

The discourse and attitudes of English language teachers in Hong Kong

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ABSTRACT: This paper suggests that Hong Kong English, insofar as it varies from Standard English, has not achieved wide acceptance in the community. The paper approaches this by investigating the attitudes of Hong Kong's English language teachers. Over a thousand messages on language issues to a computer network for English teachers were analysed, in terms of their discourse and the sources of authority the teachers referred to in support of their views on correctness or acceptability.¹ The sources regarded as most authoritative were dictionaries and grammar or usage books from native speaking countries such as Britain. Hong Kong sources such as textbooks and the media were treated with more caution, and sometimes criticised. The model of English the teachers adopted was clearly exonormative. The term Hong Kong English did not occur anywhere in the 1,234 messages, and no deviations from a native speaker norm were referred to favourably. The paper concludes that these attitudes, similar to those in the business community, will constrain the use of Hong Kong English for formal communication.

THE LANGUAGE SITUATION IN HONG KONG

In Hong Kong, approximately 96% of the population is Chinese.² According to a sociolinguistic survey conducted in 1993, 81.6% of the population spoke Cantonese as their mother tongue and 91.9% could speak Cantonese. Only 1.3% were native speakers of English (see Bacon-Shone and Bolton, 1998: 73, 75). Since then, Cantonese has spread even wider. According to the 1996 By-Census, 88.7% of the population indicated that Cantonese is their usual spoken language, and 3.1% indicated English.

For social communication between Cantonese speakers and speakers of other Chinese dialects, for example, immigrants from the People's Republic of China (PRC) mainland, Cantonese is the lingua franca. However, for formal communication with government officials in the PRC, especially since 1997, as well as for formal events at national level in Hong Kong, Putonghua is often the lingua franca. For business communication, the lingua franca is whichever language is shared by both parties, Cantonese or Putonghua. This is unlike the situation in Malaysia, Singapore or India, where English is the main lingua franca between different ethnic and linguistic groups.

On the other hand, the government's policy is that Hong Kong people should become trilingual in spoken Cantonese, Putonghua and English and biliterate in written Chinese and English. The bilingual population has increased considerably, mainly through the introduction of mass education in the seventies. According to Bacon-Shone and Bolton (1998: 76), the percentage of the population who reported that they knew English quite well, well and very well rose from 6.6% in 1983 to 33.7% in 1993, and to 38.1% in 1996 (see Bolton, this issue). There is more and more demand for knowledge of other languages, especially English, in the employment sector. English is actually used for much written communication among Cantonese speakers, for example, business letters, internal memos

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and email, even though they would use Cantonese for oral communication (see So's 1998 survey, pp. 163–4). The importation of Filipinas into the labour market as domestic helpers has also created a need to use English as the lingua franca at home.

In Malaysia and Singapore, the need to use English as the lingua franca for multi-ethnic communication led to the emergence of distinctive varieties of English which are different from Standard English in aspects of pronunciation, lexicon and grammar. The local variety is often the preferred choice in informal conversation, even for speakers who are highly proficient in Standard English, as a sign of solidarity and camaraderie (see Crismore *et al.*, 1996).

In Hong Kong, however, although there are identifiable local features of English pronunciation and lexis, such a variety of English does not seem to be accepted by the community. Luke and Richards (1982: 55–6) observed that 'there is no such thing . . . as "Hong Kong English". . . . There is no equivalent of the mesolectal or basilectal speech styles found, for example, in Singapore . . . since there is no equivalent range of English speech varieties in regular use by Hong Kong Chinese.' They pointed out that there was 'no societal need nor opportunity for the development of a stable Cantonese variety of spoken English' despite the fact that Hong Kong Chinese speakers of English did display certain distinctive features. We would suggest that with the dramatic increase in the bilingual population since the early eighties and the more widespread use of English at work and even at home, Hong Kong English has developed to some extent since Luke and Richards were writing in the early 1980s. However, there has been little change in societal attitudes to Hong Kong English.

Hong Kong falls within what Kachru refers to as Outer Circle countries, many of which were British colonies, in which British English or native-speaker standard was used (Kachru, 1985). During the days of colonial rule, it was the exonormative model that was referred to when making judgements about standards in both education and business communication, the exonormative model being either British English or American English. Deviations from these models were described as indicative of the falling standards of English, which was, and still is, one of the major concerns of the business community and the government. In the late eighties and early nineties, some of the biggest and most well-known business enterprises, including the then Hong Kong Telecom³ and Hongkong Bank, joined hands to launch the Language Campaign in an effort to arrest the falling standards. Native-speaker English teachers were brought in from 1987 to provide models of English to secondary school students.

After the change of sovereignty in 1997, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) government revived the scheme to bring in native-speaker English teachers, referred to as the NET scheme, following the implementation of mother-tongue education in nearly three-quarters of the secondary schools. The scheme is now being extended to primary schools. Language benchmarks are also being set for English language teachers in schools and the government has stipulated that starting from September 2000, all graduating student-teachers will be required to sit English language benchmark tests and practising English teachers will be given a period of five years to meet the English language benchmarks. Recently, the government launched an 'English in the Workplace' campaign and employees in the business sector were given incentives to take overseas examinations for employees, such as those run by UCLES (University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate) and Pitman. The examination results will be used by employers for reference in recruitment.

We can see from the above account that in the business and government sectors, the model of English has always been exonormative. Any deviations from the model have been considered errors. The term 'Chinglish' is a derogatory term which refers to English sentences containing features of Chinese syntax or lexical items which are directly translated from Chinese. Some of these features can also be found in Singapore English, Malaysian English and even Brunei English, such as the use of 'would' to indicate futurity. However, while they are taken as features of the local variety of English in the respective countries, they are frowned upon by the Hong Kong community as 'errors'.

Giles (1998) pointed out that the attitudes that people hold towards particular language varieties and the social meaning attached to them influence how motivated they are in learning them. Lowenberg (1990: 124) maintained that the acceptance or rejection of norms of standard English 'frequently depends on attitudinal variables, particularly on the relative sociolinguistic status of the sources of an innovation'. Crismore *et al.* (1996) argue that perceptions and language attitudes play an important part in the growth and decline of language variations in a society. Bamgboṣe (1998) in arguing for the legitimacy of each variety having its own norms, outlined a number of factors which contribute to establishing the status of a linguistic innovation. Among these factors, according to him, 'acceptability is the ultimate test of admission of an innovation' (p. 4) without which all innovations will be labelled errors. Acceptability has to do with the attitude of the users and non-users towards these innovations.

In Hong Kong, there are a number of studies conducted on language attitudes (see for example, Pierson *et al.*, 1980; Pennington and Yue, 1994; Axler *et al.*, 1998). However, very few have been conducted on the language attitudes of teachers (see for exception Hirvela and Law, 1991). As Crismore *et al.* (1996) point out, teachers' language attitudes are important because they influence the attitudes of their students. Moreover, most of these studies, like most attitudinal studies conducted elsewhere in the world, used questionnaire surveys. Very few have actually analysed language attitudes as revealed in the discourse that people engage in.

This paper attempts to fill the gap in the language attitudes research literature by investigating the attitudes of English language teachers in Hong Kong as exhibited either implicitly or explicitly in the way they talk about English in electronic messages over a period of two years. The discourses of English teachers who are native speakers and non-native speakers of English were analysed. The results of the analysis show that an exonormative model of English is clearly what both non-native speaker and native speaker English teachers defer to.

METHODOLOGY

Data for this study consisted of more than a thousand language-related messages posted over a two-year period on an internet-based computer network for English language teachers across Hong Kong. The network, known as *TeleNex*, was created by the Teachers of English Language Education Centre (TELEC) in the Department of Curriculum Studies at the University of Hong Kong. The messaging component of this network consists of a number of conference corners on various topics. Two of the main corners are the *Teaching Ideas Corner* and the *Language Corner*. The former gives teachers a chance to ask questions and share ideas on the teaching of English, while the latter gives them the opportunity to ask and answer questions on grammar, vocabulary and other aspects of

English which are important to their teaching. Participating in the discussions in these corners are native and non-native speaker teachers of English, as well as TELEC staff who specialise in English language teaching and English linguistics.

In the two-year period from October 1997 to October 1999, a total of 1,234 messages were sent to the *TeleNex Language Corner*. Of these messages, 850 were from Hong Kong teachers and 384 from TELEC staff. Six of the eight TELEC staff sending messages were native speakers of English (NS). Of the 102 teachers sending messages, a large majority, 85, were non-native speakers of English (NNS), while 17 were native speakers.

DATA ANALYSIS

All 1,234 messages were searched for the term 'Hong Kong English'. It did not occur at all. This would seem to indicate that the concept of Hong Kong English as a legitimate variety is not a strong one amongst teachers of English in Hong Kong, NNS or NS, nor amongst TELEC staff. The term 'Chinglish', however, was found in two messages but it was used to refer to the students' errors.

Queries and responses

Messages were initially categorised as being Queries (asking a question) or Responses (answering a question) or Non-relevant (acknowledgements, thanks, apologies, news, etc). Some Responses also contained queries, but as long as the message contained some response to another query, it was categorised as a Response.

The NNS teachers sent 698 messages, including 307 queries and 313 responses, while the NS teachers sent 152 messages, including 43 queries and 97 responses (see Table 1). It was found that NS teachers sent more than twice as many responses as queries (97 vs. 43) while NNS teachers sent a similar number of responses as queries (313 vs. 307). As would be expected, TELEC staff mainly sent responses (303 vs. 13).

Table 1. Queries and responses sent by participants in *TeleNex*

	NNS teachers	NS teachers	TELEC staff	Total
Queries	307	43	13	363
Responses	313	97	303	713
Non-relevant*	78	12	68	158
No of messages	698	152	384	1,234

*acknowledgements, thanks, apologies, news, etc.

Sources of authority

We started off with no preconceived ideas of how the messages should be analysed. As we went through the messages, we noticed that when expressing their views, and even when they were posing questions, teachers tended to cite certain sources to support their views or to provide the basis for their questions. This suggests that teachers defer to these sources as the authority on what should be considered acceptable and not acceptable. Such attitudes were more prevalent in NNS teachers' discourses than those of the NS teachers. We

therefore compiled a list of sources that were cited in all messages. Once the list was compiled, we went over the data again and investigated how frequently each source was referred to and by whom. Since some messages were found to give more than one source of authority (e.g. citing native-speaker usage and then a grammar book), we decided that it would be more valid to use the number of times that the sources were cited as supporting evidence, rather than the number of messages.

TELEC STAFF'S DISCOURSE

Messages from TELEC staff were not included in the analyses of attitude as they could be seen as reflecting views of the TELEC project rather than those of teachers in schools. Nonetheless, the sources of authority they cited are of interest because of the influence their messages have on teachers using the network.

Staff of TELEC, in responding to questions, made many references to grammar books and dictionaries (13.5%), as well as to the *TeleNex* grammar database (15.8%). Most of all, however, they referred to the 50 million word corpus *Bank of English* to which they have access, and a smaller in-house corpus of 5 million words (33.6% of responses). These NS corpora were used to give authority to their suggestions of 'naturalness' or grammatical or lexical acceptability, as well as to give new insights:

Message 1/138

I agree with Matthew⁴ that *spoonfuls* sounds more natural – *spoonsful* is traditionally the 'correct' form, but it strikes me as horribly pedantic. I had a look in the *Bank of English* and didn't find even one instance of *spoonsful* in 50 million words, so that is a good indication.

Message 2/063

One thing that neither Swan nor any of the dictionaries I checked revealed was the strikingly high number of 'measurement' words collocating with 'large'. Here's a quick sample from our 5 million word corpus:

this on a large **scale**, the material requirements are so st
to a very large **extent**, a subjective thing, people who can
o quite a large **degree**, the time when they prepare their n
ing for a large **increase** in the public sector (all talking

NON-NATIVE SPEAKER ENGLISH TEACHERS' DISCOURSE

Among the 698 messages sent by NNS English teachers, we identified 255 messages in which language attitudes were either explicitly or implicitly expressed when teachers discussed acceptability, corrections and differences between various linguistic forms. We then conducted a detailed analysis of these 255 messages and found that nearly half of them (121 messages) time and again referred to certain sources of authority in the teachers' discussions. The other half (134 messages) were based on the teachers' own judgement.

Let us take one message as an example. In responding to a question from another teacher about whether there is such a word as 'shopaholic', an NNS student teacher said, 'I have heard this word used by native speakers, so it must be okay' (Message 3/12).⁵ In this message, the deference to NS as a source of authority is explicit. Let us take another example. One of the NNS English teachers asked a question on whether one should say 'cheaper' or 'more cheap', and in a subsequent message, she explained why she posted this question.

Message 4/55

. . . *I was taught* to use 'cheaper' instead of 'more cheap' when I was a student. I think it is absolutely correct. What confuses me is that English is always changing and I have heard of *natives speaking* 'more cheap' instead of 'cheaper'. That's why I would like to find out if the former is widely accepted now and to know what we teachers should do if it is really the case.

In the above message, we can see that there is implicit deference to the NNS English teacher's former teacher as well as to NS usage as sources of authority. It is the conflicting statements that this teacher received from these two sources that led to her turning to *TeleNex* as a third source of authority.

In these messages, there were altogether 300 references made to various sources of authority. Table 2 shows the categories of references made by NNS and NS English teachers. We can see from Table 2 that the highest frequency of reference by NNS teachers is dictionaries (51 references) followed by books about usage and grammar books (39). Reference to native speakers, the teachers' own colleagues and the media were about the same but they trailed far behind dictionaries and grammar/usage books as sources of authority. Moreover, their attitudes towards these sources were not as unanimous as the first two. In the rest of this section, we shall analyse each of these sources, focusing on the ones with higher frequencies of reference.

Table 2. Authorities cited by NNS and NS teachers (N = 255 and 93 messages respectively)

Authority cited	NNS		NS	
	No. of references	%	No. of references	%
Self (own knowledge or judgement)	134	44.7%	44	38.9%
Dictionaries	51	17.0%	7	6.2%
Grammar or usage books	39	13.0%	15	13.3%
Media	14	4.7%	1	0.9%
Native speakers	13	4.3%	21	18.6%
Colleagues	13	4.3%	0	0.0%
Own teacher	9	3.0%	7	6.2%
Textbooks	7	2.3%	3	2.7%
Hong Kong Examinations Authority	7	2.3%	2	1.8%
Corpus	1	0.3%	10	8.8%
Others	12	4.0%	3	2.7%
Total	300	100.0%	113	100.0%

Dictionaries

There were 51 references made to dictionaries. In all cases, the dictionary was looked upon as a source of authority. There were 36 instances where the dictionary was cited as the voice of authority or as supporting the statements NNS teachers made about the language form or use in question. For example, the following message is from an NNS teacher in a series of discussions about the grammatical correctness of 'she need know':

Message 5/416

I was also shocked when I saw the sentence 'she need know' *but since the example is given in a prestigious dictionary*, I can't just ignore it.

Another example is from an NNS teacher, in response to a question asking whether 'dawn' could be used as a verb, who wrote as follows, 'Maybe it's not common to use "dawn" as a verb; *but the dictionary says . . .*'. He then quoted the dictionary entry which showed that 'dawn' could be used as a verb, as in 'The morning dawned fresh and clear after the storm' (Longman Interactive English Dictionary) (Message 6/1029).

Some teachers cited the dictionary in support of their responses to other teachers' questions. For example, in response to a question about the use of 'as well as', an NNS English teacher wrote,

Message 7/219

I've checked the *Collins Cobuild Dictionary*, and it says,

'... if you refer to a second thing AS WELL AS a first thing, you refer to the second thing in addition to the first.'

...

Therefore, though AS WELL AS is a preposition, it does not mean that it has to be followed by a gerund, but by noun or adjective as well.

In message 7, the teacher prefaced her own response with a citation from the dictionary. This kind of sequencing is commonly found in messages where the dictionary was cited as supporting evidence: it is almost as if the teacher felt that citation from the dictionary would give more weight to his/her response. There were also cases where the teacher explicitly stated that they actually checked their own understanding with the dictionary before responding. For example, in response to a teacher's question about whether 'in the sale' or 'on sale' should be used, an NNS teacher wrote, 'I've also got the impression that "on sale" should be used. Then, I checked from the dictionary and found that it's correct' (Message 8/767).

Of the other 15 messages, 7 were about information not found in the dictionary, 5 sought further clarification on definitions that teachers found in the dictionary and 3 found conflicting evidence in dictionaries or textbooks. What is interesting is that in all of these messages, there was not a single instance in which the NNS teacher expressed any doubts about the authority of the dictionary.

The dictionary was treated as more authoritative than the native speaker of English. Take the following message for example.

Message 9/46

When I was in primary school, I was taught to use 'sporty' to describe people. Recently I've heard a native speaker use 'sportive' to describe a kid. *I checked the dictionary*, but 'sportive' isn't in it. I wonder if anyone can help?

In the above message, there were conflicting messages between what the NNS teacher's former teacher said and what the NS said. The NNS teacher therefore consulted the dictionary for a verdict. Although she failed to get the answer from the dictionary, the message shows that the NNS teacher did turn to the dictionary for a verdict in the first instance and failing that she turned to *TeleNex* as an alternative source of authority.

Grammar and usage books

There were 39 references to grammar and usage books. Among them, 33 references cited usage and grammar books as sources of authority or as supporting evidence. The books referred to were mostly British and the books with the highest number of references were *Collins Cobuild Grammar* and Swan's *Practical English Usage*. Very often, in response to a teacher's question, an NNS teacher would either refer the teacher to a specific grammar or usage book, or simply quote what it said without any personal comments.

When the statements made by these sources contradicted what the teacher believed in, they were taken as voices of authority. For example, in response to a teacher's question about the difference between 'one another' and 'each other', an NNS teacher wrote:

Message 10/78

Traditional wisdom says 'each other' is used for two people or things while 'one another' for three. However, grammarian Michael Swan pointed out in his book 'Practical English Usage' that this is not the case. He said that there is little or no difference in meaning between the two expressions. . . .

The NNS teacher who wrote this message signed off after citing Michael Swan. The implication is that he took what Michael Swan said as the voice of authority.

There were 5 references in which the teacher sought clarification about statements made in grammar and usage books. Similar to their attitudes towards dictionaries, they simply accepted the statements made as correct. For example,

Message 11/271

What is the major difference between 'if I were a lion' and 'if I was a lion?' Some grammar books say that the former one is more formal. Which one is more commonly used?

The question posed by the teacher implied that she accepted what 'some grammar books' said about the former being more formal.

Native speakers of English

There were 13 references to native speakers of English. The majority of them either explicitly or implicitly accepted the NS as a source of authority (11 references). However, we can see a cline in terms of teachers' deference to NS as a source of authority. At one extreme, there is absolute deference to the NS as the norm. For example, Message 1 cited above. There is also a reference to NS English as 'natural', as in Message 12 below.

Message 12/979

Could you give me some comments on the following answers? Which answers are both grammatically correct and belong to *natural language*, i.e. *commonly used by native speakers* in contexts?

There are cases in which the NNS teachers' own teachers were treated as an equal source of authority as the NS, like Message 4 cited above. This is followed by teachers who felt that what NSs said should not be taken as necessarily grammatical, but who would take it as acceptable, as in the following message which responds to Message 4 above.

Message 13/56

I absolutely agree that 'cheaper' is grammatical. But I just wonder if 'more cheap' is acceptable or not? And if yes, to what extent? I want to quote another e.g. 'More easy'. I have heard *many native speakers* saying it. *It does not mean that it is grammatical automatically*. But I just want to draw

attention to the dynamics of English. I think it is not a matter of grammaticality but *a matter of acceptability*.

However, there are two messages where teachers cast doubt on what NSs said. For example,

Message 14/166

I wanna know which of the following is 'more' correct:

a) but enough

b) but sufficient

The NET⁶ of my school insisted that they natives speakers (do) not say 'but enough', yet she did not explain why.

Is she correct? I doubt.

Message 15/488

Please advise if the following sentences mean the same. One of my colleagues, (*herself a native speaker!*) said so.

1. He put his customer in a special barbers chair.

2. He put his customer in a special barber's chair.

Sentence 1 appears on the oral exam paper which was set by her.

Initially, I and some teachers thought there should be an apostrophe, like sentence 2. Then she found an article in SCMP⁷ . . . which said apostrophe should be omitted even if it is talking about possession. She insisted that it was acceptable to add 's' to show either plurals and possession. We are quite confused. Please help.

In both Messages 14 and 15 above, the NNS teachers had doubts about what the NS teachers in their schools said. It is interesting to note that in both cases despite the fact that both NS teachers 'insisted' that they were correct, the NNS teachers did not take them as a source of authority. Yet, they did not take themselves as a source of authority either. Therefore, they turned to another source of authority, *TeleNex*.

Media

There were 14 references to the media, which includes local newspapers and television programmes and movies. Although there were 8 references which either explicitly cited or implicitly acknowledged the media as a source of authority, there were 4 references which actually questioned their authority. For example,

Message 16/540

This Sunday, I watched a RTHK⁸ TV program of which topic is about the difference between American English and British English. I found an interesting point and want to confirm whether it is true or not. . . .

In the above message, the NNS teacher did not take what the television programme said as correct and wished to seek the views of staff and users of *TeleNex*.

Textbooks

There were 7 references to textbooks in the messages. It is interesting that except for one, all references were questions regarding conflicting evidence that they found in different textbooks, or conflicting statements made in textbooks and by the NNS teachers' former teachers. One actually queried the authority of the textbook:

Message 17/810

... The reason for me to raise this question is that in (name of textbook in Hong Kong), *there's an expression saying 'Robot Teacher is a comedy film.'* which is rather odd to me. I discussed it with my colleagues but we have no answer.

In this message, the NNS teacher explicitly expressed her doubts about the acceptability of the expression. This kind of statement was not found in the NNS teachers' discourse when they referred to usage and grammar books or dictionaries. It is also noteworthy that none of the messages cited textbooks in Hong Kong as a source of authority when responding to teachers' questions.

Hong Kong Examinations Authority

There were only 7 references to the Hong Kong Examinations Authority. However, from the NNS teachers' discourse, we can see that it has a powerful influence on their attitudes towards the correctness and acceptability of linguistic forms and usage. For example, in response to a question about salutations and signing off in letter writing.

Message 18/224

I prefer to stick to "Yours faithfully" after "Dear Principal", "Dear Editor" and "Dear Customers". The *Exams Authority* remains quite strict with this rule and so does the business world.

Teachers are keen to stick to the rules laid down by the Hong Kong Examinations Authority because they do not want their students to be penalised in public examinations rather than because they defer to its expertise. The following message made this point explicit in response to a teacher's question about whether British or American English should be used.

Message 19/737

... Personally I would go for American English, since it sounds better to me and it's more popular, I think.

But unless the Exam Authority formally states that American English is also acceptable, I think we should stick to British for the benefit of our students.

NNS teachers' colleagues and former teachers

There were altogether 9 references to the NNS teachers' own former teachers and 13 references to their own colleagues. In the former, 4 out of 9 references explicitly cited what their former teachers said as a source of authority and the rest asked for clarification in the face of conflicting evidence from other sources without challenging their authority. For example,

Message 20/527

When I studied grammar in school, my teacher told me that the question tag with "I am" should be "am I not?" Some textbooks said that it should be "aren't I?" Which one is better?

By contrast, in the references made to their own colleagues, only one out of 13 cited what their colleagues said as a source of authority. The rest of the 12 references asked staff and users of *TeleNex* to comment on their views, implying a reluctance to accept their authority. For example,

Message 21/878

I was told by some of *my colleagues* that the following sentence is grammatically acceptable – “The boy is playing a ball.”

I always think that a preposition “with” should be used after “playing” when it is not followed by any sports/musical instruments.

If the sentence is acceptable, does it mean that another sentence like “The boy is playing a lantern” should also be accepted?

In the above message, the teacher is not so much challenging the authority of her colleagues, but rather she did not see their views as overriding her own.

Own knowledge or judgement

Messages where the NNS teachers simply expressed their own opinions without citing other sources of authority made up the bulk of the messages. There were altogether 134 messages of this kind. However, this does not mean that in these messages, the teachers took themselves as the source of authority. A close examination of the discourse showed the following features.

Firstly, many NNS teachers prefaced their responses by disclaiming expertise, e.g., ‘Although I don’t confess to be an expert on usage . . .’, ‘I am not an expert in . . ., but . . .’, ‘I’m not sure if I am right’, and the like; by hedging, such as ‘As far as I know’, ‘To the best of my knowledge’, ‘I am not sure if all of the above are acceptable’; by agreeing with other teachers, e.g., ‘I agree with so and so’; or by using tentative statements such as ‘I usually/tend to use . . .’.

Secondly, they tended to end their responses by explicitly disclaiming authority, e.g., ‘If I’m wrong, please let me know’, ‘Please comment if I am wrong’, ‘Please clarify (me) if I have made a mistake(s)!', ‘Am I right?', ‘Hope my interpretation is correct and useful to you’, and so on. Alternatively, they would invite other teachers to express their views, hence implying that they did not consider their own responses as definitive. Typical expressions are ‘What do other teachers think?', ‘Does anybody have any other ideas?', ‘Do you agree?', ‘There would be better suggestions from corner readers’ (meaning users who are logging into the Language Corner), and so on.

NATIVE-SPEAKER ENGLISH TEACHERS’ DISCOURSE

NS teachers sent twice as many responses as queries and this probably springs from their confidence, as native speakers, that their views are of value. For example,

Message 22/146

As a native speaker, I would here say/write . . . I’m not quite sure why, but I think that in this context . . .

We can see from the above message that the NS teacher responded to the query by highlighting the fact that he is a native speaker as a source of authority. However, as this message indicates, some of the NS teachers recognise that while knowing what is normal NS usage, they do not always know the grammatical explanation, hence the 43 queries they did send.

Of the 152 messages from NS teachers, 93 were found to express language attitudes either explicitly or implicitly. In these 93 messages, there were 113 references to certain sources of authority or to their own knowledge and judgement to support those views.

Results of the further analysis of these 93 messages and the references made are given in Table 2.

Native speaker usage

The most frequent source of authority that NS teachers gave (apart from their own knowledge or judgement) was native-speaker usage (18.6% vs. 4.3% by NNS teachers). NS teachers of English in Hong Kong clearly regard native-speaker use of a linguistic form as indicating acceptability. They quite often overtly identified themselves on the network as native speakers as if to stress that this is the source of their authority. For example

Message 23/015

This native speaker has also heard, and used, *shopaholic* – also *chocoholic*. There is a *book with a title* something like *Chocoholic's Handbook* on sale in the UK. Well, if it's in a BOOK TITLE it must be OK!!!!?

Although slightly tongue-in-cheek, the final sentence here indicates a view that publication in a NS country confers additional acceptability. NS teachers also showed a belief that non-use of a form by NSs indicates non-acceptability. The following is an example,

Message 24/429

No normal native speaker would EVER use a construction like this . . .

Sometimes the appeal to NS usage was less explicit, with terms like 'we'd say' when the message clearly gives a Western name for the author (rather than the anonymity that some teachers choose), implying that the 'we' refers to native speakers of English. This example is referring to tenses when talking about a photograph:

Message 25/134

If looking at a photo, for example, we'd say "Which girl is you?" . . . If asking about someone's childhood character, we'd say "What kind of a girl were you?"

Native-speaker corpus

References to the corpus of NS English further indicate the importance that NS teachers attach to NS usage as showing acceptability. While they did not have access to the corpus themselves, ten of the NS teacher messages (8.8%) asked if TELEC staff could search the corpus for them on a particular issue:

Message 26/274

I was wondering what the corpus says on beginning a sentence with AND. I was taught in Primary school preferably never to begin any sentence with AND. Does anyone have any opinions?

This is clearly a resource teachers have come to appreciate through the extensive use of the corpus by TELEC staff as a basis for their judgements about acceptability as well as for illustration. (Over a third of all TELEC staff responses referred to the corpus.)

Grammar and usage books

The next most frequently cited authority after NS usage was grammar and usage books (13.3% by NS teachers, similar to NNS teachers at 13.0%). As with NNS teachers, NS teachers referred most frequently to books by British authors, e.g. *Collins Cobuild Grammar* and Swan's *Practical English Usage*. The references were usually positive, indicating acceptance of their authority:

Message 27/825

The correct form is The examples are from Eastwood's *Oxford Guide to English Grammar*.

It is only when conflicting statements were made by authoritative NS publications that they turned to *TeleNex* for jurisdiction:

Message 28/681

Quirk and Greenbaum say that DO is an auxiliary verb . . . I guess there's no disputing the experts . . . is there? . . . (in) the first example DO does not act as an auxiliary verb according to the *Collins Cobuild Grammar*; but then what about Quirk et al? Please help . . .

Dictionaries

NS teachers referred to dictionaries less often than NNS teachers (6.2% vs. 17.0%). When they did, they were usually British dictionaries, such as the *Collins Cobuild Dictionary*, and the references were positive, accepting their explanations as authoritative.

Textbooks

When the publication is a local Hong Kong one, however, the picture changes. Two of the three references to textbooks (2.7%) were negative (the third was neutral). The following message referred to a query about a 'grammar' textbook produced in Hong Kong and designated for Form 1. The NS teacher clearly regards the book as a poor authority:

Message 29/1115

This is not helped by grammar books like the one you mention that give "There is much food in the refrigerator" as an example of correct English. This sentence is clearly unacceptable and therefore I would probably not use that particular grammar book with my students.

Own teachers

A smaller number of NS teachers referred to the way they were taught in school (6.2%). This was often in terms of trying to reconcile more recent terminologies and definitions with those they grew up with:

Message 30/447

I am puzzled. I think the descriptive terminology of grammar has changed since I was at school. (Then,) a clause by definition contained ONE finite verb. I don't know how to define the grammar of ". . . with the main two being X and Y".

Media

We have already seen the positive reference to a UK-published book title in Message 23 above, as showing acceptability. However, one message referred negatively to film subtitles that were produced in Hong Kong:

Message 31/1268

There is a need, I think, to be a little careful with film subtitles. "Nightcap" refers to an alcoholic drink just before you go to bed; it cannot be applied to food (see *Cobuild*). Also, we would not really use the term "night snack"

By contrast, this message gave a British dictionary as a better authority. The use of ‘we’ also implies NS usage.

Hong Kong Examinations Authority

Two responses (1.8%) referred to the public exams authority in Hong Kong. One was positive:

Message 32/658

I think there are too many adverbials in this text. I worry that giving this text to my students may encourage them to overuse these sorts of words. This, of course, is being discouraged in the various examination subject reports.

The other, while reluctant to accept the exam authority’s view, showed a pragmatic recognition that the examining authority is a powerful determiner of students’ futures:

Message 33/223

Generally it seems to me that usage of *Yours faithfully/sincerely* is becoming far more flexible than the rules that I learned at school allowed. However, I believe the HK examining board penalises usages such as Therefore, since exams are a matter of life and death in HK, it may be better to be strict with your students and stick to the ancient rules.

Own knowledge or judgement

NS teachers cited their own knowledge or judgement more often (38.9%) than any more formal authorities. There is a cline in the assertiveness of their responses as a source of authority. There were messages where they were very sure of their own judgement. For example, the following message was in response to a query about a NS writing angrily on an internet bread forum about a new batch of wheat: ‘It will NOT hardly rise for ANYTHING’:

Message 34/538

It’s just WRONG! I know grammar is descriptive and not prescription and all that but the expression “It will NOT hardly rise for ANYTHING” is just NOT ENGLISH! Somewhere the line has to be drawn. I really can’t hardly tolerate this. You are right to question it: remember that not all native speakers of a language actually know how to use it, especially when they’re furious with their wheat!

In the above message, the teacher, being a NS, pointed out that not all NSs know how to use the language. It is interesting, and perhaps significant, that no such statements were made by NNS teachers in the data.

NS teachers also resorted more to their own intuition about appropriateness of usage, for example:

Message 35/1046

My *gut feeling* is that this is wrong, but I can’t find a rule about when to use “etc”. Does anybody know the rule?

Messages in which NS teachers invoked certain grammatical rules to make a judgement about correctness were rare:

Message 36/604

Both sentences are *correct*. “The other children” must refer to a particular group, e.g. . . .

“Other children” is more general, e.g. The *rule* which applies is about definite and indefinite articles.

However, there were also messages where they were tentative about their own judgement and they invited other teachers to comment in the same way that the NNS teachers did. Message 35 above is an example. Nonetheless, compared to NNS teachers, there were far fewer instances in which they were not sure of themselves as a source of authority.

DISCUSSION

From the above analysis of the discourse of NNS and NS teachers, we can see that there are similarities and differences in their language attitudes. Both groups of teachers deferred to the authority of the printed media, mainly dictionaries, grammar books and usage books. In a way, this is hardly surprising because codification is an important means of establishing the status of a linguistic form or usage. What is interesting is the different attitudes of both groups of teachers towards local textbooks on the one hand, and, on the other hand, grammar and usage books and dictionaries published in Kachru's Inner Circle countries, mainly Britain. They were more critical and wary about the former, which were also written by native speakers of English. This may have to do with the poor quality of some of the textbooks published in Hong Kong, which has been a matter of concern for a long time. However, it may also have to do with the fact that teachers have more confidence in publications overseas, hence suggesting that even when they refer to exonormative models, they make a distinction between local and international sources of authority. Compared to codified sources, NNS teachers' attitudes towards oral statements made by native speakers, especially their own native-speaker colleagues, were less homogeneous. Instead, they perceived *TeleNex* as a source of authority because, as mentioned above, the staff members were all English language specialists or teacher educators, most of whom were native speakers of English. This is also congruent with the finding that they regarded their own former teachers as more authoritative than their own colleagues. This may well have something to do with the fact that deference to one's own teacher is very much ingrained in the Chinese culture. Finally, the most striking difference is perhaps the perceptions of these groups of teachers of themselves as a source of authority. The queries and responses from NS teachers show a very strong tendency to base their views on their own knowledge or experience as NS users of the language. Their interest in the corpus of NS English further illustrates their faith that NS usage confers acceptability. By contrast, NNS teachers lack confidence in their own authority over the language as English teachers. This was manifested firstly in their having to cite codified sources and other sources as supporting evidence before putting forward their own views, and secondly in their having to preface their own personal opinions with hedges and qualifications, and to solicit views from fellow teachers as a signal that they did not consider their own words as final.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The data that we analysed in this study are in no way representative of the entire NNS teacher population in Hong Kong. However, because this network is open to all English teachers in Hong Kong and registration is voluntary, it can be reasonably assumed that

those who logged onto the network are those who are interested in discussing language issues. The analysis shows that even for these teachers, the model that they adopted and accepted was exonormative. There was not a single reference which discussed deviations from the model with a more favourable attitude. Even when such deviations were codified in local textbooks, and other media such as newspapers, they were questioned by teachers. The exonormative attitudes of Hong Kong's English teachers, in common with those of the government and the business community, still show a preference for Standard English in formal communication. Given rapid globalisation and the immense impact of the Internet on the language of communication amongst nations, it would be interesting to see whether there will be a change in societal attitudes towards the local variety of English in Hong Kong and towards varieties of English in general.

NOTES

1. We would like to thank the teachers on *TeleNex* for allowing us to cite the messages that they sent in as examples in this paper. We would also like to thank Sonia Cheung, our research assistant for her help in organizing and analysing the data, and Mabel Sieh, the Project Manager of TELEC for administrative help.
2. Hong Kong Immigration Department figures at the end of December 1999 showed that about 2% of the population is Filipino (136,100) and that there are another 359,100 'foreign residents' in Hong Kong. The figures do not show ethnicity, and many of these foreign residents would be ethnically Chinese. However, the top nine nationalities after the Philippines are Indonesian, USA, Canadian, Thai, Indian, UK, Australian, Japanese, and Nepali. If even a third of these foreign residents were non-Chinese, that would account for another 2% of the population – the same proportion that was often reported as being non-Chinese before the relatively recent increase in numbers from the Philippines. It is on this basis that we estimate the population of Hong Kong to be about 96% Chinese.
3. Hong Kong Telecom was renamed Cable and Wireless HKT in 1999.
4. All names in the messages cited are pseudonyms.
5. Messages cited from the network are verbatim. No attempt has been made to edit them. Teachers gave us permission to cite their messages anonymously and every effort has been made to conceal their identities.
6. NET stands for Native-speaker English Teacher. In order to improve English language teaching in schools, the Hong Kong Government introduced in 1998 a new scheme of bringing in native-speaker English teachers into secondary schools. Each school can apply for up to two NETs. So far, the government has brought in over 300 NETs.
7. SCMP stands for *South China Morning Post*, one of two English newspapers in Hong Kong.
8. RTHK stands for 'Radio Television Hong Kong', a local broadcasting station which produces radio and television programmes.

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