Chapter 5

The place of language: the language of place. Linguistic aspects of migrant ethnography.

What I must say depends too much on where I say it for the fact of my being here or there to be indifferent to me. [1]

5a. Chapter introduction

This chapter concentrates on two interrelated aspects of the interface between language and place in migration between Hong Kong and Sydney. The first aspect is an analysis of the importance of bilingual contexts and capacities for migrants from Hong Kong. The second aspect is a discussion of the methodology of ethnographic interviews in both cities in which the relation between language use and place is foregrounded.

The first part of the chapter examines the context of bilingual practices in Hong Kong, particularly in terms of the relation between Cantonese and English. Hong Kong people have a complex relation to English. It is not the 'first' language of everyday use, but it was (under British rule) the language of administrative rule and of many professional contexts. Hence its acquisition and mastery were – and still are – stakes in strategies of social advancement. The implications of Hong Kong's bilingual context are developed in a number of ways. Firstly, Hong Kong's bilingual context is a complicated competitive field, a linguistic market which conditions access to various spheres and opportunities, including emigration. Secondly, bilingual contexts are not simply understood as a happy coexistence of languages, but as a field of contending cultural styles and ways of being. Languages mark out territorial and social domains that have been historically produced. Hence, languages do not operate equally and in the same way in different places.

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[1] Todorov 1994: 22-23.

This has implications for the ethnographic analysis of cross-national migration between Hong Kong and Australia. Linguistic hierarchies and their institution in particular regions are an important dimension in the analysis of cultural transitions and migration. Migrants move between linguistic environments in which particular languages exert effects of dominance or hierarchy. Since subjects do not have infinite flexibility in acquiring linguistic capacities, language style (accent, syntax and general competencies) remains a more or less permanent marker of difference in (first generation) migrant subjects. Language is both a mobile communicative resource and something which one inhabits. For migrants from Hong Kong, language acquisition and enhancement are a basis for strategies of social enhancement, as well as a basis for cultural differentiation.

This territorial dimension of language use needs to be considered in ethnographies of migration. Languages and linguistic practices may be portable resources, but they are never quite the same entity when transferred to another place. Language as a key dispositional structure has the tendency to retain traces of its place of acquisition.

The second half of the chapter explores some methodological implications of this spatial dimension of language use. I discuss the methods that flowed out of the practical circumstances of working with migrant subjects in both Hong Kong and Sydney. This very specific research context was conditioned by the necessity of interviewing in English, a consequence of my linguistic limitations. My own knowledge of Cantonese is primitive to say the least, despite my sporadic attempts to learn it. Apart from the few words I knew from my background (third generation Chinese Australian) which mainly concern food (i.e. kitchen Chinese) my knowledge of Cantonese came from a technical college course completed some ten years ago, and some short courses in 1995 and 1996 run by adult learning colleges and the language unit of the University of Technology in Sydney. Hence, all interviews were conducted in English, with sometimes a few Chinese words being introduced into the discussion.

The arrangements and settings of interviews were indicative of the fleeting and interstitial nature of contacts with subjects for whom busyness and speed were paramount values. This was particularly the case with my interviews in Hong Kong.

This in-between-ness found its expression in the most common site of interviews, fast food restaurants like McDonalds. Fast food interviews were appropriate engagements for multi-sited research with busy, mobile migrant subjects for whom time is a prime value. The compressed and sometimes telegraphic data that arose from these interviews necessitated developing a way of reading migrant practices and subjectivities from the grain of momentary and often fragmentary speech. The final part of the chapter presents an approach to the pragmatic analysis of interview contexts which aims at locating the 'sense of place' of migrant subjects in relation to the migration process as a whole experience.

5b. The place of language

Before turning to an examination of bilingualism in Hong Kong, I want to make a more general point about language and the places in which it is used. Practical language use is never independent of place, time and social setting. Experientially any traveller knows this from going to a place in which one's first language is not the dominant one. Firstly, one's sense of place is defined as much by the sounds of the surrounding 'tongue' as by any differences in visual appearances. Secondly, the practical context and function of one's native language is different to what it is 'at home' where it is the central medium of defining the cultural order in place.

This incommensurability of linguistic territories is not just a matter of individual linguistic capacities. Languages have a 'place', a certain appropriateness within a field of socially recognised linguistic use. Hence, there can be no complete translatability. I will use a paper by Tzvetan Todorov to demonstrate the sometimes unsettling territorial effects of languages. Todorov was writing of his return to his native Bulgaria after 18 years of living in France. He found that a conference paper he had written in French about the pitfalls of nationalism did not easily translate into Bulgarian. He attributed this not to any problems of semantics or syntax, but rather to the dissonance of the language and the *place* of enunciation with the discourse he was trying to mobilise. "Condemning national values has a different meaning depending on whether one lives in a little country ...in the orbit of another, or whether one lives abroad...free from threat from a more powerful neighbour."

(Todorov 1994b: 22) More to the point, Todorov experienced unease and dislocation in his short stay in Sofia despite his fluency in Bulgarian and familiarity with local cultural mores. Conversations in Bulgarian seemed to locate him in a milieu which he no longer felt part of. Ordinary conversations in Bulgarian seemed to deny his whole subsequent development in France: "just as my bilingualism, or my dialogism, is constitutive of my present personality, so is a certain hierarchy (not just any)." (Todorov 1994b: 24) Todorov felt he could not say certain things he could easily say in Paris. A particular linguistic relation is expressed in his division of language use. French was the medium of writing for international journals, conferences, and the cosmopolitan milieu of which he is part. In Paris, Todorov would use his Bulgarian solely for intimate conversations with a few Bulgarian expatriate friends in Paris, and letters to relatives in Sofia. Bulgarian shrank into a private realm. Todorov was surprised to discover the disjuncture between Bulgarian and French in public contexts. Bilingualism, as a radical form of dialogism, is not always a happy polyphony of language use, but a struggle between discourse systems that each 'aspire to totality' (Todorov 1994b: 16). Languages themselves bear the weight of historically determined divisions of labour and hierarchies of use.

This 'struggle' between languages and their appropriate 'place' is a crucial part of the migrant's attempt to translate or convert fundamental cultural resources to another place. The relative ease with which English speaking immigrants to Australia are received is a case in point. They are often not considered to be immigrants to the same 'degree' to which non-English speakers are. As a well known author (in French) on language and discourses of nationality, Todorov had the highest intellectual and cosmopolitan standing. Nevertheless, he found that the cosmopolitanism he had achieved did not operate in Bulgaria and in the Bulgarian language. There were limits to what could be said in Sofia, as a peripheral language, culture and nation. The cultural command of a cosmopolitan disposition relies on hierarchies of language and recognised cultural knowledges.

Forms of speech have political and ethical dimensions. Language and specific hierarchies of languages associated with places and historical forces are part of a specific localisation which migrant subjects must renegotiate. For bilingual subjects (and even more so for migrants) these linguistic hierarchies present both practical and existential problems, even more so when there are linguistic difficulties. Language mediates migrants' sense of their place in the world, their relation to place and social scale.

5c. Contexts of bilingualism in Hong Kong

Among Hong Kong Chinese, the main everyday spoken language is Cantonese. According to Hong Kong government figures from 1997, 95% of Hong Kong's population speak Cantonese (*Gwongdung Wa*), compared to 38% categorised as English speakers (Hong Kong 1997: no page number) and 25% as speakers of *Putonghua* (Mandarin). These official figures tell us nothing of the bilingual continuum of language use in Hong Kong.

Linguistic use and the distribution of linguistic capabilities in Hong Kong is closely related to colonial relations. Commentators have referred to the high degree of linguistic enclosure in Hong Kong, produced by social relations characterised by 'separate lifestyles and value systems' with 'little interaction between the groups' (Luke & Richards in Gibbons 1987: 7). Nineteenth century colonial policy did not strongly stress English teaching in Hong Kong, and English did not tend to become the first language of native elites as it did in many colonised countries. In terms of everyday practice for the majority, the linguistic communities in Hong Kong did not interact much in many spheres of colonial society. Few 'expatriates' in Hong Kong made the effort to learn Cantonese. English usage amongst Hong Kong Chinese in general was limited to official, and certain professional, commercial and educational arenas.

The segmentation of the linguistic field between colonisers (English) and colonised (Cantonese) has become more blurred and complex from the late British colonial period, the handover to China and beyond. Language is an increasingly crucial and problematic question both for Hong Kong subjects – migrants in particular - and policy makers concerned with the future direction of Hong Kong.

Bilingualism in a country or region is rarely symmetrical and unproblematic. Bilingualism implies complex overlapping relations between languages which are shared, but not equally valued. Amongst Cantonese speakers in Hong Kong, the use of English still connotes power contexts and the social distance of authority, while Cantonese connotes everyday lifeworlds and a specific regional cultural realm (Lin 1996: 51). [2] For instance the few English phrases commonly occurring in Hong Kong movie depictions of the police or defence forces – which would be recognisable by most of the Cantonese-speaking audience – connote authoritative relations. These are mostly orders and responses to orders, such as ‘attention’, ‘yes Sir’, ‘sorry Sir’, ‘left-right-left-right’ rendered in a barking English. There is often a comic or parodic intention in these scriptings. This small example of the interplay and contention between Cantonese and English points to a marked ‘division of labour’ between the two languages.

An English speaker travelling to different parts of Hong Kong will be aware that bilinguality has a geographical dimension. In the course of navigating around the city, for which of course, speech is a major component, one notices that in certain centres there is a higher degree of English capacity, and a higher level of English usage in the bilingual mix of native Cantonese speakers. These centres included the CBD, where multi-national business and corporate linkages are concentrated, the more prestigious residential areas on Hong Kong island, touristic areas in Tsimshatsui, Monkok, Wan chai, and Lan Kwai Fong, and areas with high expatriate concentrations such as Lamma Island. English is more predominant in (high) cultural and educational institutions such as art galleries, theatres and concert halls, universities, and professional centres such as hospitals. Away from these areas and specialist centres, one is more likely to encounter people with very little English in

[2] A classic study of Paraguay illustrates the uneven linguistic divisions that characterise colonial and postcolonial contexts (Rubin 1968). Paraguay also has two official languages, Spanish and the main indigenous language, Guarani. Guarani is spoken by most of the people, and is the language of intimacy and solidarity, and the language used to speak to social inferiors. Spanish, spoken by roughly half of the population, was the language of power, used in official and formal contexts such as schools, businesses, and administration. Spanish is thus associated with non-solidary contexts and political power, similar to the position of English in Hong Kong. This has been a consistent finding where colonial powers systematically installed their own language for governmental purposes while the native language was maintained by the majority of the colonised (Foley 1997:334-335).

their bilingual mix. This was more likely with older people. This geography of linguistic practice is based on a spatialised distribution of linguistic and cultural capital. (I am speaking of tendencies not clear-cut regions.) English capabilities amongst Hong Kong Chinese are clearly not an either-or state, but an economy of competencies. One encounters a higher level of English competence in high (read 'western' as opposed to regional) culture circles such as theatre and the visual arts (but not Chinese opera), academia, international finance and exchange (although Mandarin is an important and competing medium for economic exchanges with China, Singapore etc.), and professional milieux. (There are some alternative professional fields, which do not rely on English such as Chinese medical practices).

English and 'Chinese' are the official languages of Hong Kong. However, Chinese was only belatedly recognised as an official language along with English in 1974 (Welsh 1993: 487). [3] Only after the prospect of the return to China became irreversible with the 1984 Joint Declaration, did the policy of 'localisation', the handing over of high-level posts in the administration and in industry to local Hong Kong people, become a real objective (Postiglione 1992: 20). This reluctant decolonisation could have led to the de-emphasising of English and the valorisation and increased use of Cantonese as the dominant vernacular language. Instead, there has been an increased demand for English-medium education, as Hong Kong people's perspectives expanded beyond the immediate region in the wake of the handover. This has to do with the mobilisation of migration as a potential strategy for a significant proportion of the population, since the countries of emigration and desired emigration were largely English speaking. More generally, English was perceived as the predominant language of capitalism, science, and technology, of the west. English acquisition is seen as a means for advancement in the postcolonial and post-industrial context (Ng 1999).

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[3] In terms of written Chinese, since there is no distinct form of written Cantonese, 'Chinese' was taken to mean the 'standard written Chinese' used in Hong Kong and Taiwan and the overseas Chinese communities. However, since the 1950s the PRC had been rationalising and standardising the writing system in order to make it easier to learn. The total number of characters was reduced and characters themselves simplified by reducing the number of strokes. The existence of two writing systems creates a disjunction for Hong Kong in the handover context. In terms of spoken language, Chinese clearly meant Cantonese as the main vernacular language in Hong Kong, but this too is now

Educational policies are fundamental in a bilingual context. Basic primary schooling for the majority in Hong Kong had always been in Cantonese. High schools were officially 'English medium'. The marked segmentation between the medium of teaching between primary schools and high schools is illustrated by these figures from 1980. The percentage of primary schools in Chinese medium was 91.4%; in English medium 8.6%; secondary schools in Chinese medium 12.3%; in English medium 87.7% (Hong Kong Education Department, in Gibbons 1987: 6). The general extension of high school education, which became free and compulsory from 1979, should in principal have made a generation of Hong Kong students into 'English speakers'. In practice there was (and is) a great variation in competency, since the majority of students have little exposure to native English speakers (Kwan-Terry & Luke 1997: 290-93). Generally, in spite of the requirement for teaching to be in 'English medium', students received a mixture of English and Cantonese from their teachers, of dubious pedagogical benefit, at least for English-language learning purposes. As Lin describes it, 'the teachers' and students' bilingual classroom practices represent their local, pragmatic solutions to the problems created by the imposition of a foreign language as the medium of instruction despite their having a common native language.' (Lin 1996: 74) Those who were able to attend elite private English-medium schools were most advantaged, and in general those with greater linguistic capacities in English inherited from family background had a head start. Upper middle class students tended to dominate areas which reward English proficiency, such as entry into the civil service, professions such as law and medicine and the prestigious Hong Kong University (Postiglione 1992: 21-3).

However, English-speaking remains an uncertain quantity for contemporary Hong Kong people, although possession of good English has clearly been a recognized form of cultural capital, and an essential requisite in certain spheres. English and Cantonese are no longer the only elements in the linguistic equation. The administration's policy leading up to 1997 was to "develop a civil service which operates efficiently in Chinese and English and is conversant in spoken Cantonese, English and Putonghua" (Hong Kong 1997: 25). Now that Hong Kong has returned to Chinese sovereignty, there will be further 'Mandarinization' in Hong Kong.

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problematic in the post-handover period with the prospect of Mandarin (*Putonghua*) becoming the

Language policy has become an increasingly hot political stake. It is a politically complex issue. Various groups express worries about: the loss of recognition of Cantonese; the attendant loss of Cantonese culture; the erosion of educational access and decline in standards of English, seen as vital to international competition; bureaucratisation and incorporation by the PRC associated with the introduction of Putonghua; the loss of traditional Chinese characters represented by the simplified characters used in the PRC.

Cantonese may be seen as a subordinate dialect to Putonghua. However, there is a complex play of linguistic distinctions in Hong Kong. The well educated may not always speak good English; successful business people may or may not speak Putonghua, although a significant proportion of the business elite having emigrated from Shanghai. Certainly, Putonghua is in increasing use in negotiating business and political connections in the PRC, as Hong Kong becomes more intermeshed in the Chinese economy. However, Cantonese is itself the subject of forms of linguistic valorisation, not only in Hong Kong, but in Guangzhou, where Mandarin is often stigmatised as the language of distant authority. Cantonese retains its pre-eminence in the sphere of regional culture and everyday life. [4] Cantonese has also gained considerable prestige and desirability in other parts of China, with people learning Cantonese in order to take advantage of business opportunities in Guangdong and Hong Kong (Matthews and Yip 1994: 2-3). In addition, Cantonese is the most prominent Chinese dialect in the west, since Guangzhou was the major regional source of migration from the mid-19th century onwards. There are ready-made linguistic connections through Cantonese to communities in countries like Australia, Canada, USA and Britain.

Hong Kong people are necessarily engaged in a complex linguistic market. For Bourdieu (1993:79), "(t)here is a linguistic market whenever someone produces an utterance capable of assessing it, evaluating it, and setting a price on it". With a terminology derived from economics, the notion of a linguistic market tries to

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principal language of power and administration.

[4] 'Standard' Cantonese is at the top of a regional hierarchy of Chinese languages. Stigma is often attached to the speaking of other dialects such as Hakka, Hokkien & Chiuchow, and to sub-dialects of Cantonese. (Kwan-Terry and Luke 1997: 290-1)

capture the way in which languages and language use are objects of distinction and hierarchy in various social fields. Bourdieu uses the notion of 'price formation' as a way of pointing to the differential values given to languages and language styles. These relative values can change as power relations between groups alter in various communicative arenas such as administration, education, media, technology, and as they are brought into play in particular social fields as elements of the cultural capital held by agents. This becomes more complex in migration, where subjects move between quite different linguistic fields. In the situation of returnees or astronauts, language capital can be exploited in numerous ways. An improved command of English may be very useful in Hong Kong or China, especially in certain specialised fields. But the difficulties of acquiring and maintaining language skills between linguistic fields, particularly for the children, is a major problem. Language acquisition and maintenance can be a source of either enhancement or limitation to cross-national movement.

Linguistics in its more formalist guise tends to treat languages as separate systems or codes. These can nevertheless be brought together by subjects 'switching' between language usage in a single enunciative exchange. Sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists have often demonstrated how code-switching enacts various forms of social marking, in which the relations between languages and language styles are active indicators of status and hierarchy (Rubin 1968; Foley 1997: 333-7). [5]

One study of code switching was conducted with students of Hong Kong University, Hong's Kong's oldest (and most colonial) university, where teaching was traditionally done entirely in English. It is hardly generalisable to Hong Kong Chinese as a whole, because English competencies would be abnormally high. Nevertheless, even in this untypical context, Gibbons found a 'strong social norm' against the speaking of English amongst an exclusively Chinese audience. Speaking English in ordinary conversation was interpreted as showing off, and as a denial of Chinese ethnicity. There was a large vocabulary of insults used for those deemed to be speaking English in an inappropriate context. Gibbons saw this stigma against the use of English by those who spoke it relatively competently (as students of Hong

Kong University do, compared to the general population) as differing from the situation in other countries with British colonial histories, such as Singapore, Kenya, India and Uganda, where the speaking of English was displayed as a badge of elite membership. Bilingual choice of language use has much to do with the 'identity characteristics' of interlocutors (Gibbons 1987: 30, 130). Between Hong Kong bilingual speakers, establishing a link with a shared Cantonese background is often more appropriate in establishing intimacy and commonality than the expression of the prestige and authority of English.

All of this points to the ambivalence many Hong Kong people feel towards English. The use of English between Cantonese speakers is often referred to as *baahn yeh* – 'acting' or 'putting on airs' (Lin 1996: 68). This local critique of English occurs at the same time as it is recognised and valued as a social asset. Even the best-educated *Heunggong yan* who most benefit from their English proficiency have internalised the bifurcation of the linguistic usage into realms of power/governance, and 'local knowledge'/intimacy. Interviewees often remarked on their incapacity to talk of emotions or 'deep feelings' in English.

English, supposedly the pre-eminent 'world' language of commerce, science, computers, media etc., may be tied to prestige, cosmopolitanism and authority, but the complementary association of Cantonese with locality and solidarity makes for a highly segmented field of language practices. This is further complicated by the greater integration with China and the increasing use of Putonghua as administrative language. But there has long been a strong regional linguistic assertion of Cantonese, which has maintained itself strongly in Guangzhou province. Hong Kong popular culture, in the form of films and pop music, has used Cantonese to assert a Hong Kong Chinese modernism distinct from the state directed modernism of the PRC. It is open to conjecture whether this 'regional modernism' will maintain its distinction from the emergent cultural forms of popular culture coming from mainland in post-handover Hong Kong. Already we see local pop singers and filmmakers shifting to Mandarin-medium production to capture the larger market in the PRC.

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[5] This linguistic marking is also a feature *within* languages and the variations in language style which

5d. Language and migrant strategies

I have been discussing the bilingual context in Hong Kong and the position of English in a complicated linguistic market. English is a significant part of most Hong Kong people's 'bilinguality' in that it enters into everyday code-switching in speech and writing (Ng 1999). However, there are large differences in English speaking capacities and in the need to use English. Cantonese and English are contending elements within a specific bilingual context. The bilingualism of Hong Kong people emerges out of a complex and hierarchised 'linguistic market' created from a lived colonial history. Hong Kong people engage in a linguistic field in which a range of strategies are possible. Migration to an English-speaking country such as Australia is inherently a linguistic strategy. Migrants attempt to transfer and convert forms of cultural capital, including linguistic capabilities, into other national fields. On the other hand, as I will argue, they may also be enhancing English speaking capabilities and other social and educational capacities to better engage in Hong Kong life.

Linguistic assets are a key resource for migrant strategies. The degree of linguistic adjustment required will vary greatly depending on the degree to which linguistic capacities transfer to different linguistic markets. Emigration often requires a substantial investment in learning acquiring or extending competency in another language and its local vernacular contexts. This may take place through formal education or through immersion in specific contexts such as workplaces. In the case of Australian immigration this usually means extending capacities in English. There is little likelihood that contemporary immigrants to Australia could continue to exist in a Cantonese-speaking milieu.[6] None of my informants entered linguistic and social 'enclaves' in Australia where they were able to exist in a primarily Chinese-speaking environment (a situation which is more likely in the US). They were all actively engaged in the English speaking world of work or study, in whatever field. Only elderly, retired parents who accompanied several informants live largely without using English. My informants were all engaged in occupations that required a high

mark out class, region, ethnicity, education and gender. See Labov 1972, and Trudgill 1983: 134-6.

[6] By contrast my paternal grandmother, who came to Australia from China during the 1920s, lived for some 50 years without acquiring more than a handful of English words.

level of English usage, usually with a public interface. On the other hand, Australian census statistics of language use show a high use of Chinese as the first language in the home compared with other Asian immigrants. [7]

As mentioned in the previous chapter, overseas study has been a common strategy of Hong Kong families with the means to send their children abroad for periods of high school or university education. International educational strategies, which result in the enhancement of English language skills, are often closely connected to future migration. 'Elite' Hong Kong families have long sent children overseas to enhance their educational prospects. More common amongst my informants was the 'middling' strategy of attempting to bypass the educational/linguistic streaming which limits opportunities in Hong Kong. [8]

I have been arguing that there are strong connections between language and place. Language practices are generated within contexts of social relevance to particular places and domains. These places are in part constituted by language, or rather languages, within the linguistic field that is operating in that locality. It makes a difference where you are speaking from. Language is not separable from the place of utterance, but is always 'saturated with context.' (Hanks 1996: 140) This is what Todorov discovered on his return to Bulgaria – that linguistic contents are not unproblematically translatable between places. Migrants, and especially 'transmigrants' move in an out of linguistic territories to which they must adjust.

Because subjects do not simply 'use' languages, but rather dwell within them as one inhabits a familiar (or less familiar) place, language is often closely tied to an ongoing sense of identity. For many Hong Kong subjects speaking English entails a struggle to feel at home in their speech. One informant, Connie, talking in Hong

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[7] The 1996 census reported that over 91% of Hong Kong-born people spoke a non-English language (mainly Chinese) at home.

[8] Nonini (1997: 208-14) categorises strategies of middle-income Chinese in Malaysia seeking education overseas as 'middling transnational transversals'. Nonini sees these as attempts to accumulate qualifications and connections that can be utilised in gaining entry to global markets and professional networks. These global networks are already located in Hong Kong. Such middling strategies may facilitate either movement out of Hong Kong or a means of enhancing opportunities in Hong Kong.

Kong about why she decided to return after almost five years of living in Sydney, includes the language context as part of her ‘reasons’ for leaving Sydney.

> Living in Sydney, its good for family, I think with children, but not for singles. Sydney, they say it’s a multicultural society. But I think that, firstly, the mother tongue is not Chinese, its not Cantonese, its not the same feeling, so . . that’s why I want to come back.

A great deal is compressed into this short evaluation of living in Sydney. Language was a key component in Connie’s sense of a homely place. Connie referred to her isolation and yearning for family and friends – she had no family in Sydney and many of her Hong Kong friends had returned to Hong Kong. She associated this loss of intimacy with the familiarity with the cultural world in Hong Kong, and to the ‘mother tongue’ of Cantonese. Neither the rhetoric nor the lived experience of Australian multiculturalism (which she had been discussing) could provide her with ‘the same feeling’ of fitting in as in Hong Kong. A discourse about places brings together language, social networks, and the interpretation of cultural norms and affects in a fuzzy set of associations. But it was the lack of a familiar linguistic environment that provided the strongest focus for Connie’s yearning.

Connie’s English obviously did not provide the ontological security of the mother tongue, in the way that Cantonese did. How should we understand ‘Hong Kong English’, and how effectively does it transplant into migrant contexts? It is difficult to describe ‘Hong Kong English’ as a linguistic entity, since there is not a general and homogenous enough usage that would enable its description as a distinct vernacular form. While English competence varied greatly amongst informants, for all of them[9] it was a ‘second’ language, not a native, intuitive language.

Difficulty with English and its everyday usage was one of the biggest problems mentioned by informants in Sydney. English is not a ‘foreign’ language for my informants, but a *more* or *less* developed element of their bilingual background. The degree to which it is felt to be problematic depends very much on the mode of a

[9] One exception was a teacher of English literature who spent part of her childhood in Mauritius and lost her written Chinese ability.

person's English acquisition, on educational and familial backgrounds. The majority of informants possessed a 'middling' English proficiency.[10] Most subjects had acquired and augmented their English capacities through the public school system and through their tertiary training in less prestigious professional courses, such as engineering and nursing. The few people who were fluent or near-fluent English speakers were all in higher status professional spheres, such as law, medicine and university teaching, or in business. These people had all spent a considerable time in schools or universities in Britain, Canada or Australia. There was a strong isomorphism between English proficiency and the status of social positions in Hong Kong, at least in this small sample of people.

Because they are acquired along with other dispositional schemes, languages encompass specific ways of thinking and referring to the world. In a bilingual context, the association of a language with specific spheres is part of the character of that language. I have noted the historical association of English with law, governance and the authority of the state (although this is clearly changing now that Hong Kong is part of China). Language proficiency in 'second' languages tends to be highly attuned to particular fields in which the language was acquired. One informant – an electrical engineer – could convey complex technical information about optical wiring much more easily than he could describe ordinary events away from his workplace. The contents and character of language tend to reflect the semantic and conceptual orientation of the spheres of education, occupation, social milieu and so on, in which they were formed.

Informants would often say they could not express certain concepts in English, or that English was not appropriate for conveying affect. Stanley, speaking of his children's competence in Cantonese, expressed the gap between a first language and one that is acquired as a supplement to another.

> They can't *really* speak Chinese. That's a problem. I talk to them, but they cannot tell you their feelings. Simple things they can, but in order to express their deep feeling, they can't, they have to use the English words. Same as we do, but the opposite. If I

[10] I have no professional judgement to back up this assessment of linguistic capacities.

> want to express myself really, when I'm in an emotional mood, I have to use some Chinese words.

Stanley recognised the linguistic gap that will inevitably develop between first and second generation migrants. Primary languages tend to remain ontologically primary for their speakers. They point backwards to a place of acquisition because they have an affective resonance with childhood and the make-up of the person. Primary languages are a basic ground for identification with a familiar 'local' world.[11] Stanley's children can't 'really' speak Cantonese, which will be destined to be 'secondary' for them, just as English remains secondary to Stanley. His children's bilingualism is an inversion of their parents'.

Hong Kong emigrants may be bilingual, but they rarely have an equal grounding in two (or more) languages.[12] There was considerable variation in the English competence of interviewees. Their English ranged from close to fluency to fairly poor.[13] The majority were somewhat short of the fluency required in many everyday interactions in Australia.

Interviewees often commented negatively or even apologised to me for their poor English competence in Sydney, but never did so in Hong Kong, where Cantonese is 'at home'. Possession of language and language style can be a matter of honour or shame, depending on where you are located. Language is as much an aspect of a place as a visual landscape. Speech surrounds and envelops the native-speaker with its familiarity and recognisability, while the non-native speaker is engulfed in uncertain sounds and meanings. It makes a difference where a language is spoken, and where it 'belongs'.

[11] This is not to say they remain primary in every case, that they cannot be lost, or that language does not become creolised.
[12] A few of my informants were 'tri-lingual', with a command of Putonghua. These were relatively older people who had come to Hong Kong from China.
[13] However, even the weakest English speakers are of a higher standard than many Hong Kong-ers, because of their histories of higher education and professional and para-professional careers, and because there is a requirement to demonstrate competence as part of Australian immigration requirements.

5e. Interviews in English: some methodological implications

Thus far I have focused on the complex bilingual contexts that face Hong Kong people, and the strategic importance of language capacities for migrant subjects. I have also suggested that various spaces and domains result from uneven hierarchies of linguistic recognition, and that negotiating these territories is a key task for many migrants from Hong Kong.

The remainder of the chapter will be concerned with methodological implications of this spatiality of language for working with migrant subjects in different national 'sites'. Sites within a 'multi-sited ethnography' are not simply 'there': they emerge with the unfolding of the research that brings them into being. Interviews with subjects at different locations and temporal points in migration processes were the main point of entry to accessing interviewees' 'sense of place' and dispositions towards places within a specific migrant orbit. Hence it is necessary to examine the interview itself as a site and a spatial practice in which specific accounts of place could be generated.

I want to first consider the effect of English as a medium for interviews. My lack of proficiency in Cantonese, the primary language of my informants, threw up many research problems. The overall scope of dialogue was limited, and interviews were conducted in English. I could not easily reconcile myself to 'not speaking Chinese'[14] when engaged in ethnographic research. Informants' lesser capacity in English to express complex (or even not so complex) thoughts and conceptions affects the material on which the research is based. There was the ever-present danger of misinterpreting details. Also my lack of written Chinese understanding limited my access to textual and media sources of knowledge common to my informants. My linguistic lack led me to work more closely with verbatim interview texts. In working closely with the English accounts of Chinese speakers, I was

[14] I refer to Ien Ang's paper, 'On Not Speaking Chinese'. Ang argues from the perspective of the Chinese-looking 'overseas'-born person who is judged as inauthentic because she is unable to speak Chinese. She notes the powerful aura of China and Chineseness in the west which is disabling for those not bearing originary Chinese cultural competencies, 'depriving them of an autonomous space in which they can determine their own trajectories for constructing cultural identity' (Ang 1994: 13). Nevertheless, not speaking Chinese makes it hard if you want to speak to the Chinese.

positioned in an uncertain struggle to translate understandings, both on the part of my informants and on my own part as a researcher. In some ways these limitations determined my methodological approach to this research. That is one reason why this study is so grounded in presence and lived space. I was led to concentrate on the most ordinary, mundane details of migrant practice. In terms of interpretation and analysis, I focused closely on the fine grain of interview texts, attempting to locate the positioning of the speaker in relation to the places and practices they were describing.

The extensive citation of sometimes imperfect Hong Kong English may not be flattering to its speakers. Although the speech of interviewees was communicatively adequate in its context presenting my subjects' speech as printed text with grammatical or lexical 'mistakes' may seem to infantilize subjects. However, I maintain that presenting the 'grain' of actual speech has a value in accessing migrant self-understandings. Preserving the 'bad English' of my informants is a way of maintaining a sense of the linguistic struggle of migrancy, which is at the same time a struggle to translate meanings and significances to new contexts.

Working solely with English was not entirely a negative. Sometimes the struggle with a less familiar language could enable opportunities for expanded communicative exchanges between native and non-native speakers, a shared reflexivity about the taken for granted nature of meanings. Janie, discussing her difficulties with English in Australia raised this possibility:

> J: That's something about having to work so hard to understand someone talking in English. An opportunity sometimes, talking to a person, we both trying to understand something, but having some trouble . . . they need to explain what their meaning is, it helps me understand more how they're thinking.
>
> P: You mean, because you're trying to understand what's going on, the other people try harder to understand as well? If they can make that effort, it's good for both.
>
> J: Yeah, I suppose so. Like, if they see that you're struggling they feel this interest, they feel, like, to go on because you like them. But then, at the same time, if they are comfortable with you, then they will go on, trying to understand you.

Janie presents the possibility of an 'ideal speech situation'[15] in a situation of linguistic difficulty. This could arise where there is a will on the part of both interlocutors to maximize understanding, resulting in a reciprocal labour of understanding. The difficulties of translation may sometimes provide conditions for the questioning of ordinary meanings that are usually taken for granted in everyday language of 'fluent' speakers. This potential for a negotiated reflexivity between English speakers of different backgrounds and competencies may offer compensations for the deficits of understanding which often occur in everyday linguistic transactions.

5f. Inter-views to go: fast food ethnography

Most of my information about migrant practices was obtained through interviews – some entailing a more 'formal' division between questioner and answerer, and some more informal, in a mode closer to 'conversation'.[16] This was sometimes supplemented by 'observation' i.e. hanging out with subjects with whom I was able to form a more enduring relationship. However, these relationships were few, since migrant subjects are usually busy and jealous of their time. Much of the information I use came from quite brief interview exchanges.

I have been arguing that the location of speech acts has an importance. Since interviews draw on spatial contexts, the positioning of bodies, surrounding objects and the symbolic aspects of a place, the actual location of interviews in Sydney and Hong Kong is of interest. The way in which interviews were arranged is pertinent to this discussion. Interview occasions and sites, in Sydney or Hong Kong, were usually suggested by the interviewee to fit into busy schedules. These venues already suggested a scenario – how much time would be available, the degree of intimacy and intensity and so on. Locations ranged from restaurants, coffee/teashops, parks,

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[15] This is no more than an oblique allusion to Habermas's extensive theories of communicative rationality. See, for instance Habermas 1982: 272.

[16] 'All questioning is a forcible intrusion', as Canetti (1973: 331) once wrote. 'Structurally' the interviewer no doubt has greater power over the interviewee, in determining the order of questioning, setting the basic agendas of discussion, and in ultimately in being the proprietor of the resultant 'text'. This text is after all a potential resource for the researcher, but not for the person being researched.

homes and workplaces of informants. Meetings arranged in people's homes were unusual, especially in Hong Kong. Restaurants were the most common venue for busy people, usually during lunch hours. This may be attributed to a strong link between food and hospitality for Chinese. However, these restricted meeting times were more contingent on the 'busyness' of subjects: Hong Kong people are almost always (or profess to be) busy, particularly when in Hong Kong. It seemed almost a defining element of Hong Kong hospitality to express how busy you are and then to generously 'make time' for the other person. Sometimes this time did not even include (physical) meeting – several respondents I met only through telephone or email exchanges. These fleeting and interstitial exchanges seemed pertinent to the speedy and purposeful urban dispositions I discussed in chapter 3.

Location of interviews: Sydney					
Home	Workplace	Restaurant	Outdoors	Other	TOTAL
7	6	5	1	1	20
Location of interviews: Hong Kong					
Home	Workplace	Restaurant	Outdoors	Other	TOTAL
6	7	16	5	3	36
13	13	21	5	4	57

Table 8: Location of interviews by city [17]

The interview locations suggest a different spatiality of social exchanges in the two cities. Interviews were more likely to be conducted at a home in Sydney, and more likely to be at a restaurant in Hong Kong. [18] There was a greater use of outdoor spaces in Hong Kong due to the crowdedness of indoor space. Proximity to workplaces was a key aspect of interview location – most of the fast food locations were nearby to the workplace of informants. A number of interviews took place at workplaces, usually offices – these usually took place after working hours.

[17] 'Home' included both informants' homes or my home in Sydney and Hong Kong. Outdoors locations were mostly parks and public benches. 'Other' included telephone interviews, cars, and email.

[18] The greater use of the suburban home as a social interface will be discussed in more detail in chapter 7.

A common site for interviews (especially at lunchtimes) was McDonalds, a recognisable landmark for a non-local. In Hong Kong it seemed an appropriate place for an encounter with a foreigner, as an icon of internationalised taste. For my informants in Hong Kong, fast food outlets, franchised operations with generic fittings and colour schemes were preferred more for their visual style than for the speed of preparation of the food (or for its quality). They tend to be more roomy, brightly lit, new-looking with standardised layouts, usually with service counters where meals are prepaid. They are not as crowded as other Hong Kong lunch restaurants, and there was more possibility of a modicum of privacy and room for my cassette recorder and notebooks. Fast food restaurants provided a slightly more leisurely milieu than the standard Chinese eatery where there is often a palpable pressure to eat and leave quickly. People saw fast food venues as a place to 'get away'. Watson (1997:93) reports that consumers in Hong Kong McDonalds spent much longer eating meals than their counterparts in the US – 26 minutes as on average as opposed to 10 minutes. McDonalds curiously provided 'not-so-fast food' in a city of fast food.

Fast food (*faai cháan*) does not delimit the type of food served – there are Chinese-style as well as hamburger and fries joints.[19] Fast food restaurants are defined as such more by the generic style of their visual and spatial layout, the standardisation of their routines of self-service, and the standardised food appropriate to a meal that has little intrinsic interest in itself. Fast food environments are hospitable without the engagement required of hospitality.

An interview at McDonalds speaks of passages, moments stolen in mid-flight, in a place that could be anywhere. For Marc Augé (1995: 107), 'non-spaces' are generic spaces that are not specific to anywhere in particular, they are positions in-between territories – such as transit lounges for people who never enter a country, or motorways that avoid the inhabited places to which they convey the motorist. A non-space must be functional and generically 'familiar', but without a grounding in any

[19] Other popular 'fast food' outlets in Hong Kong in which interviews took place were Maxims and Café de Coral, which serve Chinese food, and Hardees, an American hamburger franchise found in Hong Kong. Other interviews in Hong Kong took place on park benches, a tea shop in Causeway Bay, more up-market restaurants and bars. Fast food interview venues in Sydney included 'food halls' in Sydney shopping centres, coffee shops and McDonald's.

‘organic’ sociability or cultural specificity. Curiously, we may sometimes feel quite ‘at home’ in these neutral, non-organic locales. They may be conducive to a reflexive solitude, or to an encounter with an unknown other.

Interviews on the run, fast ethnographic encounters, seemed an appropriate way to encounter subjects busily immersed in long-term migrant strategies. A fast food interview, even before it is conducted, already suggested some aspects of the exchange: the ordinariness and modesty of these encounters, the brevity of the exchanges, the temporariness of meetings in passing, and the contingency and incompleteness of accounts of processes which were not certain in their outcome. These kind of arrangements were more than likely to be made in Hong Kong, which accords with the urban style and valorisation of speed I discussed in chapter 3.

Although my intention was to trace subjects across migratory space and time in the multi-sited manner, meetings often fell through the net of my best laid plans. Provisional arrangements would be made for future meetings: ‘can you call me when you get back to Hong Kong or Sydney?’ I would ask. Cards would be exchanged. (A business card with contact information is indispensable for making any contacts in much of Asia.) But there would always be a doubt about whether this future meeting would eventuate, whether because of changed circumstances, bad faith or simply forgetting. Some interviewees are represented by just the single occasion, half an hour squeezed from a busy schedule. Clearly there are practical limitations to this style of ethnographic encounter. Fast food interviews imply a passing encounter. I could not expect to attain a ‘definitive’ understanding of a subject’s migrant experience and trajectory from a fast food interview. At best they provide a ‘snapshot’, a report of the co-ordinates of a momentary position, a glance at the screen of memory or a passing evaluation of a trajectory.

Interviews were ‘open structured’, without set questions, just a range of practical areas to be covered. Questions began with details of settlement in Sydney, movements between Hong Kong and Australia, particular places they lived, and their impressions of them. The direction and emphasis of the dialogue would then hopefully emerge from the flux of discursive interaction. In an open interview the interviewer must simultaneously direct, follow and interact in the flow of dialogue in order to build on the emergent *telos* of the interview. Interviewing resembles musical improvisation where a player must listen at the same time as intervening and shaping the temporal form and the material being created. The difference is that in the dialogue with the informant, the interviewer must aim to avoid distortions of the informant's viewpoint. The openness of questioning is an attempt to combat question effects, where the thematisation of questions leads the response in directions it would not have taken, where respondents tend to reproduce expected responses. A question becomes interesting for me when it enables or encourages the other person to go beyond an immediate 'fact' into some realm of 'embodied reflexivity', a triggering of some memory fragment or affective trace in which a subject has invested something of themselves.

There are hazards to this style of encounter. The brevity and sometimes fleeting nature of many meetings could limit the degree of engagement and mutual reflexivity that is needed to produce any insights. The open structure might not work if there was not sufficient time available for the dialogue to develop some useful direction. Interviewees sometimes expected a more formal agenda and theme to the interview, typically asking 'what is it you want to know?' I would not want to tell them if I did know. Interviewees might be less inclined to 'go with the flow', and supply more prefabricated responses. In general there was a willingness and a curiosity to engage in a discussion of their migrant experience (within the parameters of the half-hour of hamburger time they had allocated).

5g. Re-placing speech

Partly because of the condensed nature of many interviews and the limits imposed by my lack of Cantonese, I tried to maximise the understandings that could be generated out of the resultant material by relating it closely to the spatiality of the bodies of the interlocutors, the place of the interview and the persons, things and spaces, referenced and brought into accounts of migration. I wanted to bring the spaces of migrant stories into sharper focus by linking them more closely to the interview as a practice in itself. That is, an interview is not simply talk *about* some other practice or viewpoint. Rather, it is a performative (and collaborative) act, bringing other spaces into being in a particular discursive conjuncture.

I want to take a more theoretical detour to underpin my approach to the analysis of interview materials. I will draw on the ‘practice linguistics’ of William Hanks, an American anthropologist who has developed a synthesis of sociolinguistics and other philosophical and sociological approaches, including Merleau-Ponty, Goffman and Bourdieu. Mutual understanding is not purely reliant on a speaking a common language (or on equally shared language), but is more generally about a shared sense of ‘what is going on’ in a particular social milieu (Hanks 1996: 234). This provides an opening for understandings generated outside of language and its aspirations to totality. Language and social position, and the knowledge and capacities of speakers, interpenetrate to generate positioned understandings of where one is in relation to a social context. Dialogical speech always entails taking a point of view and an inhabiting of positions. As Hanks puts it: ‘to speak is to occupy the world’, not just to represent it (Hanks 1996: 236). Hanks’ work links language practice to the ongoing negotiation of lived space. The notion of an active occupation or inhabitance of places raises the question of how migrant subjects extend their sense of ‘where they are’ through linguistic means. Language is obviously crucial to ways in which migrant subjects accommodate themselves to new environments such as Sydney. This is obscured by the tendency to think of ‘space’ in visual terms.

When taking part in any dialogue such as an interview, speakers occupy a ‘participant frame’, but also bring into being other contexts (Hanks 1990: 141-3). Goffman’s notion of the frame refers to the background context of a conventional situation, the shared ‘principles of organization’ in any social setting, a slice of action which is both contingent in its outcome, and determined at some level by the participants’ acquired dispositions and sense of their capacities and status relative to other participants (Goffman 1974: 10). A basic face-to-face situation involving two (or more) participants is enacted in the immediate physical context. This context involves a specific place, a particular spatial arrangement in which people are positioned and position themselves in relation to other actors and objects, and for a given period of time.

For the French linguist Benveniste, “Verbal acts constitute discourse space creating a speaker, a location, and a moment of utterance that is utterly unique and always changing.” (Benveniste in Hanks 1990: 6) It is *through* linguistic practice that subjects and objects are constituted as relations, are located in a space, and projected into narrative. That is to say, there are no subjects and objects independent of their being made subject and object in speech or some other re-presentive mode. It is in this broad sense that all utterances are performative. For instance, when greetings are exchanged between two people, and introductions are made, each speaker subsequently represents themselves in terms of the first person pronoun, ‘I’. Having set up the primary frame of the interaction, a dialogue is not limited to the immediate environment. ‘I’ may become a separate figure, a character deployed by the speaker in a description that is ‘not in the world in which the speaking occurs.’ (Goffman 1981: 147) The speaking subject’s body and its immediate location provides the immediate ‘indexical ground’ for speech, accounting for ‘how utterances simultaneously make reference to and articulate with the context in which the reference is performed’ (Hanks 1996: 154-5). The body serves as a reference point relative to which other things are located. When a speaker discursively brings into play other places, times and social situations - even another ‘self’ - she refers to “places and objects distinct from the bodies of the interlocutors and yet defined in relation to them.” (Hanks 1990: 257)

Linguistic practices, in order to operate across changing contexts, include ‘shortcuts’ which allow speakers to make reference in highly economical ways by assuming the knowledge of the situation of utterance. ‘Shifters’, which include indicators of place like ‘here’ and ‘there’, indicators of specificity like ‘this’ and ‘that’, indicators of time like ‘now’ and ‘then’, and personal pronouns which index persons in relation to the changing relations between speakers in a discursive space, most clearly illustrate this flexible ‘context-sensitive’ aspect of language. Hanks broadly claims that deixis (and practices of making reference more generally) is a means to align and integrate different orders of communicative practice.[20] ‘Deictics ground the discourse in

[20] In his work on Mayan language and spatial practice Hanks shows in great detail how Mayan deixis is related to ‘orienting systems in the Mayan world’ such as understandings of culturally specific ‘core spaces’ such as the body, domestic space, cardinal points, agriculture and ritual spaces (Hanks 1990: 8). He is really describing the ways in which habitus is inculcated and empowered to act in spatialised and spatialising practices.

which they occur in the broader context of its production, connecting text to participants, circumstances, and the actual conditions of interaction. In doing so they provide a crucial point of contact between discourse and the sociocultural body.' (Hanks 1990: 8-9) Deixis is a way for a subject to make reference to the world relative to her body, utilising 'the apparent concreteness of body space', and the shared corporeal and perceptual field of other interlocutors, bridging the speech event and the narrated event. Deixis is a linguistic device that is germane to 'indexical displacements', in which a projection is made from the corporeal field, the immediate bodily space shared by participants, to a referential frame, an interperspectival space that is mutually available for understanding by the participants. Such speech is not restricted to known, experienced spaces – a frame space may describe 'virtual' frames to which speakers have access, spaces of possibility or imagination (Hanks 1990: 519).

Deixis is a means of 'filling in the gaps' created by the transitory nature of a speech situation and the place of utterance - 'here'. Because deixis occurs within the relativity of social contexts, the frame of reference may be greatly expanded ('here' on earth), or contracted ('here' on the tip of my finger) (Hanks 1990: 401). The understanding of context is normally supplied by non-discursive means between interlocutors. 'Here' may also be transposed, as in reported speech (where another being temporarily occupies the first person), or other speech practices in which a point other than the current frame of reference is identified. These shifts in scale are crucial to the integration of embodied sense, based in immediate corporeal experience, with orientations of a less immediate, more global or abstract nature. Deictic practices allow for the fuzziness and mutability of speaking practices. Sudden changes of frame and scale can be easily and swiftly incorporated into speech without disturbing the basic structure of a narrative.

A wide range of scales was discursively brought into play in my interviews about migrant trajectories. The most typical frame was defined by the 'here' and 'there' of Hong Kong and Sydney/Australia. (Which place is 'here' depended on the site of the interview). Reflexivity about migration tends to bring this basic duality into being since the basic territorial division in migration is so strongly marked. The bodily experience of the speaker is always the reference point for these frames, since speech draws on the body's acquired dispositions, tastes, perceptions and affects in trying to 'fit' with the world it has encountered in dialogue with others.

Speech practices can be understood as part of an ongoing orientation to new spaces and relations, the social topology and territorialisation of a given place. In the interplay of spoken language and lived space, 'both bear the traces of their joining' (Hanks 1990: 401). Spoken language draws its contextual frameworks from the relations of bodies and things in space and imagined space. Specific places are brought into relevance through referential speech. Speakers shift frames and perspectives during talk, referencing both positions in physical space and relational values within social contexts. The constant indexing in discourse spaces of many aspects of social relations and embodied experience provides a means of analysing the shifting perspectives of migrant subjects. I have been arguing for a social analysis of speech embedded in the immediate contexts of bodies and lived spaces. In the discourse space of dialogues about migration practices, 'here' was the starting point for accessing the larger contexts of my informants' movements between Hong Kong and Sydney.

I want to illustrate this rather theoretical discussion with an example from a dialogue with Stephen, a building engineer who was inspecting my flat in Sydney. This example points to the importance of extra-discursive elements (like things or images) within the scene of the interview. Subjects often provide clues to the way they were positioned in relation to a migratory trajectory, or to the way they experienced the immediate space around them in relation to other places.

In this (unplanned) exchange Stephen and I were discussing a recent hailstorm that had caused damage to the roof of my building. He mentioned that he had been in some bad typhoons where water had flooded into his apartment in Hong Kong. Noticing a poster image on my wall, Stephen said, 'I come from there, that's very familiar.' Seeing the image of a street on Hong Kong Island with its old double-decker trams and the usual dense array of neon signage had 'transported' him into the scene. He spoke of where he used to live, a 22nd storey apartment in Pok Fu Lam, on the southern side of Hong Kong Island. It seemed like 'another world' now, one to which he could not return, since he could no longer afford to live there.

Looking out the window at my view across Redfern and the south-east of Sydney made him think of the cost of a similar view in Hong Kong, and to reflect on the whole trajectory of his migration to Australia. Stephen had thought of returning to Hong Kong, but he now realised that time and the property market had conspired to close off that possibility. Also he had been gone too long and would not be able to get used to living in Hong Kong again. “Very crowded, no space.” A touristic image had triggered off a conversation which brought both Hong Kong and Sydney into alignment within a ‘discourse space’. The effect of my presence cannot be left out of this scene. Stephen was intrigued by my interest in Hong Kong and asked me what I thought of it, how I compared living in Sydney to living in Hong Kong. This was a way of indexing his own journey and trajectory. A reflexive engagement emerged out of two people referencing an image of a place, recognising the common experience of a place, and generating a narrative about contrasting passages to that place.

While this conversation may seem innocuous and ordinary, it contains some typical elements of migrant accounts. Stephen split his lived experience into two distinct ‘worlds’, in his case as much temporal entities as spatial. Quite distinct images, and sensual characteristics, and memories were ascribed to both places. These qualities were linked to a sense of a particular migrant passage and social ‘fate’, and to an accommodation with the present state of things.

This account is similar in structure to many of my interviews about migration. The discourse space is clearly divided in two parts, into the migrant ‘here’ and ‘there’. Reference may rapidly shift to different objects. In this case, ‘here’ was my flat, a view across the suburb of Redfern, a city, a country of which Stephen was now a citizen. ‘There’ was a picture on a wall, a memory of street life in Hong Kong, a flooded apartment, a crowded place, a real estate market. While having a conception of ‘here’ and ‘there’ implies a perspective ultimately grounded in lived embodied experience, this did not limit referentiality to fixed moments in time, or fixed locations. A subject is both ‘spatialized and spatializing’, existing within a spatial context while able to improvise new spatial connections.[21] Memory and imagination entail a re-presentation of space, as a subject shifts between referential frameworks.

Edward Casey discusses the constitution of the 'here' and 'there' in relation to the lived body. 'Here' provides a focal point of reference, a *place* from which an extended territory ('there') must be able to be constituted. Both 'here' and 'there' are multilocular and slippery. Firstly, many 'heres' can be postulated – Casey specifies five senses of 'here'[22] (Casey 1993: 52-54). Secondly, many 'theres' can be generated from each 'here', many possible divisions of the body, the bodies of others, and of the territorialized spheres of the social world. In establishing a place, a point from which a subject speaks, there is both a localisation of a standpoint (here), and a territorialization of place into more than one sphere, creating other places. This has many implications for the subjects' sense of being and the generation of territories of similarity and difference.

Phenomenological description of the dimensions of 'here' and 'there' is a means of generating a (hypothetical) understanding of the generic structure of place as it is individualised for a subject. It demonstrates how place is extended from the corporeal realm to index and hierarchise other realms; how it is constructed around a a division; and how it is intertwined with linguistic structures and conventions. In the following chapter I concentrate on a more specific analysis of here and there from the viewpoint of migrant subjects moving between Hong Kong and Sydney.

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[21] For Merleau-Ponty, 'spatialized space' encompasses physical space, "my body and things, their concrete relationships expressed in such terms as top and bottom, right and left, near and far", while 'spatializing space' refers to the subjects capacity to "'trace out space' with its interchangeable dimensions'" (1962: 244).

[22] 1) *Here in part* a localisation within the body, for instance, the point or part of the body from which we imagine we are thinking or seeing or feeling some sensation; ii) *here of my body proper*, the body understood as a unity, and possibly as an identity with the 'self'; iii) *here of my by-body*, a sense of the space incorporated in a particular bodily action; iv) *regional here*, a 'realm' of familiarity or 'property' within which a body feels it can move or act, such as a house, city even a nation; and v) *interpersonal here* my (or our) body, or country, as opposed to yours (Casey 1993: 52-54).

5h. Chapter conclusion

This chapter has brought together a number of apparently disjunctive inquiries: the social contexts of bilingual language use; the effects of place on what can be said; methodological problems of conducting interviews in a second language; the physical location of interviews; and an approach to linguistic pragmatics which foregrounds the relation between the bodies of interlocutors and the places brought into being in discourse spaces. What links these elements together is an interest in the interconnections between place and the dialogical articulation of 'where we are' in terms of social and spatial contexts. My discussion of interview methodology brings together the sociological particularity of relationships between interlocutors, and the way in which the multiple aspects of the interview context are brought into the frame of the linguistic exchange.

I raised questions about both the value of interviews not in a primary language of the informants, and about the status and nature of 'Hong Kong English'. English is nevertheless a part of the bilingual horizon of my informants, although bilingualism in Hong Kong is anything but symmetrical. Hong Kong people's struggles to negotiate English competency and performance in migrancy can be seen as an extension of the linguistic and social hierarchies present in Hong Kong.

Analysis of the siting of interviews pointed to the often momentary, 'passing' nature of ethnographic encounters, which found its expression in one frequent interview scene, fast food restaurants. Fast food interviews are perhaps appropriate for multi-sited research with busy, mobile subjects. The resultant telegraphic data necessitated finding a way of reading migrant practices and subjectivities from the grain of momentary and often fragmentary speech.

I approached interviews as 'sites' which condition the referentiality of linguistic exchanges, bringing together relationships between interlocutors, bodies and other things and qualities within a proximate space. The manner of occupying these dialogical spaces affects the way in which subjects could bring different spaces and times into play within a discourse space in constructing accounts of migrant trajectories. I concentrated particularly on the deictic aspects of interview speech because these point most to qualitative differences between places, and between social and cultural domains. My analysis examines patterns and continuities in the way that subjects mobilise and frame comparisons of place, of the 'here' and 'there' of migrant discourse space. Accounts of migrant passages strongly differentiate the qualities of 'here' (Sydney) and 'there' (Hong Kong')[23] in articulating an ongoing sense of place which always relates both places. This methodological discussion is directly linked to the analysis of interviews in Sydney in the following chapter.

[23] This is, of course, reversed for interviews conducted in Hong Kong.