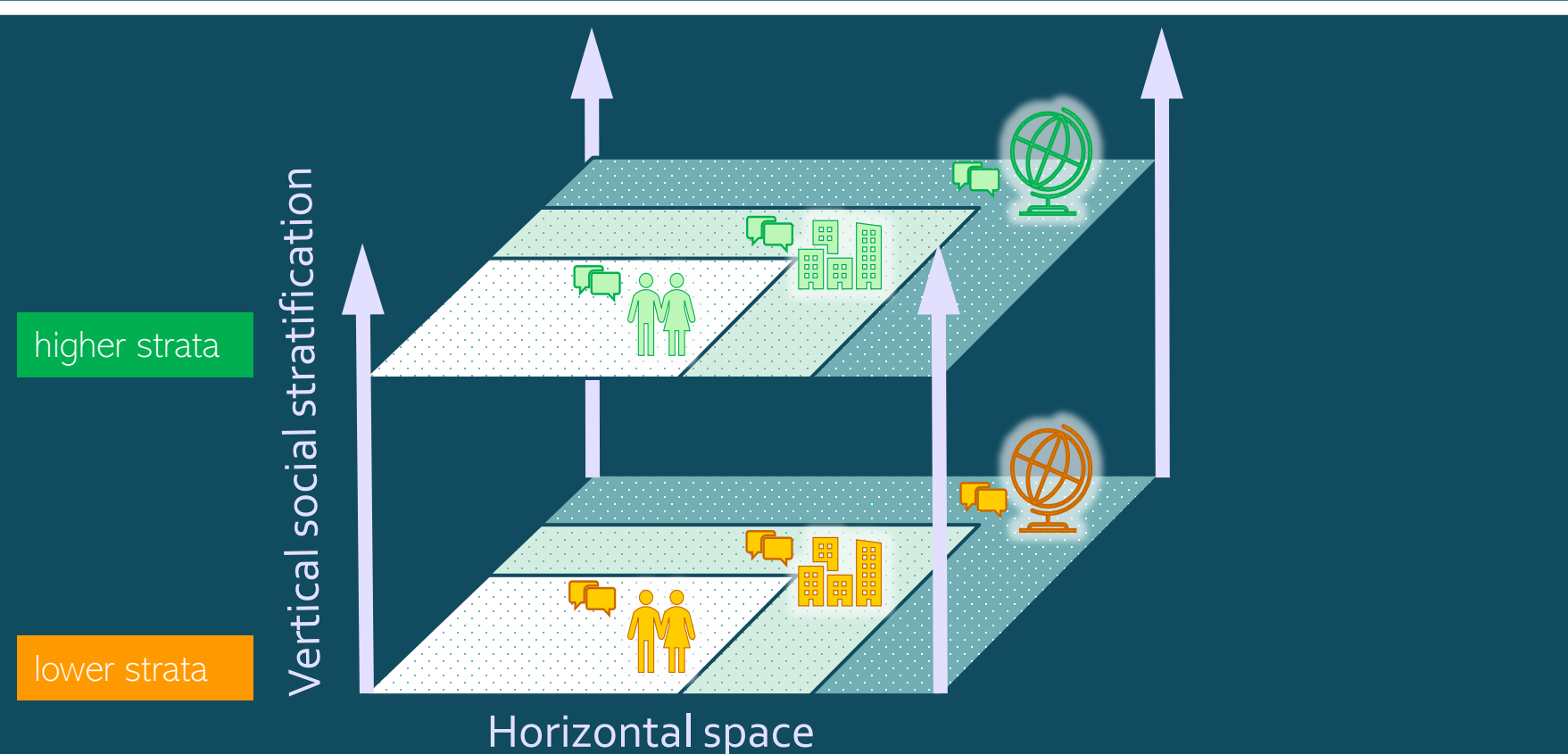


INTRODUCTION

The study of World Englishes is concerned with identifying and analyzing English varieties in relation to sociocultural contexts. It asserts that there are local varieties of Englishes, used in local ways, for local purposes. English is an official language in postcolonial Hong Kong. The version implemented in schools and workplaces is exonormative. However, a small, yet insightful collection of research by Lin (2008, 2009, 2014) reveals how HK hip-hop musicians use English in creative ways to index local identity and to translocalize hip-hop. This review uses the Sociolinguistics of Mobility as a theoretical framework to situate Lin's findings within the broader sociocultural context, thereby showcasing how Lin's findings help debunk existing, problematic assumptions about English in HK.

BACKGROUND

Blommaert's (2010) Sociolinguistics of Mobility



Spatiotemporal Frames, a.k.a. Scales

Metaphor used in social sciences. Sociolinguistic phenomena can be viewed on macro, micro, and intermediary scales. Traditional metaphor views language resources as distributed & flowing across horizontal space. Blommaert adds a vertical direction. Language resources are distributed across social strata, leading to social inequality.



Value

Language resources can be useful, emblematic, and marketable



Mobility

1. Language resources can be re-distributed
2. Language resources assist humans' vertical and horizontal movement

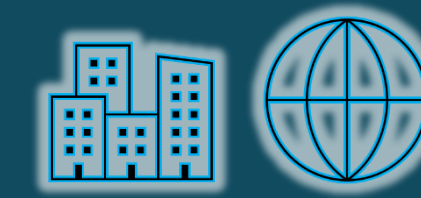


Indexicality

Language resources invoke social images

Sociolinguistic Landscape

Chinese & English = Official languages
Many other unofficial languages
Cantonese = Unmarked default of intranational communication
English = Language of:



Local & international communication



Socioeconomic mobility

Locals' sociolinguistic orientations towards English are generally positive, but some scholars and locals:

- ✗ view English code-switching as disassociation from Chinese identity, asserting the codes should be separate (Chen, 2006);
- ✗ see Cantonese as the sole marker of vernacular identity (Chik, 2010);
- ✗ exoticize HK's 'East meets West' hybridity (O'Connor, 2010)

HK does not meet the criteria for a New Variety of English... yet.

RESULTS

Finding 1: Value is spatiotemporally dependent

1993: Lazy Mutha Fucka (LMF)

- Used Cantonese & English profanity
- Themes: Working class life, youth culture, politics, anti-establishmentarianism
- 1990s were a time of poor economy and sociopolitical unrest
- Disbanded in 2003 facing controversy

2003: FAMA

- Uses Cantonese, Mandarin, & English; makes fun rhymes; does not swear
- Themes: middle-class, school, media
- 2000s were relatively peaceful and prosperous
- Active

2008: 24Herbs

- Diverse ethnic backgrounds & styles
- Uses Cantonese & English with some profanity
- Even alternates between whole English and Cantonese stanzas
- Active

Finding 2: English is mobile enough to facilitate import, translocalization, and export

English gave MC Yan's (LMF main vocalist) access to hip-hop culture and global politics, inspiring:



A life goal of generating **sociopolitical consciousness**



Wordplay using Cantonese innuendos in **political commentary**



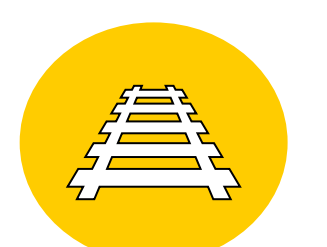
Strategic swearing to index working class and jar upper class



Adaptation of **musical & prosodic** parameters to Cantonese



Semantic inversion of *Yellow Peril* to index solidarity



U-shaped long-term strategy: **Global success** → HK clout

Finding 3: English helps index local identity

FAMA uses Mandarin, Cantonese, and English to facilitate rhymes, make discourse markers, and make multilingual wordplay. This **engages the local youth**, who are well-equipped to understand it all.

Examples:

- Rhyme: 街邊 'gai-bin' (street) / 開心 'kai-xin' (happy)
- Stage name: 'MC C-Gwan'
 - Based on real name = 'Chehng Si-gwan'
 - Uses an HK anonymous address term *gwan*, as in 'Mr C' or 'John Doe'
- Pun: 'A-B-C-Gwan-E-F-G'

24 Herbs uses heteroglossia to:

- ✓ Demonstrate default mode of communication
- ✓ Relate to audience of varied socioeconomic classes
- ✓ Problematize the monoglossic marker ideal
- ✓ Teach a new structure of feeling reflecting banal hybridity: **'HK society is heterogenous and therefore is indexed better by heteroglossia'**

Example:

*They ask a polite English question – "Do you know me?"
Then rap repeatedly faster until it becomes:
"Diuneihloumei!" – very rude in Cantonese slang.*

CONCLUSION

Lin shows that English is:

- Integral to local identity
 - Manipulated as a free linguistic resource
 - Extended in the creative domain of hip-hop
 - Useful for intra- and inter-national purposes
- This may help debunk some problematic ideas and provide evidence for future indigenization.

Both HK hip-hop and its research are young, yet the former evolves quickly. The recent activity of HK hip-hop musicians during a period of political unrest and protest may bear insights for sociolinguistic research. This may merit careful and sensitive study of the evolution of HK hip-hop language practices within their changing sociopolitical context.

I propose that future researchers:

- Implement Blommaert's paradigm as a theoretical framework to connect micro-meso-macro language phenomena
- Obtain diachronic and quantitative data (e.g. lyrical feature rates)
- Study a lineup of greater ethnic diversity
- Monitor the conditions for indigenization

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