

Language Use and Negotiation in a Philadelphia Chinatown Bakery

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This pilot ethnographic study explores the linguistic repertoires of workers at a Chinese bakery in Philadelphia Chinatown. Given that these workers interact daily with a variety of linguistically diverse customers, this research attempts to better understand their use, choice, and negotiation of language(s) within the context of the bakery. The bakery workers in this study have symbolic power and access to goods in the shop and, in turn, bargaining power in language negotiations that take place in their bakery. Data from this research shows that the bakery is not just a marketplace for baked goods: it is also a Bourdieuan linguistic marketplace where the value of languages that typically hold high social capital – English and Mandarin – are perpetually met and challenged. More exploration should be undertaken to examine and value this knowledge of multiple languages, and this paper is an initial attempt at this endeavor.

Introduction and Literature Review

While much research has been done on the multilingualism of young children or university students, less work has focused on the multilingualism (and multiliteracies) of blue-collar immigrant workers who use a variety of languages for special purposes. Members of this often-marginalized, blue-collar-working immigrant group have voices, strengths, and agencies that deserve to be investigated, documented, and heard. Furthermore, multilingualism and multiliteracies do not cease developing after childhood; languages and language strategies are learned and developed across the lifespan (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2007). Thus it is worthwhile to examine what strategies are being employed by this population of language users.

Moreover, because of their socioeconomic stance within the larger society, blue-collar, adult immigrant workers are often seen through a deficit lens (e.g., being characterized as having limited English proficiency or accented pronunciation) when, in fact, many possess a vast repertoire of linguistic knowledge from their first language (L1) and oftentimes second or third languages (L2 and L3), which enable them to traverse across linguistic boundaries.

Also housed within this deficit frame is the long-standing language ideology about “Chinese” – that language varieties (such as Cantonese or Shanghaiese) are “only” dialects that hold less prestige compared to the standard or national language, Mandarin. This is considered one of the fantasies of what people lump together as the “Chinese” language (DeFrancis, 1984). It is the fantasy of “Chinese” being a singular, static entity based on the rising esteem of China and Mandarin, thus devalorizing the actual linguistic diversity that exists within “Chineses” and among speakers who do not speak Mandarin as their L1. In fact, as DeFrancis and essentially all modern scholars on Sinitic languages note, Cantonese is a language mutually unintelligible from Mandarin. As Kroskrity (2001) states of “nonstandard” languages, “Rather than being understood as linguistic differences, such perceived inadequacies are instead naturalized and hierarchized in a manner which replicates social hierarchy” (p. 503). It is therefore important to focus on these differences, realizing that those who are thought to speak with linguistic “inadequacies” are also hierarchized depending on the social context at hand, regardless of the variety of language they speak.

For example, the research by Vitanova (2005) and Gordon (2004) on the negotiation of identities in female immigrants yields significant insight into the linguistic flexibility and ability to adapt to cultural and gender norms in the United States. Moreover, it is precisely because of the new roles that immigrant women need to take on that they often opt to work instead of continuing ESL classes (Skilton-Sylvester, 2002). Thus the adaptive flexibility of these immigrant women enables them to break prescriptive norms about how they “should” act and what languages they “should” learn and use.

As Lave and Wenger (1991) note, identity and participation in a community of practice are entwined and interrelated. Lave and Wenger bring up the idea of *legitimate peripheral participation* (p. 38), which is integral in viewing communities of practice as complex, changing, and also constantly contested. As the communities of practice change, so do the identities of those involved. Together with Wertsch (1985, p. 208), who sees the unit of analysis as *person-in-action-with-tool* co-constructed within the sociocultural context and the media, the idea of public discourse can be understood as a very complex and dynamic issue. Moreover it is through participation in communities of practice identity that individuals construct identities (Eckert, 2000). Thus the bakery workers in this study, who can be seen as part of a community of practice in the bakery setting and also of a larger Chinatown setting, cannot simply be viewed in terms of blue-collar, immigrant L1 speakers of Cantonese and/or “non-native” speakers of English; rather, at various times and places, different strands of their identities will be highlighted, and their use of different languages will reflect this.

The work of Bourdieu on social capital is useful in conceptualizing the idea that people and languages have “value” and are always connected to a power struggle. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) state, “Social capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group

by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (p. 119). The value of social capital comes from prior inequalities and exclusions, and resources also include those linguistic. Bourdieu and Wacquant also note that "what goes in verbal communication, even the content of the message itself, remains unintelligible as long as one does not take into account the totality of the structure of the power positions that is present, yet invisible, in the exchange" (p. 146). As such, participants must have a degree of linguistic and cultural competence in order to gain access, fully or partial, into interactions, and this is a dynamic process, filled with constant negotiation and renegotiation. It is important to note that the linguistic marketplace, like a real marketplace where goods are sold, is diverse, and languages oftentimes do not hold the same purchasing power.

Scollon (1997, p. 46) argues that all behavior is public in that it is reliant upon expressions and symbols that are socially based. He uses the term *sites of engagement* to call the occurrence of a community of practice being brought together through public discourse in legitimate peripheral participation. In his work with the handing out of handbills and freebies in Hong Kong, Scollon notes that there are social practices involved – a young woman handing out handbills with sanitary napkins, upon encountering a middle-aged woman, retracts her offer – knowing what to say or do in the brief window of interaction time with each person that walks by is a constant negotiation and ratification of social identity and social capital. Likewise, work by Heritage (1984, p. 300) in multilingual settings shows that institutional service talk is "talked into being," where in all service encounters, social identities are negotiated and navigated through. Torras (2005, p. 120) furthers this by adding the component of acquaintanceship, which "enables the participants to set their talk on track in a way that their service can be resumed at the very point where they left it in their last encounter."

The concepts of constant negotiation of language and identity and how they are used to challenge the notions of languages of traditionally higher linguistic capital will be looked at in the bakery context.

Methods

The first time I visited BT Bakery¹ was six months before this research began, and I casually observed that the workers there spoke not only Cantonese, Mandarin, and English, but also Vietnamese and other varieties of Chinese – an impressive linguistic feat to me. As an American-born L1 Cantonese speaker who can "pass" linguistically and by the way I look (so I have been told) as someone born in Hong Kong, I was able to gain a unique vantage point of the bakery. My first few interchanges with the bakery workers would be in English or Mandarin, and sometimes Cantonese, but with more visits and heightened famil-

ilarity, we chatted solely in Cantonese. These initial interactions motivated me to choose BT Bakery as my site of observation.

Situated at the corner of two very busy streets in Philadelphia Chinatown, BT Bakery receives a very steady flow of customers at all hours of the day. The high number of customers in flux, combined with the relatively compact physical size of the bakery, makes for an ideal site to look at language interaction. See Appendix for the illustration of the floor plan of BT Bakery.

I initially went into the site with two main research questions that evolved as I spent more time observing the site: 1) What are the linguistic repertoires of the workers at BT Bakery? How do the bakery workers make use of their linguistic repertoires in interacting and negotiating with their customers?; 2) How do bakery workers typify – via knowledge that is explicit and conscious as well as tacit – their customers in terms of guessing (or knowing) what language to start the interaction in? Are there hierarchies or preferred language varieties that tend to dominate in the bakery? If so, how flexible or solid are the rules of interacting and settling upon the language variety of interaction?

Before formally interviewing the bakery workers, I informed them about my study. They allowed me to interview them, though it was concurrent with their working time, making it difficult to hold a cohesive conversation. I later came in to observe on random days, during which the ladies would come and chat with me when they were free and I could ask more unstructured questions. My observations were oftentimes corroborated with spoken opinions by June and Lee, my two focal female participants. Their comments are interspersed throughout the field notes.

Having access to (or at the very least, accurate recognition of) many of the same languages in the bakery workers' linguistic repertoires allowed me to easily note down the language interactions that were occurring without having to constantly ask the workers what they were speaking. There were still some languages I could not recognize, and in these instances, I would ask for clarification at a later time.

Observing in the bakery was minimally invasive, but sometimes it was awkward being the only person in the store jotting notes in my notebook. I made sure to purchase at least three baked goods and a beverage before sitting down at my table so that I could spend a prolonged period of time observing. I also left a relatively large tip in the tip jar before I left the store. As each baked item only cost about 70 cents and because I observed very few customers leaving tips, I can say with confidence that June and Lee knew I appreciated their letting me sit in the store.

I conducted ten hours of fieldwork for this pilot ethnographic study at BT Bakery. I made seven visits to the bakery, making observations lasting over an hour each time. Each visit involved taking field notes on the interactions between June and Lee and the customers that came into the bakery in the duration of my observation time. I understand and take full responsibility for the fact that time spent "in the field" was limited, as this research was done as a

requirement for a course I was taking for credit. However, as a very frequent patron of this bakery to this day, I am no stranger to this site. The themes observed were not noted cursorily but rather reflect the off-hand observations I have made throughout my many visits to buy baked goods there.

In this paper I try to include quotes in Cantonese and Mandarin, the two Chinese in which I am most fluent, whenever I felt they were relevant. The Cantonese lines are romanized using *Jyutping* () and the Mandarin using *Hanyu pinyin* (), alongside the characters and English translations.

Data Analysis

After observing and speaking with June and Lee over a period of two months, I have categorized three salient themes that emerged from the data: multiple identities, multilingualism as an asset, and the acceptability of phonologically “inaccurate” English and Mandarin. These themes will be supported by observations and quotes.

1. Multiple Identities of June and Lee

June, a Chinese woman in her late 30's, and Lee, a Vietnamese-Chinese² woman in her early 50's, have multiple and oftentimes intersecting identities, among which include multilingual mothers, salespeople, owner (in June's case), and immigrants. They value these identities both separately and collectively.

Though nominally June is the owner of BT Bakery, there is little difference between the tasks she does in the store from what Lee does. June does not seem to oversee any of Lee's work, and the two treat each other like very close friends. In fact, it was only through my asking how long the two had worked at BT Bakery that Lee divulged that June was the (*loubaanmoeng*, ‘female owner’). From the looks of how hard the two were working, I had assumed that they were both working for someone.

At first blush, one will readily notice that June and Lee are friendly salespeople, just pushy enough to get products sold but also very attuned to what their customers purchase and certain customers' life histories. On multiple occasions, June and Lee exploit the fact that they remember a customer and/or what she/he had ordered. One example of this is when a young Asian man comes in asking Lee in English, “You got the cheese?” A bystander overhearing this would be confused without the necessary background information. Almost immediately Lee answers back in English, “Yesterday you eat the cheese you like it, huh?” Noticeably surprised that Lee remembers him so readily, the male customer responds a little sheepishly, “Heh, yeah.” Lee asks if he would like other baked goods, but he says no.

Lee and June's knowledge of their customers works in their favor in this other example, where a customer ends up buying more goods because of the extended period of time spent on conversation. An older, Cantonese-speak-

ing woman asks for bacon and scallion buns. She asks June and Lee, “
 ?” (*hai mai nego housik a* ‘Is this the one that tastes good?’). Lee says “yes” in Cantonese, adding that the woman’s son came and bought the same buns yesterday. She even compliments the non-present son, “好斯文,
 ” (*hou siman, cengleng baakzeng* ‘So cultivated, good looking and educated’). June and Lee emphasize how much he liked those buns, pointing to exactly where he was sitting while eating them. They note he had also come the day before for egg custard tarts. Their knowledge of specific customers is impressive. They add that her 大佬 (*daailou* ‘older brother’) also came yesterday. Lee says that “
 ” (*nei go hou zungyi* ‘Your brother really likes it’). By now the conversation has lasted a good five minutes. The lady asks if the
 (*maakbau* ‘wheat bun’) is good. As expected, Lee responds in the affirmative. The woman picks up a few. Her total is \$11.70. She takes out a \$50 bill and exclaims, “
 ” (*mou saai cin la* ‘I’ve got no more money’), and then jokes that they should ask her son to pay her bill next time he comes in. This final wheat bun purchase might not have happened were it not for the fact that June and Lee made the effort to bring in their familiarity with the woman’s brother and son, prolonging the conversation and deepening the level of intimacy.

Lee and June also know the drink preferences of elderly customers; in fact, many of their elderly customers simply sit down at the tables and are served their “regular” beverage (usually a hot coffee or milk tea, or an occasional Ovaltine). While it could be argued that Lee and June are able to recall drink orders readily because their drink menu only consists of six or seven items available hot or cold, recognizing customers and their regular orders nonetheless renders them successful saleswomen.

June’s identity as a saleswoman overlaps and is often juxtaposed with her identity as a mother. June’s three children (ages 9, 7, and 5) spend much time at the bakery, especially on the weekends. At times June acts exasperated by the “trouble” her kids cause her, but it is evident she is happy they are around. She chastises them in Cantonese in front of Lee but always with a smile; threats of punishment are not followed through. One day, June comes in after being outside for a while and says that her kids
 (*zaadai saanmun* ‘pretended to close the door’) when she left them to take their naps. June proceeds to describe the situation: she tells them to

(*gwaigwaidei fangaau* ‘Behave yourselves and go to sleep’) and they tell her, “
 ” (*maami zau la* ‘Mommy, leave!’). But then, she says, “
 !” (*maami zauzo le, zauwai zau!* ‘But when Mommy leaves, they run all over the place!’). One would think that for how her children are misbehaving, June might be angrier, but how she narrates the story shows that she is actually proud to share details about her children with others. As she tells the story about how “bad” her children are, it is as if she expects her listeners to tell her that is just typical behavior for children that age. This is furthered by her saying, “
 !” (*aaqjan gaa!* *houngaan fangaau gaa!* ‘They lie! They go to sleep so late!’). While the content

of her speech sounds serious, it is said with a smile – June clearly likes to talk about her children, even if they are misbehaving.

Another example of this is when June makes a comment about her son, Jeffrey, who is talking to himself while playing Pokemon cards:

(*cisin ge, tong zigei gongje* ‘He’s crazy, talking to himself’). Usually calling someone *cisin* is not taken in a positive light, but it is clear in subsequent statements that she is not making truly pejorative comments about her son. She explains that someone bought him the Pokemon cards, and he had been playing with them ever since. It was as though June was proud that her son was good, well behaved, or well liked enough that someone gave him Pokemon cards.

The bakery serves as a site of babysitting as well; June’s children play and do homework at the tables under her watchful eye. In the bakery space, June takes on roles as both owner and mother. Between selling and stocking baked goods, June can be heard teaching her children proper manners and behavior: I have heard her tell them, “*?*” (*jiu doze jandei zimzi?* ‘You have to thank [the person giving you something], okay?’) and “*一定要做晒homework先得*” (*jatding jiu zosaai homework sin dak* ‘You have to finish all your homework’). The bakery is also a pick-up/drop-off site for others to babysit June’s children. I have seen an elderly woman (whom I think is the children’s grandmother) and also a family friend picking up and dropping off the children at the bakery; it is clearly a focal location in June’s life.

In terms of language use, the children speak to their mother and Lee in English, and June and Lee almost always respond in Cantonese. In the bakery context, June code-switches most with her own children. For example, when her son Jeffrey says, “Mommy I wanna go home!” June responds via Cantonese/English code-switch, “*你都未食lunch go home*” (*nei dou meisik lunch dim go home* ‘You haven’t even eaten lunch yet, how can you go home’).

While they are in the store, Lee and June are clearly “in power” because they have access to the goods that customers want. However, when they are with the children and especially when they are speaking in English with them, Lee and June seem to have less control over the choice of language that they use. As June lamented to me, even when she and her husband only speak Cantonese in the home, their children are starting to use more and more English; their family’s Cantonese communicative stronghold is slipping.

2. Multilingualism as an Asset, Especially in Talking About Others

June and Lee consistently use their multilingualism as an asset. This is especially apparent when they use a code language, a language that they think their customer does not speak, to talk about a particular customer,

a strategy mostly deployed by June, or when they use a language they know their customer knows to build rapport, done mostly by Lee.

June's dual use of Cantonese and Mandarin to talk negatively about a customer is particularly salient. The first example takes place when a mother and her three teenage daughters come into the bakery. In English, the mother asks for some sponge cakes and then demands, "Give me big strawberry," referring to the small chocolate cakes with a single plump strawberry on top. June grabs the cake closest to her (from her standpoint behind the counter). The woman insists that June instead reach for the cake with (what she believes is) the biggest strawberry, furthest away from June. June cannot reach this cake without running her hand over all the cakes, risking smearing the cream and knocking some cakes over in the process. June tells the customer she cannot reach that specific cake. Infuriated, the customer goes into a tirade at the register, which is manned by Lee, voicing her dissatisfaction, "How do you treat customers like that? We come here all the time buy cakes from you!" While collecting the woman's money, Lee apologizes with, "Sorry, it's ok" in English. June, however, is unabashedly infuriated. In front of the customer she voices her discontent in Cantonese, stating matter-of-factly how all the strawberries are the same size and how crazy (*cisin*) this woman is for wanting her to get a cake that is beyond her reach. From the fact the customer does not get any angrier after this insult (here, "crazy" actually means "crazy") and says nothing to defend herself, it seems that she does not understand Cantonese. As the woman leaves, she continues grumbling about how the customer should always be right. Once the woman and her daughters are out the door, June and Lee start talking in Cantonese about how crazy the woman was. June says, "激死" (*bei keoi giksei* 'She really pissed me off'). She proceeds to retell the whole situation to Lee, who had already seen the incident unfold. June ends her retelling with, " ?" (*mutgwai jan lai ge le* 'I wonder what ethnicity those people are' lit: 'what kind of ghosts are those people?'). She concludes that they must be "Indonesian" because they do not speak to her in any variety of Chinese. Still upset, she strikes conversation with an older Mandarin-speaking customer who had also witnessed the scene. In Mandarin, she asks him, " ?" (*ni kanle ma* 'Did you see that?') and using only Mandarin, tells the whole story again, this time embellishing the details, using the words for 'insane' and 'deranged' to describe the customer.

The whole interchange was especially notable because of how much satisfaction June took in berating the woman while she was still in the store and also after her exit, in not one but two languages to different people in the store. Because (I assume) she knew her Mandarin-speaking customer did not understand the Cantonese version of the retelling, June took on the persona of both victim and storyteller, which made for a very juicy story for everyone involved. Moreover, June employs the use of othering, defining one's own positive identity through stigmatizing someone else (refer to Pennycook (2001) for more in-depth examples of othering), when she calls the customer

"Indonesian," along the reasoning of "if she does not speak one of the many languages I know, she must be Indonesian because I cannot speak Indonesian." As evidenced by the incident with the so-called "Indonesian" woman, use of English in a conversation gives June the entitlement to make judgments about the speaker afterwards in Cantonese or Mandarin. Though June does not explicitly flaunt the fact that a person she does not like cannot speak her language(s), that she reverts back to her code language right after the interaction is over so that she can make judgments shows that she has "won" by having the last word.

A similar incident involving a Cantonese-speaking construction worker took place. This man had asked Lee if the coconut buns were (*san m sansin* 'fresh or not fresh'). This seems an interesting question to ask (though, as I have noticed, many customers ask this question), since Lee and June probably would not explicitly state that their products were not fresh. Once the man leaves, Lee and June start talking to each other about him in Cantonese. June calls his comments about freshness (*dojyu* 'frivolous'). Interestingly, she then repeats the whole story to a nearby Mandarin-speaking customer in Mandarin, ending the story with "有毛病!" (*you maobing* 'he's got some [mental] illness!; he's crazy!'). Though the story is the same, instead of being simply "frivolous," the new retelling more dramatically characterizes the man as "crazy." June switches back to Cantonese and says, "

? (*mtong mai gaakjat minbao me* 'As if we would sell day-old bread!')

This technique of speaking out in complaint and dissatisfaction is done not only through her mother tongue, but in other language varieties as well. The deliberate use of bilingual storytelling reaches a wider linguistic range of audiences. Like with the woman who wanted the biggest strawberry, June uses Mandarin as the dramatic language and is heard by a larger audience. The power differential between June and her "crazy" customer widens; June strategically uses Cantonese and Mandarin to play victim while getting her side of the story heard, leaving the hearers on her side. June ends her story by reminding her workers to (*geidak caapdin a, mhai tingjat mou minbao la* 'Remember to plug in the electricity, otherwise tomorrow we won't have bread!') This is quite the witty tie-in to her comments about selling day-old bread.

On one occasion, Lee uses her multilingualism to mock a Caucasian, English-speaking family. There is a young child sitting next to me saying, "I don't wanna go! I want another sponge cake!" This girl, her older sister, and their father are sitting together. Lee is watching this interchange as well, and she catches my eye and winks at me. Lee says to the child in English, "You're going to be in trouble!" The father, very patient with his daughter, says, "Come on, Mara. Let's go." Mara says, "Ow! You're choking me! I'm going to throw up!" The father calmly says, "Throw up? That's not good. Are you sure? Dry your tears, let's go outside." Mara resists, but says, "I wanna go home!" June and Lee are talking to each other and say, in English, "In trouble!" Then, switching to Cantonese, one of them says, "... (*gaaudou keoi lou-*

dau... ‘Stirring up so much trouble for her father...’). The sentence is without a subject, but it is clear the subject is Mara. Those who speak Cantonese might agree that there is also an implied criticism here, too: the father is also partly at fault because he cannot control his own daughter, allowing her to stir up so much trouble. Lee and June proceed to mock Mara’s whining by using a Cantonese which matches Mara’s tone exactly: “我要去! 我要去!” (*Ngo yiu heoi! Ngo yiu heoi!* ‘I want to go! I want to go!’). On one hand, the English-speaking personae that Lee and June take on makes them seem at least mildly sympathetic to the father and daughter. However, when their Cantonese-speaking personae emerge, it is clear they actually find both father and daughter rather laughable. The father and his daughters were completely oblivious to the fact that they were being publicly mocked in Cantonese.

Lee is very astute of language varieties; in the hours I have done my field-work, she has (correctly, to the best of my knowledge) identified at least six Vietnamese-speaking people and has carried out conversations in Vietnamese with all of them. She has even “brought out” the Vietnamese in customers who started interactions with her in English.

Using a common language to build rapport extends to the part of the customers as well. Once, a Mandarin-speaking man orders a – hot coffee – pronouncing the word “hot” in Cantonese and then “coffee” in Mandarin. It sounds like “*jit ka fei*”. In Cantonese it would have been *jit gaa fei*; in Mandarin it would have been *re ka fei*. The distinction might seem slight to the untrained ear, but it is phonologically and tonally realized as separate linguistic entities. Linguistic accommodation is taking place here; that is, there are times where speech is adapted to the surrounding environment and taken up with little to no judgment about the utterance. With the above example it is the Mandarin speaker that accommodates by using Cantonese, challenging and breaking the hierarchy of Mandarin as the language of prestige that connects all “Chinese” speakers. Also interesting was Lee’s response: she first tells the man the price of his purchase in Mandarin but switches to Cantonese when she says the drinks are ready. There are numerous examples like this one where customers come in speaking Mandarin but end up switching to Cantonese, which may or may not be their L1. Sometimes Lee or June reject the accommodation by responding in Mandarin, but other times they accept the token of Cantonese as lingua franca, either in full or in part, as in the above example. It is unclear if any sort of systematicity exists in this decision process, though it is important to note that language interactions need not always have clear-cut rules.

3. Acceptability of Phonologically “Inaccurate” Mandarin and English

Lee and June are L1 Cantonese speakers – it is the language they use in spontaneous speech – but they are willing to risk phonological inaccuracies in their speech (in Mandarin, other varieties of Chinese, or English) to speak the language of communication of their interlocutors. Lee, in particular, is willing to risk being incorrect in guessing what languages the customers speak.

On one occasion, two young Asian men came into the bakery. As most Asians who come into the bakery tend to be of some Chinese heritage, Lee must have thought they spoke some variety of Chinese. She asks them in Mandarin what they wanted to order, and they responded with, “Huh?” Lee changes from Mandarin to English. They again request for clarification, asking, “What?” They finally order in English their tapioca fruit drinks and sit down very close to me. At this point I realize that they are speaking Korean (a language I can recognize but cannot speak) to each other. Because the blender was running while Lee was making the tapioca drinks, she did not hear the two speaking in Korean. In one last attempt to figure out what language they spoke, Lee asks in English, “Where are you from?” Perhaps the Korean men did not hear the question, since there was no response from them. By now, the men have paid for their drinks and are sitting down again; Lee does not interact with them after this. In fact, she seemed almost a little cross at them for not responding to her, as I noticed her giving them slight glares when they were not looking up at her.

Lee and June’s Mandarin can be characterized as having a “Cantonese accent.” For example, in saying [ʃiɛ ʃiɛ] in Mandarin, they would say [sɛ sɛ], since Cantonese does not have the voiceless alveo-palatal fricative phoneme /ʃ/ in its sound inventory. In most circumstances, phonological inaccuracies such as this one would be looked down upon by L1 Mandarin speakers. However, there seemed not to be any negative reaction or overt correction by any Mandarin speakers, perhaps because Lee and June had access to the baked goods.

Since tapioca balls are also called pearls, when a customer orders a drink, Lee can often be heard asking, “Pearl no pearl?” It sounds more like [pɤ nou pɤ], and some listeners need some time to process what was said. Certain customers have asked her to repeat herself, but Lee never goes out of her way to pronounce the syllabic alveolar lateral approximant [l] to form the prescribed “correct” way of pronouncing “pearl,” nor is there ever overt correction by customers.

In another instance, an older Asian man tells Lee in Mandarin he wants BBQ pork buns 打包 (*dabao* ‘packaged to go’). His Mandarin is accented, and it obvious he had learned it as an additional language. Perhaps because Lee could tell that Mandarin was not his native language, she switches to English, “How many?” When he does not respond, Lee asks him, “How many? How much?” repeating these two phrases several times. Ultimately she tells him it costs \$10.40. The amount he gives her is five cents short, and she says, “Five more cents.” After some negotiation of meaning, he gives her a nickel. It seems that this man knows less English than he does Mandarin. Lee’s question of “How much?” is not necessarily the prescribed way of asking “How many” but she is willing to try and get on the same page of understanding with the man. While the customer tries to initially negotiate with Lee in Mandarin, she probably thinks he is not fluent enough in it to communicate, thus changing the language to English, which ultimately turns out to be

the weaker language for the man. While Lee turned out to have guessed “incorrectly” about this man’s language background, the extent to which she and June are flexible enough to go beyond “correct” language to foster dialogue is remarkable. This seems especially true when dealing with new or infrequent customers.

That both Lee and June are such linguistic “risk takers” could just be the result of needing to interact with all customers. Lee had told me that she thought Philadelphia Chinatown was smaller and safer compared to other Chinatowns. June had also said, “*tongjangaai housaai ga* ‘Chinatown is really small’). As Lee said during an interview with her, “Sometimes you will be wrong [about guessing what your customers speak], but then just shrug it off! It’s just one person, right?” Her affective filter is very low, and maybe it is being in the position of salesperson in charge of the goods that makes her so comfortable in these interactions. Both Lee and June can also be heard saying “*zousaangji zau haai gam* ‘This is what doing business is like’), perhaps pointing to their stance that everything they do within the confines of the bakery – mistakes included – is done for the benefit of doing business and making revenue. They have used this phrase at least four times when talking with other customers, linking the necessity of effective communication with being a good business person.

Discussion

The linguistic repertoires of June and Lee are obviously diverse. When asked what languages and language varieties they can speak, June reported that she could speak Cantonese, Mandarin, Vietnamese, English, Hakka, Fukkien, and Hoisan varieties as well as a little bit of Indonesian. Lee reported to speak Cantonese, Mandarin, Vietnamese, English, as well as the Toisan and Teochew varieties. During the course of the observation, Cantonese, Mandarin, English, and Vietnamese were heard most often.

A common language was repeatedly seen used as means of building rapport, while a code language, shared only with certain people, was also consistently seen as voicing discontent. When the latter took place, Cantonese was almost always used. Depending on the context, interlocutors, or audience, Mandarin would be used to supplement and dramatize the situation to get the story heard to the larger periphery. This corresponds to Lee’s views that at the very least, if one uses Mandarin, chances are that one will be understood. This also aligns itself to Torras’ (2005) findings that service workers’ multiplicity of identities are deployed strategically to accomplish successful service.

Worth noting is the fact that rapport-building was mostly done by Lee, while voicing discontent and dramatization was almost always done by June. This could be because June is the owner of BT Bakery and thus has more freedom to say what she wants to say. While Lee is older than June, that still does not allow her to speak ill of the customers. Lee is heard

agreeing with and adding to June's comments but hardly ever instigating negative remarks on her own.

Trying to answer the question of how Lee and June typify customers proved more difficult than originally expected. Non-Asian customers were always spoken to in English, save for one Caucasian pastor who changed the conversation out of English by asking for coffee in Mandarin; he is undeniably an anomaly. Because both Lee and June were L1 Cantonese speakers, they used Cantonese most often in interacting with their customers. Still, there were times when they "knew" their customers spoke something other than Cantonese, as in Lee's uncanny ability to pick out Vietnamese speakers. When asked how she knew they were Vietnamese speakers, Lee said it was "out of familiarity" – however, not all cases of Vietnamese use could be explained through familiarity. When asking Lee and June how they typified their customers, they claimed they used Mandarin because that was the language that, by probability, would most often be understood by the customers. This seemed to be true, though there were also enough instances to show that Mandarin was not understood by all customers. Furthermore, there were also significant linguistic accommodations made by both bakery workers and customers, which made it difficult to characterize concretely rules of interaction. At best, these rules seem very flexible and only subsidiary in understanding language interaction at BT Bakery.

In terms of language use in bi/multilingual restaurant settings, Hill (2001) and Barrett (2006) warn of the potential for racism and communication failure when parties only put up a guise of wanting to use Spanish as a "common" language. The use of a "Mock Spanish" by otherwise monolingual Anglo English speakers is seen by Hill (2001) as covert racism in all occasions used. There were no observed instances of any "Mock Chinese" at BT Bakery, as Asian customers far outnumber Anglo English speaking ones; any mocking occurring in the bakery was done by Lee or June. As Barrett (2006) notes, the "authentic" Spanish spoken by workers in restaurants is a form of solidarity and resistance. The same linguistic bond seems to exist between June and Lee in their interactions with more problematic customers.

The language ideology of Cantonese being "only a dialect" does not seem to hold at BT Bakery. If a language of typically higher social capital (English, Mandarin) is used by June or Lee, it does not have to be phonologically accurate; if mistakes are made, neither June or Lee go back to correct themselves. As an astute reviewer of this paper mentioned, the "marketplace" of baked goods doubles as a linguistic marketplace where language diversity and multilingualism are accepted and where Cantonese holds equal if not more currency than English and Mandarin in spending power.

Educational Implications

While this research might not fall into the traditional realm of classroom language instruction and language learning, it does examine multilingualism, a key component of educational research on language. Issues of cross-language social interaction have definite implications towards education. Implications from this research offer suggestions for teaching working-class immigrants, especially those who arrive in the classroom with a pre-existing multiliterate background. Skilton-Sylvester (2002) investigates immigrant Cambodian women's investment in ESL programs, describing how the changing identities of these women as workers ultimately determine their participation in or withdrawal from classroom ESL programs in the United States. Observing Lee and June's work interactions and use of English for specific purposes, it seems likely that they would not have much vested interest in ESL class enrollment for some of the same reasons as the Cambodian women that dropped out of the ESL classes in Skilton-Sylvester's study (2002). Data from this bakery study provides a perspective of how languages are actually used together and negotiated in real time. Lee and June are not lacking in English proficiency by any means; it is their impressive showing of multilingualism that ultimately empowers them, allowing them to build rapport with and mock customers. This suggests that ESL classroom expectations might also realistically incorporate more meta-linguistic strategies in conjunction with, or even over, accuracy.

Moreover, as Torras (2005) concludes, because of the intensely international and intercultural nature of today's society, companies in the service sector – and, I would argue, any institution with international constituents, including schools and universities – need to recognize that linguistic identities are “not something static to be taken for granted” (p. 121). Thus making students and educators aware of realities of people like June and Lee can serve as educational “teaching moments” while at the same time validating the often-overlooked multilingualism and flexibilities of those people who work in establishments we frequent the most.

Limitations and Closing Remarks

It is important to note that this was only a pilot study and does not attempt to be a full-scale ethnography. Further fieldwork should be (and currently is being) conducted in order to more concretely analyze the themes above.

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Notes

¹All establishments and personal names mentioned in this paper are pseudonyms.

²The term Vietnamese-Chinese () is used to refer to people of Chinese ethnicity who live/d in Vietnam. Vietnamese-Chinese are generally fluent in Cantonese (as parts of Cantonese-speaking Guangdong and Guangxi provinces border Vietnam), Teochew, and/or Hakka languages, as well as Vietnamese.

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Appendix

Floor plan of BT Bakery

