction was English and six reported a mixture of two to three of the languages. Four of the students seemed quite unclear about which language their course content was delivered in, perhaps reflective of the general "anything goes" attitude.

## Results and Discussion

Modal scores were calculated for all data as it was felt that mean scores were inappropriate for calculating ordinal data. Koustalis (2013) points out that a flaw of using means is that extreme scores at a high and low end result in an “average”, which lies in the middle. Raw figures will be presented in the Appendix but for the results section modal scores will be presented for Strongly Agree (SA) Agree (A) Disagree (D) Strongly Disagree (SA).

Table 1  
*Attitudes to the four languages (N=62)*

1. Being able to speak English well is important for my future	SA
2. Being able to speak Mandarin well is important for my future	SA
3. Being able to speak Cantonese well is important for my future.	A
4. Being able to speak Portuguese well is important for my future	A

According to this small sample English takes priority over the former colonial language (Table 1). Perhaps interestingly, Putonghua also takes precedence over Cantonese. However, when the sample was divided into Macau students and Mainland Chinese students there were some differences. Macau students gave greater emphasis to Cantonese than mainland students, and gave slightly less emphasis to Putonghua (Table 2).

Table 2  
*Macau and Mainland China respondents' attitudes to the four languages*

	Macau (N=45)	Mainland China (N=17)
1. Being able to speak English well is important for my future	SA	SA
2. Being able to speak Mandarin well is important for my future	A	SA
3. Being able to speak Cantonese well is important for my future.	SA/A	A
4. Being able to speak Portuguese well is important for my future	A	D

Table 3

*Attitudes to language of instruction on degree courses (N=62)*

5. English should be the language of instruction in my major	A
6. Mandarin should be the language of instruction in my major	A
7. Cantonese should be the language of instruction in my major	A
8. Portuguese should be the language of instruction in my major	D

Table 3 shows that there were no reported differences between Mainland Chinese and Macau students. It is not clear from the results whether the students were happy mixing languages on instructions or whether the questions were poorly designed. Another limitation of this small-scale study is that as it relies exclusively on quantitative data the information gathered is lacking in depth. Richer data could in future be collected by conducting focus groups and/or individual interviews with some of the respondents. However, one interesting point which emerges is that English again is placed in front of the ex-colonial language, Portuguese.

Table 4

*Students' self-reported communicative ability in the four languages (N=62)*

9. I can communicate well in English	D
10. I can communicate well in Mandarin	A
11. I can communicate well in Cantonese	SA
12. I can communicate well in Portuguese	SD

As the majority of the respondents were from Cantonese speaking homes it is not surprising that communicative ability was rated more highly in Cantonese. Mainland Chinese answered SA to question 10 (Table 4). Though the respondents did not feel confident in English there self-reported Portuguese levels were even lower. Once again the traditional colonial language ranked below English. However, it may be interesting to note that students thought English was important for their future but did not feel able to communicate well in the language.

Table 5

*Macau and Mainland China respondents' attitudes to which languages should be official languages of Macau*

	Macau (N=45)	Mainland China (N=17)
16. English should be an official language of Macau	A	A
17. Cantonese should be an official language of Macau	SA	A
18. Mandarin should be an official language of Macau	A	SA
19. Portuguese should be an official language of Macau	A	A

As might be expected, mainland students seemed to value Putonghua more highly and Macau students gave more support to Cantonese, in terms of official language policy (Table 5). Again, this question might be more fully answered in future with a face to face interview or focus group follow-up.

Table 6

*Macau and Mainland China respondents' self-reported mixing of languages*

	Macau (N=45)	Mainland China (N=17)
13. I sometimes mix different languages when I am speaking	A	A
14. I sometimes mix different languages in my social media posts	A	A

It is questionable this self-report about the mixing of languages is, firstly as the classification is fairly arbitrary, and secondly because it would be more interesting to analyse what the students actually do, rather than what they report doing (Table 6).

## **Conclusion**

Macau holds interest for those interested in World languages because of the ever-evolving interplay between four (at least) languages. As we have seen above it is Macau is not a location which fits neatly into Kachru's (1985) three concentric circles model. McArthur (2001) talked of this model as belonging to a "tidier world" and, for this reason, one which might not apply as neatly as when it was conceived. It could certainly be argued that the world has got untidier since 2001, with the spread of the internet and globalisation. It is not clear what the three circles model can assist us with in understanding the spread of English in Macau.

Phillipson (1992) polemically denounces “linguistic imperialism”, yet in Macau, the colonial language appears to be declining for daily use, relative to English. In criticising proponents of the English as lingua franca model, Phillipson (2009, p. 338) suggests that language spread is tied up with “agendas of the powerful” However, the powerful in Macau are the Chinese government. If empires were the decisive factor in determining the spread and influence of a language then it might be expected that the spread of English in Macau and Hong Kong would vary considerably, but this does not appear to be the case, as we have seen above. As Kirkpatrick (2007, p. 343) points out “even in the context of Hong Kong, a place which was a British colony from 1842-1997, scholars have argued that demand for English has been more pragmatic than the result of colonial language policy”. For Macau, a territory which has never been a British colony, the argument for pragmatism as the cause of the spread and increased use of English must be even more readily accepted.

English does indeed seem to have increased in daily use in Macau for pragmatic, rather than ideological reasons. Vong and Wong (2014, p. 350) describe English as “the language of trade and commerce in Macao” (original spelling). In a territory with English speaking Filipina helpers (Noronha & Chaplin, 2011; Shi, 2017), and casino staff, Cantonese speaking locals and Putonghua speaking tourists English does to a limited extent perhaps, function as a lingua franca and the evidence is that locals want to use it as a lingua franca. As previously mentioned, the large influx of foreign domestic workers may also have contributed to the spread of English in the SAR.

Languages are often mixed and blended in Macau, but sufficient research has not been done on whether there is a Macau variety of English. Education policy still seems to be laissez faire and personally speaking, as a Macau parent I would like to know the main language of instruction before enrolling my children on a University course. However, what and how Universities and school in Macau teach still appears to be somewhat “ad hoc”.

Turning to the future, Bray and Koo (2004, p. 231) confidently state the following “It seems likely in the future the role of Portuguese will diminish further, despite its ongoing official status. The roles of Putonghua and English are likely to expand, and the role of Cantonese will remain fairly constant or diminish”. Those predictions were made 13 years ago and were not totally outlandish. However, Macau is subject to quite sudden political shifts – as seen above Portuguese is once again gaining political backing from regional and national governments – seriously enough for my own University English department to have an item on a meeting agenda about whether we were all likely to lose our jobs to Portuguese teachers and for our University President to e-mail staff re-affirming his commitment to English language teaching. It seems likely that the four main languages present in Macau will continue to blend for the immediate future, assisting to give Macau (SAR) its unique linguistic flavour.

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### **Note on Contributor**

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