МЕЛКИЕ ИНЦИДЕНТЫ КАК ИНДИКАТОР ЯЗЫКОВОГО ПРОГНОЗИРОВАНИЯ: НА ПРИМЕРЕ СИТУАЦИИ ГОНКОНГА

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Языковое прогнозирование – одно из ключевых направлений языкового планирования. Исходя из гипотезы о том, что мелкие инциденты, связанные с языком, часто являются предвестниками крупномасштабных беспорядков, в статье сначала рассматриваются исторические изменения в языковой политике Гонконга и проблемы текущей политики «двух письменностей и трехъязычия», а затем рассматривается ряд мелких инцидентов, связанных с языком, произошедших перед беспорядками в Гонконге в 2019 году, включающих протесты и волнения против стандартизованного путунхуа и упрощенных китайских иероглифов, наблюдаемых Национальным институтом научно-исследовательским центром по вопросам языковой ситуации и социального развития в Китае при Уханьском университете. Очевидно, что эти инциденты сыграли важную роль в процессе формирования беспорядков 2019 года и могут служить одним из параметров языкового прогнозирования в Гонконге. В статье также обсуждаются методы и трудности при наблюдении за мелкими инцидентами, связанными с языком, и заявляется о необходимости большего междисциплинарного сотрудничества и государственных обязательств. В заключение статьи подчеркивается важность языкового прогнозирования на основе киберпространства, несмотря на существующие проблемы, характерные для цифрового мира.

Ключевые слова: языковая политика в Гонконге; инциденты, связанные с языком; политика «двух письменностей и трехъязычия»; упрощенные китайские иероглифы; языковое прогнозирование

MINOR INCIDENTS AS AN INDICATOR OF LANGUAGE PROGNOSIS: THE CASE OF HONG KONG

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Language prognosis is one of the key areas in language planning. Based on the hypothesis that minor language-related incidents are often precursors to large-scale riots, the article first examines historical shifts in Hong Kong's language policy and problems of the current "biliteracy and trilingual" policy, and then reports a series of minor language-related incidents before 2019 Hong Kong riots, including oppositions and unrests against Standard Mandarin and simplified Chinese characters, monitored by the National Institute of Chinese Language Matters and Social Development at Wuhan University. It is clear that these incidents played an important role in the process shaping the 2019 riots, and can serve as one of the parameters for language prognosis in Hong Kong. The paper also discusses methods and difficulties in monitoring minor language-related incidents, and calls for more interdisciplinary co-operations and government commitments. The article concludes emphasizing the importance of language prognosis based on cyberspace despite the existing challenges that are peculiar to the digital world.

1. Introduction

Language prognosis or sociolinguistic forecasting is one of the key areas in language planning. The major practitioners of sociolinguistics postulated the idea parallelly, as Cooper proposed a "predictive adequacy" within the framework of language planning:

Predictive adequacy refers to our ability to forecast events…forecasts could, in principle, be made about what actors will attempt to influence what behaviors of which people by what means and with what results. [Cooper, 1989:48]

Similar ideas also appeared in Chinese literature. But it is the Russian scholars who made it an academic term "*Языковое прогнозирование*" ("Yazykovoe prognozirovanie) [В.Ю. Михальченко, 2006:271], and proposed a comprehensive model and applied it to explain real-life language development [Биткеева et al., 2019]. In the following article, we would like to use the case of Hong Kong to demonstrate the feasibility of language prognosis. It is our belief that in multilingual or multi-dialectal societies, language-related incidents usually precede outbreaks of large-scale social unrests. These incidents are usually small enough to be easily neglected, but they are effective barometers for us to monitor social trends.

2. An overview of historical shifts in Hong Kong's language policy

Three stages can be drawn to describe Hong Kong's language situation in the last two centuries [Su, 2010]:

1) Before the British occupation in 1842, language situation in Hong Kong was not much different from other areas in Southern China, i.e., local dialects for speaking and Wenyan (classical Chinese) for writing. Cantonese was the main dialect spoken by the residents, and Hakka dialect was also used by a number of immigrants.

2) During the British occupation from 1842 to 1997, English became the only official language and Chinese (Yue dialect) had no official status until 1974. During this period, English dominated all official spheres, while Chinese dialects, mainly Yue and also some Hakka, Southern Min and Wu, were used for speaking. Vernacular Mandarin with Yue dialect influence was also used for writing.

3) After the handover of Hong Kong in 1997, *The Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region* came into effect. In Article 9 of Chapter I, the Basic Law stipulates:

In addition to the Chinese language, English may also be used as an official language by the executive authorities, legislature and judiciary of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

This arrangement is not only a manifestation of the principle of "one country, two systems", but also takes historical and practical considerations into account. Because English still occupies a dominant position in administrative, legislative, jurisdictional and business affairs, its status maintains. On the other hand, the term "Chinese language" used in the Basic Law can refer to both Putonghua (Standard Mandarin) or Cantonese dialect, with no clear specification made. This ambiguous approach later became the popular term "biliteracy and trilingual" promoted by the Hong Kong SAR Government, with a long-term goal of adopting Putonghua as the administrative, legislative, jurisdictional and educational language, Cantonese dialect as marketing, television and family language, and English as business language.

3. Problems of the "biliteracy and trilingual" policy

The "biliteracy and trilingual" policy was first proposed by the former Chief Executive of the Hong Kong SAR, Mr Tung Chee-hwa, in his 1997 Policy Address, which called for "all secondary school graduates to be able to write fluently in both Chinese and English, and to communicate with others confidently in Cantonese, English and Putonghua" [Li and Leung, 2020].

There have been two major achievements in last two decades since the implementation of the policy [Shi and Zhuo, 2015]. Firstly, the status of English in Hong Kong has remained basically unchanged, with Hong Kong people still valuing their English proficiency; and secondly, the Putonghua ability of the younger generation has been improved. However, the relationship between Cantonese dialect and Putonghua has increasingly become a focus of controversy over the "biliteracy and trilingual" expression in the policy.

Under the 150-year British rule, Hong Kong has long been out of step with the mainstream culture of the mainland, and the people of Hong Kong are accustomed to calling their mother tongue (i.e., Cantonese dialect) "中文 (literally, Chinese written language)", which corresponds to the term "英文 (literally, English written language)". On the other hand, while the rapid development of the vernacular language (白话文) in the mainland since 1919 has made the difference between Chinese written language and spoken language increasingly minute, the corresponding process in Hong Kong has been much slower, which has resulted in the separation of "语 (spoken Chinese)" and the "文 (written Chinese)" in Hong Kong.

Based on the theory of diglossia proposed by Ferguson [1959] and Fishman [1980], Su [2010] constructed a multi-layered diglossia system to describe the language situation in Hong Kong (Putonghua abbreviated as PTH):

H	L						
English	Chinese						
	H			L			
	Standard Chinese (PTH)			Chinese dialects			
	H		L	H			L
	written PTH		spoken PTH	Cantonese dialect			dialects other than Cantonese
	H	L			H	L	
	Standard written PTH	Cantonese-influenced written PTH		written Cantonese	spoken Cantonese		
					formal	informal	

The linguistic landscape depicted by the graph above is further complicated by two factors:

1) Due to the "biliteracy and trilingual" expression ambiguity term in the Basic Law and the implementation of "biliteracy and trilingual" policy, many Hong Kong people, especially young people, regard the Cantonese dialect as a language. Following this logic, the relationship between the Cantonese dialect and Putonghua will no longer be "diglossia", but "bilingual", and the linguistic landscape illustrated above will be completely rewritten.

2) The above illustration only takes into account the language but not the characters. As well known, traditional Chinese characters are mainly used in Hong Kong, while simplified Chinese characters are mainly used in the mainland. Differences between the two kinds of characters are not very significant, and both can be used to record any variations of spoken Chinese (both Putonghua and Cantonese dialect), but in Hong Kong the differences can often be magnified by certain groups, with simplified Chinese characters being the target of attack.

4. Minor language-related incidents in the last decade

Let us briefly review the observations and studies in the reports *Language Situation in China* (hence abbreviated as LSC), edited by the National Institute of Chinese Language Matters and Social Development at Wuhan University, on language issues in Hong Kong, especially on minor language-related incidents that may not count as large-scale conflicts.

4.1 "Supporting Cantonese movement" in 2010

The so called "supporting Cantonese movement" is a series of events took place in Guangzhou from June to August 2010, only a few months before 2010 Asian Games. The incident began with a misunderstanding that the government wanted to switch all of previous Cantonese dialect programmes to Putonghua on Guangzhou's main television channel. Protests began on Weibo (the biggest microblogging platform in China) in June, and several small-scale marches took place on the streets of Guangzhou in July and August, which were eventually ended when the government stepped in to dispel the rumours.

Although this incident took place in Guangzhou, it was strongly influenced by certain groups in Hong Kong, and our report has made a very clear judgement on that:

Certain foreign, Hong Kong and Taiwan media took the opportunity to fuel the fire… Many newspapers in Hong Kong, such as the Apple Daily and Ming Pao, exaggerated the facts, claiming that "10,000 people in Guangzhou went to the streets to support Cantonese"; some netizens in Guangdong and Hong Kong made an agreement to "launch a movement in support of Cantonese", and instigated to hold a "historic Hong Kong-Guangdong collaboration to support Cantonese". (LSC, Special Report, 2010, No.1, written by Zhao et al.)

4.2 "Chinese Language Festival" incident at Hong Kong Polytechnic University in 2012

At the end of November 2012, Hong Kong Polytechnic University and Hong Kong Confucius Institute co-organised a "Chinese Language Festival" for overseas students. Due to the use of simplified Chinese characters, the event was immediately criticised and attacked on Facebook, Google+ and some local forums in Hong Kong. Some even pointed their fingers directly at the Central Government and made extremely radical and inflammatory remarks, such as the infiltration of the Communist Party, the promotion of "disabled characters" (which is an insulting name they gave to the simplified Chinese characters), and so on.

Our report conducted an in-depth analysis on the motives of the incident, pointing out that it was not a purely language incident, but a political one, in which some people with political motives made use of the language as a political tool to alienate the relationship between Hong Kong and the mainland, so as to deliberately create hostility between Hong Kong identity and the Chinese identity, by exaggerating the differences between the two types of characters. Our report has also made visionary suggestions, including:

Exchanges between young people in Hong Kong and the Mainland should be promoted comprehensively, and efforts should be made to expand the scale of enrolment of Hong Kong students in the mainland. There is an urgent need to enhance young people's understanding of

the motherland and identification with the motherland, both from the perspective of solving current problems (among those who participated in this incident, a large proportion were young people) and from the perspective of a long-term solution. (LSC, Special Report, 2012, No.2, written by Li).

4.3 Intensive oppositions to simplified characters from 2015 to 2016

Between 2015 and 2016, simplified Chinese characters were again confronted with intensive oppositions in Hong Kong, with the following major incidents (from LSC, Special Report, 2016, No.1, written by Wang & Hu):

1) At the end of November 2015, Hong Kong Polytechnic University once again engaged in a fierce debate on the issue of traditional and simplified Chinese characters, and some Hong Kong students posted separatist slogans saying "HK IS NOT CHINA", which ignited widespread support in universities in Hong Kong and on social networks. In the following two months, there was a steep increase of "Hong Kong independence" speech on social media, reaching a peak of the past two years.

2) In December 2015, the SAR Education Bureau mentioned in a document that "students should be able to read and write simplified Chinese characters", which triggered speculations among some Hong Kong media and radical political organisations, which claimed that this was "political tactic" for "brainwashing" and "in the name of widening the scope of learning, it is actually Mainlandisation". The Education Bureau was forced to make several clarifications under pressure, and in February 2016, radical organisations involved in the dispute over simplified characters staged a premeditated "Mongkok riot".

3) In February 2016, the Student Union of Hong Kong Baptist University issued an open letter complaining about the use of simplified Chinese characters in a canteen notice, and the letter included insulting and pan-political remarks such as "paying attention to who is in charge in Hong Kong", "bowing down and pandering to the mainland", "Mainland students are welcome to withdraw from the union and the university" and "being discriminated everywhere", which has once again aroused fierce controversies.

4) In February 2016, the Hong Kong television channel TVB received nearly ten thousand complaints in one day over the use of simplified Chinese subtitles in its news reports, and some "localist" groups rallied to protest, and some media fueled the protests by labelling TVB as "communists".

5) In March 2016, the Secretary for Education of Hong Kong was besieged by more than 100 protesters when attending a secondary school celebration ceremony. Some of the protesters wore T-

shirts with the slogan "Hot-blooded Citizen" and carried banners with the slogan "Defend Traditional Chinese Characters".

4.4 The occupation incident of Baptist University in 2018

In January 2018, more than 10 students from Hong Kong Baptist University occupied the university's language centre for eight hours and insulted teachers there with offensive language after failing to pass the Putonghua examination. This was followed by a half-month-long standoff between the university and the students, during which a march of more than 200 people also took place on the campus (LSC, 2018, No.1, written by Chen & Guo).

The incidents selected above all include both online and offline settings. Besides, there were also a large number of incidents that took place only online, which will not be further elaborated. It is evident that participants in these incidents were mostly young people, especially university students, who had received their school education after the return of Hong Kong in 1997, and some of them were even born after 1997. However, their attitudes towards the mainland were not only distanced, but also confrontational and hostile. Before the outbreak of large-scale violent riots in 2019, language was turned into a tool to express their emotions.

5. Methods and difficulties in monitoring minor incidents

Above we have reviewed some of the language-related incidents that took place before the 2019 violent riots in Hong Kong. As an old Chinese saying goes, "it takes more than one day for three feet of ice to freeze". Large-scale social riots, in addition to the soil from which they arose, needed to ferment and brew for a period of time, and the incidents above played an important role in this process. We certainly do not consider that problems in Hong Kong are merely language problems, but language and language-related incidents can serve as an important window for minoring social trends in Hong Kong.

In our monitoring, social media is undoubtedly the most essential source. Although we do use a number of automated crawling softwares, they are not always as effective as they could be due to legal and technical constraints, so in practice manual analyses remain the most important method, mainly including:

1) Regular monitoring of the top hits in social media;

2) Collecting and organising hot topics and their comments;

3) Analysing the nature of the incident, etc.

During the process we also encounter difficulties. Similar to other languages are the legal and technical problems mentioned above. As scholars, we can only see the front-end data like any other

user, and cannot access the back-end data which contains more information, including user attributes which are crucial for relevant analyses, that's why in many circumstances it is difficult for us to make very accurate profiles. In addition, there are problems with automated crawlers too, such as capturing large amounts of invalid data, or being blocked if used too often.

We also face problems unique to the Chinese language. For example, Chinese netizens will take advantage of Chinese characters to bypass cyber-regulations through using homophones, character variants, similar shape characters, and even splitting-up character. Furthermore, there are also euphemisms relating to politics in Chinese social media, making it difficult for outsiders to understand, all of which add to the difficulty of information processing.

6. Conclusion

With the increasing degree of virtualisation of human society, the importance of language prognosis based on cyberspace is beyond doubt. Meanwhile, due to its virtual nature, language prognosis in cyberspace also faces numerous challenges that are quite different from those in real world. This calls for more interdisciplinary co-operations and government commitments. We are glad to see that language prognosis could play a greater role in a wider arena.

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Примечание

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