

BOOK REVIEW

JOHN C. WAKEFIELD (ED.). *CANTONESE AS A SECOND LANGUAGE: ISSUES, EXPERIENCES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING*. ABINGDON, OXON: ROUTLEDGE, 2019.

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This long overdue book on teaching Cantonese as a second language consists of three parts. Part I contains five chapters on teaching and learning Cantonese, Part II consists of five chapters chronicling advanced learners' experiences and advice, and Part III comprises three chapters discussing the learning of Cantonese as a second language in the Hong Kong education system. Because of space constraints, this review focusses on the first and third parts of the book. For future reference, only the chapter titles and authors of Part II are given here, and these are as follows: Chapter 6 *My Cantonese Odyssey* (by Robert S. Bauer), Chapter 7 *Self-reflective ethnographic analysis of a Singaporean learner of Hong Kong Cantonese* (by Lian-Hee Wee), Chapter 8 "Do you dream in Cantonese?" *The long road to a competent L2* (by John Guest), Chapter 9 *Striving for linguistic and cultural assimilation in Hong Kong* (by John C. Wakefield), and Chapter 10 *Cantonese as seen from Japanese eyes* (by Shin Kataoka).

Part I of the book discusses pedagogical and educational linguistic issues revolving around the learning of Cantonese as a second, or foreign language. The editor notes that this is the second book-length treatment of Cantonese as a second, or foreign language, with the first being a dissertation on the topic. Comparing the figures from Simons and Fennig (2018), the editor finds it perplexing that little attention has been given to issues on teaching and learning Cantonese, although the number of Cantonese speakers is comparable to the respective numbers of French, German, and Italian speakers. It is noteworthy that this book uses *Jyutping* as its romanisation system, which was created by the Linguistic Society of Hong

Kong in 1993. The editor clarifies that words like “you” and “girl” are written in two forms, namely *nei5* and *neoi5* as well as *lei5* and *leoi5*, respectively. The *n*-initial pronunciation is the original pronunciation that is currently in use in the dictionary, whereas the *l*-initial pronunciation is commonly uttered by most Cantonese speakers (p. 6). The *n*-initial pronunciation for “you” and “girl” is the typical Cantonese rendition available at the local karaoke venue, thus, suggesting that pre-recorded musical materials may conserve the original Cantonese pronunciation.

In Chapter 1, *The Cantonese Language*, Robert S. Bauer and John C. Wakefield state that Cantonese is the second most spoken Chinese language after Mandarin, also known as *Pou2 tung1 waa6/2*. Offering their further insight into language and dialect, Bauer and Wakefield explicate that Cantonese and Mandarin are two different languages because they are mutually unintelligible to people who only speak one of them. Cantonese itself has since evolved into several dialectal varieties (cf. review of Chapter 5). Cantonese spoken in Malaysia and Singapore (Sew 2015), for example, is quite different from Cantonese spoken in Hong Kong in terms of speech phonetics and morpho-pragmatics. It is little wonder that the authors invoke Hong Kong Cantonese (HKC) as a first language that varies from the Cantonese(s) spoken in Guangdong and Guangxi. Bauer and Wakefield report that Hong Kong primary schools do not use any kind of Cantonese romanisation to teach Cantonese pronunciation, whereas mainland Chinese students are comfortable with the Pinyin system of romanisation as the students have become familiar with Pinyin from learning Putonghua (Mandarin) in primary school. There are 19 consonants in the Cantonese phonological system, namely, *b-*, *p-*, *f-*, *m-*, *d-*, *t-*, *s-*, *n-*, *l-*, *g-*, *k-*, *h-*, *ng-*, *gw-*, *kw-*, *z-*, *c-*, *w-*, and *j-* (*the last two segments are semivowels and articulated with some friction*, p. 13). Bauer and Wakefield explain that Cantonese has nine nuclear vowels, *i*, *yu*, *e*, *oe*, *aa*, *a*, *u*, and *o*. Among other details, the chapter analyses the compositional structure of a Cantonese syllable into segmental units, namely onset, nuclear, and coda.

In Chapter 2, Siu-lun Lee surveys the attitudes and learning hurdles of 282 learners of Cantonese as a second language, which are the returning responses from the original 300 questionnaires issued. As a spinoff, a focus group discussion comprising 12 university undergraduates, and 10 working professionals from the survey responses provides an understanding on attitudes and learning hurdles among the Cantonese learners. The 22 learners describe Cantonese as fascinating, lovely, creative, full of local taste, and poem-like, among other think, but at the same time, they think that Cantonese

is one of the most difficult and complicated languages to learn. The rank of priority of Cantonese skills desired by the learners ranges from the ability to speak (58.5%) to the abilities to understand Cantonese speech (50.8%), translate between Cantonese and English (47.7%), and understand Cantonese written materials (43.1%). The three types of hurdles listed in the report are linguistic, psychological, and sociocultural in nature. The learners surveyed also think that the use of correct tones is critical to being understood and many want to acquire good Cantonese pronunciation. Lee opines that pronunciation drills need to start from individual phrases, moving on to sentences and then connected discourse (p. 61).

In Chapter 3, Winnie Chor reports on learning Cantonese in the work context. The workers in question are domestic helpers, representing 360,000 people in Hong Kong. Most of the workers came to Hong Kong after 1997, are non-English speakers, and would gain a career advantage from mastering Cantonese spoken by 6.27 million (88.9%) of the Hong Kong population. As a mother of two who has had a domestic helper for seven years, Chor highlights the problematic situation involving an Indonesian domestic helper who lacks the basic proficiency of understanding simple phrases such as *hot* and *cold*, as well as *take a bath* in Cantonese. The situation becomes frustrating, especially when the helper claims that she has high school qualification with basic Cantonese and English proficiencies. Chor divides the materials for learning Cantonese into two types, namely Cantonese resources that require the expert instruction of a teacher, and self-reliant learning resources. As a native speaker, she finds the expression *sei3 faai3 bun3* (“four-and-a-half pieces”) to denote a coffin as outlined in a self-reliant resource to be odd. In contrast, Hokkien speakers in Taiwan describe a coffin as *four-piece-wood*. A standardised Cantonese proficiency test is available from the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) but ironically, such Cantonese testing remains non-existent in Hong Kong. However, the Linguistic Society of Hong Kong initiated a workshop in 2015 with the intention of setting up a Cantonese test centre, thus, accreditation for Cantonese proficiency is currently in progress.

In Chapter 4, Raymond Pai presents a case study of the Cantonese as a foreign language programme in North America. There are more than 20 universities, or colleges offering a Cantonese language programme, with seven American universities and two Canadian universities teaching Cantonese beyond the beginner level. Pai focusses on the University of British

Columbia (UBC), Canada, which has received a two-million Canadian dollar endowment fund to establish a Cantonese language programme in 2013. The Canadian Cantonese programme has since developed into a dual track system separating the enrolment of heritage speakers from that of non-heritage speakers. Understandably, Cantonese popular culture is a useful element to motivate the learning of Cantonese as news about Andy Lau, participation of Cantonese student in singing competition, and a resource entitled *Pop Hong Kong: Reading Hong Kong Popular Culture, 2000–2010* (Ma and Ng 2012: 95) are referenced as part of the learning details at UBC. Currently, there are five Cantonese courses, at three levels of proficiency, with around 270 students enrolled.

In Chapter 5, Matthew B. Christensen recounts how the Cantonese as a foreign language programme with actual classroom instruction began 30 years ago at Brigham Young University (BYU), although Cantonese proficiency accreditation via coursework-examination started in 1973. In accordance with the ACTFL proficiency framework, *Cantonese 202* (an intermediate level module) requires students to reach the intermediate high level in reading proficiency as its learning outcome. Cantonese learners find it challenging to read short essays, articles, and notes in Standard Written Chinese (SWC). Christensen states that reading proficiency in Cantonese seems to be a constant toggling between Mandarin and Cantonese speech phonetics and pragmatics:

Speeches given by Hong Kong government officials may begin with a formal written version, but these officials change the wording from formal written to formal spoken terms when actually giving the speech. Some newscasters likewise may read from a text written in SWC, pronouncing the words in Cantonese, sometimes substituting Cantonese spoken words for the more formal SWC terms; this becomes a much more formal version of spoken Cantonese. Each of the characters can be, and are, pronounced in Cantonese, but they often differ significantly from the words used in everyday speech. This more formal Cantonese register is very challenging for learners of Cantonese to understand because it is closer to Mandarin Chinese's grammar and lexicon but is pronounced in Cantonese (p. 102–103).

Separate Google searches on the Cantonese faculty at UBC and BYU websites, show that the Cantonese faculty at UBC consists of a full-time lecturer (Raymond Pai) and a sessional lecturer (Zoe Lam) whereas the Cantonese faculty at BYU comprises two professors (Dana S. Bourgerie and Matthew B. Christensen) with experience researching and teaching Cantonese, Mandarin, and Chinese dialects.

Part III begins with Chapter 11 in which Chan Shui Duen explores the learning issues faced by ethnic minorities, i.e., non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students in Hong Kong who are struggling to learn the formal Cantonese register as the second language. Chan highlights the confusion arising from the teacher for rejecting the so-called colloquial Cantonese verb *caai2* commonly used to denote riding (a bicycle) in favour of the SWC verb *daap6* without providing the proper explanation to the NCS students (p. 219–220). Additionally, Chan underlines a learning dilemma facing NCS students after 1997 with many schools adopting Putonghua as the medium of instruction alongside Cantonese. Most of the NCS students in Hong Kong are assigned to the Cantonese class despite of the Putonghua option because of the ample Cantonese linguistic resources available in the society.

Chapter 12 sees Cheung Hin Tat measuring the Cantonese proficiency of South Asian (SA) children selected from primary and secondary schools. The results indicate that 80% of children 8 years old or older performed at or below the age expectation for 5.5 years in terms of Cantonese proficiency. Furthermore, the measurements demonstrate a stagnancy of growth in using Cantonese complement clauses, reflecting a difficulty for SA learners in recounting event development with complement-taking mental verbs in Cantonese (p. 244). As a remediation to improve the Cantonese progress of SA learners, who are lagging in the regular Cantonese classes, Cheung suggests oral Cantonese as a solution instead. In addition, Cheung concludes that increasing tutorial time to work on the curriculum designed for children who are competent in Cantonese does not help the SA learners to acquire Cantonese.

In Chapter 13, Chaak Ming Lau and Peggy Pik Ki Mok write about teaching Jyutping to NCS students in Hong Kong. Based on the census data, they find that only 51.8% of the ethnic minorities (Indian, Pakistani, and Nepalese speakers) speak Cantonese as a daily language. Chaak and Pik outline unique Cantonese phonetics that NCS students may have difficulty with, namely a character that changes its word categories may have multiple pronunciations, such as 畫 *waak6* (draw) or *waa2* (a drawing). Another phonetic conundrum in Cantonese Chaak and Pik identified is homophone, for example, *jil* may denote 姨 aunt, 衣 clothes, 醫 medicine or 伊 that (obsolete) (p. 252). Chaak and Pik highlight the complexity of a simple concept such as 龜 turtle which has 16 strokes in its character, this may be difficult for NCS students to recognise, write, and learn. Furthermore, NCS students may find it difficult to differentiate the two-way aspiration contrast in different

pronunciations at the onset, e.g., 爸[p] vs 叭[p^h] (p. 254) which is difficult to differentiate. The proposed resolution is to learn Jyutping-romanisation typing skills that increases the exposure of NCS students to the Chinese characters, thus, improves the overall Cantonese proficiency. Chaak and Pik opine that Jyutping as an auxiliary learning tool removes the psychological barrier of NCS speakers because they can write/type Cantonese without having to acquire thousands of Chinese characters.

Collectively, the book makes an original contribution to teaching and learning Cantonese. The expert contributors share valuable information and findings, offering a well-beaten path to instructors and convenors who are interested in designing and implementing Cantonese language education. Some of the ideas are useful for Cantonese material development purposes. Readers interested in understanding the issues of learning and teaching Cantonese will find the book useful for setting research parameters in the study of learners mastering Cantonese as a foreign language.

As indicated in the review, the development of a standard measurement to evaluate Cantonese proficiency in Hong Kong is in its infancy. As such, the formalisation of a standard Cantonese assessment instrument has become an exciting project to look forward to in the near future. This is a useful publication that language libraries around the world may conveniently have as it offers an electronic subscription.

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