Examining the Language Attitudes of Native Cantonese Speakers of Hong Kong Towards Minority Cantonese Accents

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1   Introduction

Hong Kong is home to many non-native speakers of Cantonese from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, leading to the existence of many non-native accents of Cantonese. However, unlike in many Western countries, there has yet to be research done on the language attitude of native Cantonese speakers in Hong Kong towards non-native accents, nor has there been research done on whether linguistic profiling is exhibited by native Cantonese speakers in Hong Kong, and this research project aims to gain insight into the above issue.

1.1   *Linguistic profiling*   Linguistic profiling is a phenomenon that is quite common in general. According to Baugh (2018), linguistic profiling can be defined as follow:

> "Those who engage in linguistic profiling make inferences about the speech they hear, and then they act upon those inferences by denying goods or services to the speaker based on negative stereotypes about her or his speech." (Baugh, 2018, p.63).

Linguistic profiling is the act of inferring the social group a speaker belongs to based on their speech features, and treating that speaker differently based on one's attitudes and believes towards that social group. The study of whether linguistic profiling is present is important as there have been many cases where minorities faced discrimination as a result of linguistic profiling.

Before examining the literature on linguistic profiling, we should first discuss how social factors can affect language perception. The phenomenon of linguistic profiling exists as knowing the social group(s) a speaker belongs to influences language perception. For example, Niedzielski (2016) ran an experiment to examine the stereotyping of Canadian English. In Detroit, the stereotype for Canadians is that they speak with Canadian Raising, where the diphthong /aw/ is produced as a mid vowel when followed by voiceless obstruents (eg: house and about) (Niedzielski, 2016). She invited participants from Detroit and asked them to listen to a series of recording and to do a vowel matching task. Half of them were told the speaker was from Detroit, and the other half were told the speaker was from Canada. Niedzielski (2016) found that participants made more errors when they were told they were listening to a Canadian. This was due to their assumption of Canadians speaking with Canadian Raising, demonstrating that knowing the nationality of a speaker will influence speech perception. This is important for the discussion of linguistic profiling later since this establishes the fact that our speech perception is affected by social factors. In addition, many social factors that affect speech perception are unrelated to linguistic accuracy (such as age and gender), meaning that our speech perception could be a reflection of our existing biases towards different social groups and not the linguistic accuracy of the speaker.

Moving on to the discussion of linguistic profiling, one of the most famous examples of linguistic profiling is the racial discrimination in the Philadelphia housing market. Baugh (2003) found that when he (an African American male) and many of his African American acquaintances called a housing agent to look for housing, they were often told there were no houses available, however, when they called back with a white accent, they were suddenly provided with a variety of options. Since the housing agents Baugh talked to did not see him and black callers were offered less housing than white callers, this led Baugh to hypothesize that the agents made our his race through his voice, and gave him worse treatment based on their negative attitudes towards African Americans (Baugh, 2003). Baugh (2003) then found out that his hypothesis was true, and minorities were being discriminated

against based on their accents. He also found that most listeners were able to make out the race of a speaker with just one word.

Aside from race, linguistic profiling of other social groups also exists. Douglas and Garvey (2001) found that housing agents in Philadelphia were not only profiling customers based on race, but on their perceived gender and social class as well. Douglas and Garvey (2001) found that female speakers were given less access to housing than male speakers, and lower-class sounding speakers were given less access to housing than upper-class sounding speakers. This demonstrates that listeners can discern multiple social classes from a speaker's voice, and linguistic profiling is not limited to just race.

1.2   *The sociolinguistic landscape of Hong Kong*   Before discussing how one can determine if there is linguistic profiling of minority accents in Hong Kong, we must first discuss the sociolinguistic landscape of Hong Kong.

There are three official languages in Hong Kong: Cantonese, English, and Mandarin. While all three languages are used in all domains of life in Hong Kong, Cantonese is much more commonly used than the other official languages, with 88% of the population using it as their native language (Census and Statistics Department, 2019). The second most spoken language is Mandarin at 3.9%, followed by English at 1.4% and Tagalog at 0.3% (Census and Statistics Department, 2019). This shows that the linguistic landscape of Hong Kong is dominated by Cantonese, despite there being three official languages.

Another important factor to consider is the racial makeup of the Hong Kong population, as Hong Kong has many immigrants from Southeast Asian and Western countries. According to the Census and Statistics Department (2016), the vast majority (92%) of the population are ethnically Chinese. Non-Chinese people only make up 8% of the population, and within these minorities, the vast majority are Asian, with non-Chinese Asians making up at least 6.3% of the population (Census and Statistics Department, 2016). The largest minority groups are Filipinos (2.5%) and Indonesians (2.1%), with only 0.8% of minorities being classified as ethnically "White", of which the British make up 0.5% of the population and Americans make up 0.2% of the population. This shows that Hong Kong is ethnically dominated by the Chinese, and the vast majority of minorities are from other Asian countries.

After looking at the languages most ethnic minorities speak, we should look at the attitudes Hong Kongers have towards ethnic minorities. A study from the Hong Kong Unison (2012) found that most Hong Kongers tend to have negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities from Southeast Asia, and positive attitudes towards minorities from the West. It was also found that most Hong Kongers are less willing to work or study with other Southeast Asians when compared to other Chinese people or Westerners (Hong Kong Unison, 2012).

Most ethnic minorities in Hong Kong speak Cantonese with a non-native accent. This could lead to linguistic profiling as most Hong Kongers should be able to identify the race of different minorities based on their accents, which could lead to Hong Kongers attaching their negative attitudes towards Southeast Asians to Southeast Asian accents and their positive attitudes towards Westerners to Western-sounding accents.

To find out if there is linguistic profiling of non-native Cantonese accents a matched-guise test was used to gauge the personal believes of Hong Kongers towards different Cantonese accents.

1.3   *The matched-guise test*   A matched-guise test is a test where a competent speaker of multiple languages or accents is recorded, and participants listen to and evaluate recordings of the same speaker speaking in different languages or language varieties under the assumption that the speakers in all the recordings are different (Kircher, 2015). While there are direct methods to gauge a person's attitudes towards an accent, such as a survey, the matched-guise test is superior as it mitigates individual variance within the stimuli. This allows for the observation of the person's more personal attitudes towards an accent (Kircher, 2015).

The matched-guise test has been used to show people's attitudes towards different accents in previous studies. For example, Lillelund-Holst et al. (2019) investigated the language attitudes of people from Copenhagen towards different Copenhagen accents using a matched-guise test, and have found that people from Copenhagen associate speakers of "Modern Copenhagen Speech" to be smart, while speakers of "Street Language" were viewed to be outsiders. Another example would be Loureiro-Rodriguez et al. (2013), where they examined the language attitudes of teenagers and young adults of Galicia towards three different language varieties: Spanish, Standard Galician, and Vernacular Galician. Loureiro-Rodriguez et al. (2013) found that most people had negative attitudes towards Vernacular Galician, and Vernacular Galician speakers were seen as less "appealing" than Spanish speakers. These two studies show us that we can find out people's attitudes towards different accents using the matched-guise test. Therefore, we could use the matched-guise test to examine Hong Konger's attitudes towards non-native Cantonese accents, and these attitudes can reflect whether there is linguistic profiling.

The matched-guise test has been used in Hong Kong to investigate the language attitudes towards different English accents (Chan, 2018; Li, 2009) and to investigate the attitudes of Hong Kongers towards the three official

languages of Hong Kong (Lai, 2015). However, there has yet to be research on the attitudes of Hong Kongers towards different Cantonese accents, and the matched-guise test can be used to gain insight into this issue.

1.4   *The current study*   The current study aims to conduct a matched-guise test to investigate the language attitudes of native Hong Kong Cantonese speakers towards different non-native Cantonese accents and to investigate if there is linguistic profiling of non-native accents by native speakers. This paper addresses the following questions:
1.   What are the language attitudes of native speakers of Hong Kong Cantonese towards non-native Cantonese accents?
2.   Can the language attitudes of native speakers of Hong Kong Cantonese be attributed to linguistic profiling?

2   Methodology

2.1   *Participants*   In total, 16 adult native Cantonese speakers completed the experiment, however, one participant noticed that some of the speakers were the same person, and their data were discarded, and only 15 responses were counted in the end. The age of the participants ranged from 20 to 56 years old, with a mean age of 43.5 years old. Of the 15 respondents, 9 were men and 6 were women. All respondents were speakers of Cantonese, most of the respondents also (75%) spoke English, and only 46.7% of respondents also spoke Mandarin. All the respondents used Cantonese at home and only 2 respondents (13.3%) used another language at home, which was English. The respondents were recruited from my social circle under the promise that they would get a gift voucher after completion of the survey. All of the respondents reported having normal hearing.

2.2   *Experimental materials*   The materials were created by recording three speakers of different linguistic backgrounds reading six passages twice. The first reading was done with a native Cantonese accent (native guise), and the second reading was done with a non-native Cantonese accent (non-native guise).

I gathered speakers who could speak with an authentic native accent and an authentic non-native accent influenced by one of the following languages: Tagalog, Thai, and English. The Tagalog speaker is a 24-year-old male university student who speaks Cantonese as his L1 but grew up exposed to both Cantonese and Tagalog. The Thai speaker is a 51-year-old female domestic worker who speaks Thai as her L1 and has been speaking Cantonese for around 15 years as a result of working as a domestic helper. The English speaker is a 57-year-old male university professor from the United Kingdom who speaks English as his L1 but has been speaking Cantonese for around 32 years.

Moving on to the six reading passages, they were created each with a characteristic of Cantonese in mind to help identify which feature(s) of Cantonese affected the judgment of non-native Cantonese accents. The feature targeted in each passage is missing in at least one of the target minority languages to elicit feelings that the speaker is non-native when listening to recordings in the non-native guise. All the passages were about everyday topics and sensitive topics were avoided. This is to avoid the content of the passages from biasing the judgment of the participants.

It should be noted that all the speakers were coached during the recording session to ensure the guises sounded authentic, and some recordings were edited after recording to eliminate elements that made them unnatural and/or unauthentic, such as long pauses, incorrect tones, and unnecessary vowel lengthening.

2.3   *Procedures*   The experiment was done by creating a survey in Qualtrics that contained and asked the participants to rate the recordings, the survey was divided into four parts.

The first part consisted of screening questions to ensure that the participants were suitable for the study.

The second section contained all the recordings and asked the participants to rate them in three different tasks. The recordings were presented one at a time and the participants listened to all the recordings from one guise before moving on to the next guise. The order of the guises and the order of the recordings within the guise was pseudorandomized to prevent the ordering from biasing the participants. For each recording, the participants were told they could listen to the recordings as many times as they wanted. For the participants to believe that each recording is produced by a different speaker, each guise was assigned a unique name. The real names of the speakers were not used to protect their anonymity. The participants were asked to rate the stimuli thrice.

First, the participants were asked what word(s) they think associate(s) with the speaker they just heard, the purpose of this question is to gauge the general attitude the participant had towards the recording.

Then, they were asked to rate the stimuli on a scale of one (not at all) to six (very) on the stimuli's association with different descriptors to gauge their language attitudes. The descriptors were: educated, smart, friendly, trustworthy, and upper-class.

Afterwards, the participants were asked how willing they were to form different personal relationships with the speaker in the recording on a scale of one (not at all) to six (very).

Finally, the participants were asked where they thought the speaker was from. The goal of this question is to see if they were able to make out the race of the speaker based on their accents.

For the third part, the participants were asked how willing they were to form different personal relationships with people of different ethnicities on a scale of one (not at all) to six (very). The goal of this question was to gauge the participant's general attitudes towards ethnic minorities in Hong Kong, and to see if there is a correlation between a participant's general attitude towards ethnic minorities and their rating of the recordings.

The final part consisted of demographic questions and questions about the participant's linguistic background.

2.4 *Predictions*   For the first research question, it is predicted that native speakers will rate Southeast Asian accents negatively, and the English accent positively. As it is likely for them to figure out the race of the speaker based on their accents, and their attitudes towards different minority groups in Hong Kong would influence their judgment.

For the second research question, since the participants' language attitudes are predicted to be negative towards Southeast Asian accents and positive towards the English accent, it is anticipated that the resulting language attitudes can be at least partially attributed to linguistic profiling, and there should be a correlation between the participant's evaluation of the stimuli and the participant's personal evaluation of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong.

It is also predicted that the English and native guises will be rated the highest and have similar ratings, followed by the Thai guise, and the Tagalog guise is expected to have the poorest rating. The English guise is expected to have a high rating as the prestige Westerners have in Hong Kong should lead to a positive rating. For the Thai and Tagalog guises, they are expected to have lower ratings as most Hong Kongers have negative associations for Southeast Asians, which should be reflected in their ratings.

3   Results

3.1 *General attitudes towards the guises*   Figures 1 and 2 look specifically at the results of the two major evaluative questions. Looking at Figure 1 shows us that, in general, the native guises had higher ratings than the non-native guises. The only exception is the Thai speaker, where her non-native guise was rated as friendlier and more trustworthy than her native guise. For all the descriptors, a pattern can be seen for the non-native guises. The Tagalog guise has the highest mean rating for all the descriptors in Figure 1, the Thai guise had the lowest mean rating, and the English guise was in the middle. The difference in mean ratings between the non-native guises is small for solidarity descriptors (friendly and trustworthy), and the difference is more significant for status descriptors (educated, smart, upper-class).
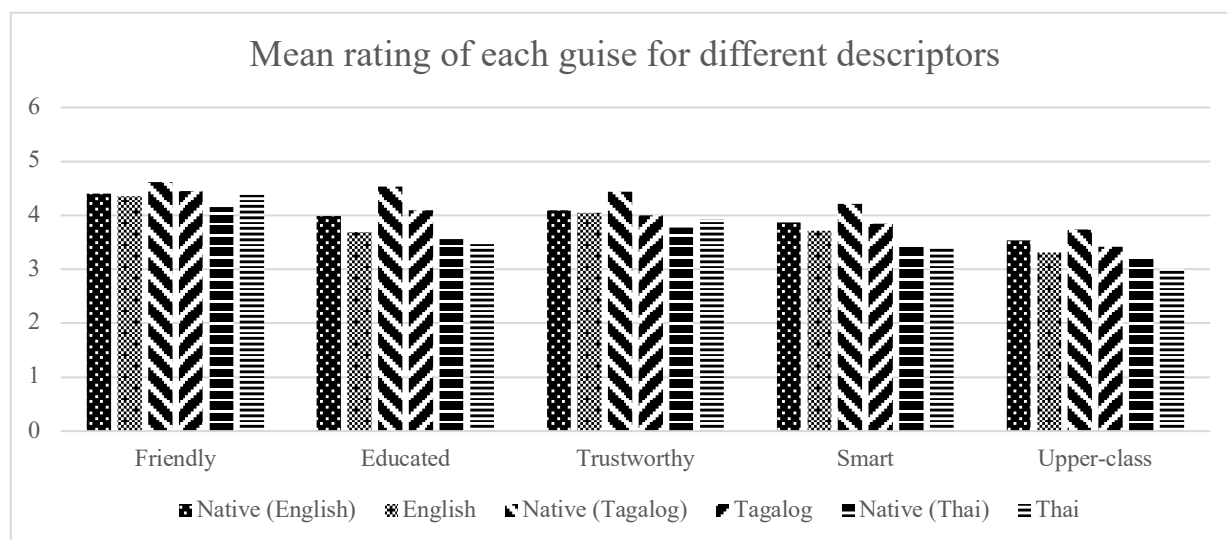

Figure 1: Mean rating of each guise for the different descriptors

Looking at Figure 2, we can see that the patterns are similar to those in Figure 1. Similar to Figure 1, speakers were given higher ratings when speaking in a native guise, and the Thai speaker is the only exception. For the descriptors "be neighbors" and "be family", the non-native guises have similar mean ratings. However, for "work" and "be friends" the Tagalog guise has a higher rating than the other non-native guises, and the mean ratings for the English guise and the Tagalog guise are similar.
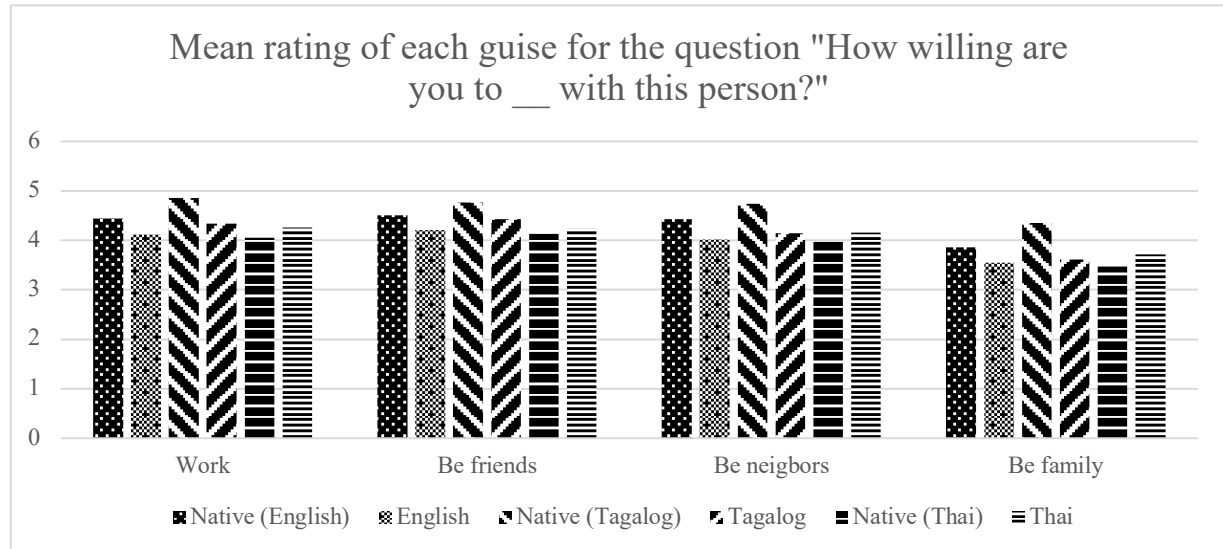

Figure 2: Mean rating of each guise regarding the participant's willingness to form personal relationships with the speakers

A multivariate ANOVA was performed to investigate if there is a statistically significant correlation between the guises and the ratings of each descriptor. The test was done with the guises as the independent variable, and the ratings for the descriptors as the dependent variables. Table 1 shows the results of the ANOVA, and the p-value is 0.001 or smaller for all descriptors except for "friendly". This indicates that there is a strong correlation between the guises and the rating of all the descriptors apart from "friendly".

One-Way ANOVA (Welch's)

	F	df1	df2	p
Work	5.93	5	249	< .001
Be friends	4.18	5	249	0.001
Be neighbors	7.59	5	249	< .001
Be family	7.30	5	249	< .001
Friendly	1.63	5	249	0.153
Educated	14.58	5	249	< .001
Trustworthy	4.79	5	249	< .001
Smart	10.24	5	249	< .001
Upper-class	7.42	5	249	< .001

Table 1: Multivariate ANOVA on the correlation between the guises and the ratings of each descriptor

3.2 *The perceived race of non-native guises* Most participants failed to correctly guess the race of the speakers in the non-native guises, and this misperception might influence their ratings.

Figure 3 shows that only 22% of participants correctly guessed the race of the English speaker. 33% of participants correctly assumed that he was a Westerner, 32% thought he was Southeast Asian, and there were

almost as many participants that thought he was Indian (21%) as there were participants that guessed correctly. It is likely that many participants evaluated the English speaker as a Southeast Asian.

For the Tagalog speaker, only 3% of participants correctly guessed his race. Surprisingly, the majority (51%) of participants assumed he was a Westerner, and only 30% thought he was Southeast Asian. It is likely the majority of participants evaluated the Tagalog speaker as a Westerner.

For the Thai speaker, only 10% of participants correctly guessed her race. Half of the participants thought she was either a Mainlander (22%) or Filipino (28%). 60% of participants correctly guessed that the Thai speaker is Southeast Asian, suggesting most of the participants were evaluating her as a Southeast Asian.
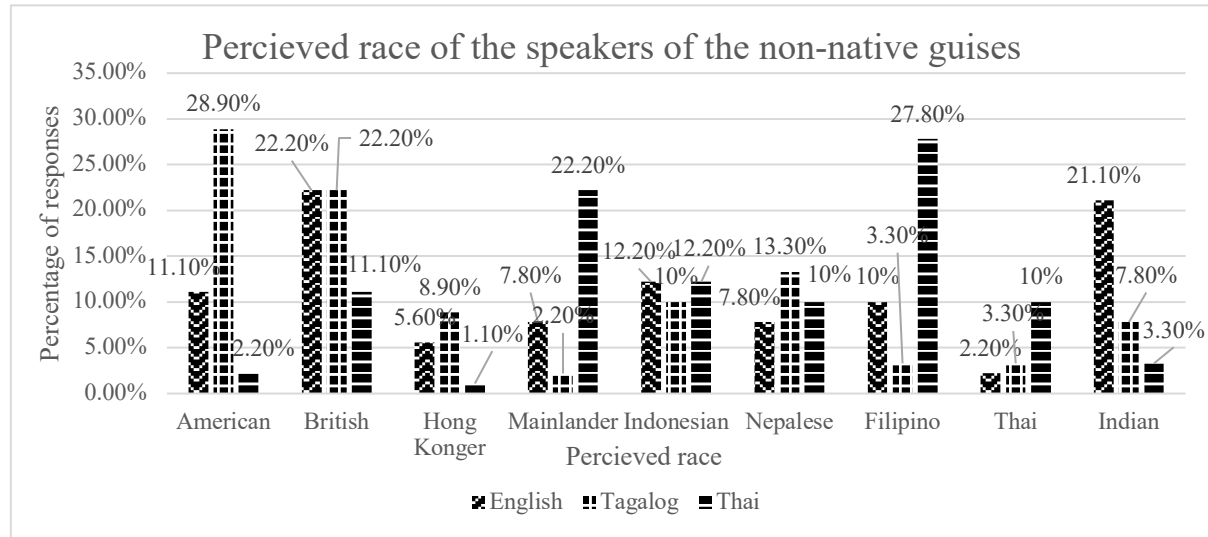

Figure 3: Participant's perceived race of the speakers of the non-native guises

Considering most participants misperceived the races of the speakers, it is very likely that their evaluations of the guises are based on their (mis)perceived race of the speakers. To test the above hypothesis, a multivariate ANOVA was conducted with the perceived races of the participants as the independent variable, and the scores for each descriptor as the dependent variables. Table 2 shows that the p-value is below 0.05 for all descriptors, and below 0.01 for all descriptors except "trustworthy" and "friendly". Table 2 shows that there is a statistically significant correlation between the perceived races of the speakers and the ratings of the descriptors, which indicates the evaluations of the speakers are influenced by the perceived race of the speakers.

One-Way ANOVA (Welch's)

	F	df1	df2	p
Work	5.05	8	192	< .001
Befriend	3.59	8	193	< .001
Be neighbors	5.21	8	192	< .001
Be family	8.87	8	193	< .001
Friendly	2.27	8	195	0.024
Educated	11.36	8	193	< .001
Trustworthy	2.76	8	192	0.007
Smart	15.43	8	194	< .001
Upper-class	19.59	8	193	< .001

Table 2: Multivariate ANOVA on the correlation between the perceived race of speakers and the ratings of each descriptor

3.3 *Participant's attitudes towards ethnic minorities and its correlation to ratings* Beginning with the participant's attitudes towards ethnic minorities, Figure 4 shows that the three races with the highest mean ratings are Hong Konger, followed by British, and followed by American. The ratings of the races outside of the top three are similar with the exceptions of Mainlanders and Thais, suggesting Mainlanders and Thais are seen as the more prestigious Asian minorities. Mainlanders had a higher rating than Thais for "be family" and "have your children marry", while Thais had a higher rating for "work", "be friends", and "be neighbors". This shows that Hong Kongers are more willing to form casual relationships with Thais, and more personal relationships with Mainlanders. Figure 4 also suggest that Hong Kongers have the same social attitudes towards Indians, Indonesians, Nepalese, and Filipinos.
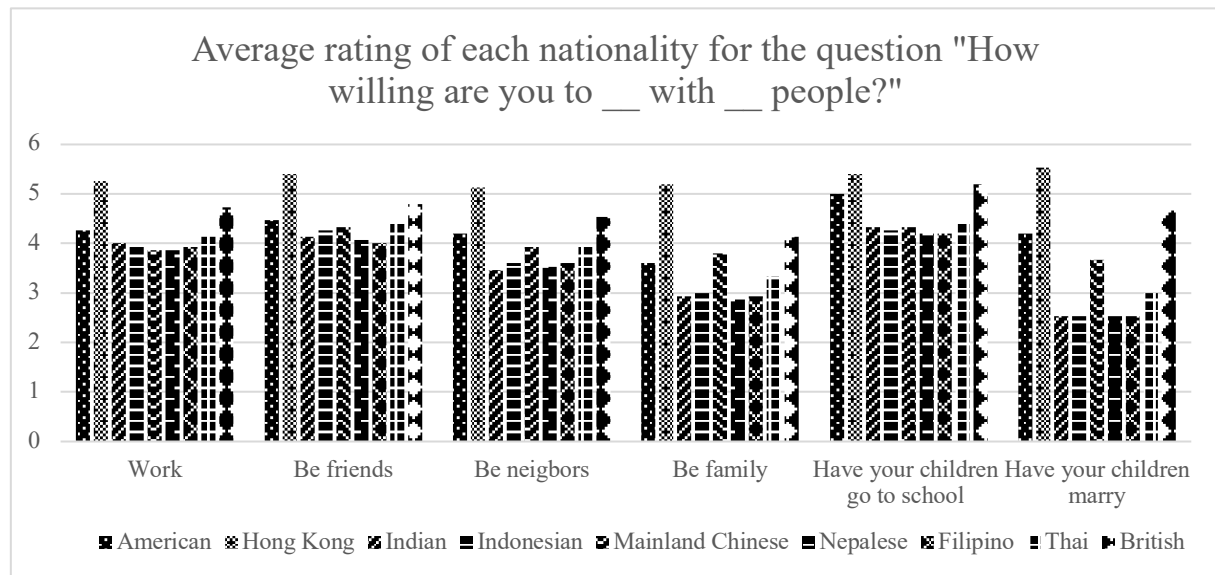

Figure 4: Participant's attitudes towards different ethnic minorities

The words participants used to define "Hong Kongers" and the words participants associated with "ethnic minorities" are shown in Figure 5 and Figure 6 respectively. Figure 5 shows that most participants associated being born or raised in Hong Kong with being a Hong Konger and only a minority though speaking Cantonese was a criterion for being a Hong Konger. Figure 6 shows that most participants associated ethnic minorities with South and Southeast Asians, and only one participant associated (in)competence in Cantonese with ethnic minorities. Interestingly, none of the participants associated Westerners or Mainlanders with ethnic minorities. Figures 5 and 6 show that most participants did not associate the (in)ability to speak Cantonese with ethnic identity and ethnic minorities are only associated with non-Chinese South and Southeast Asians.
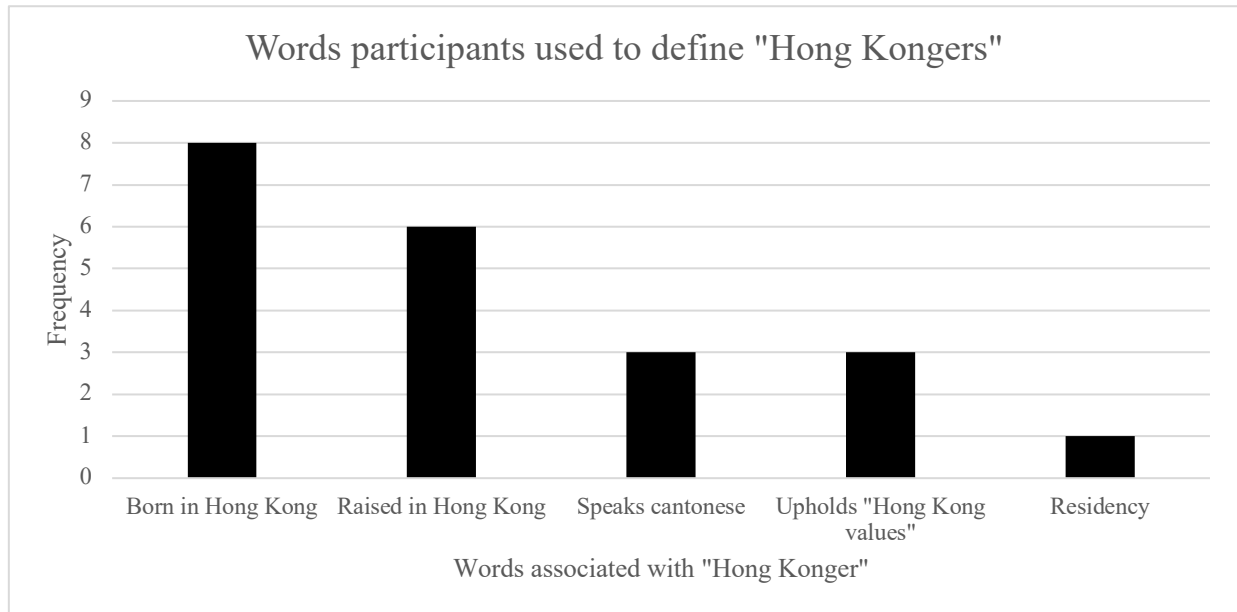
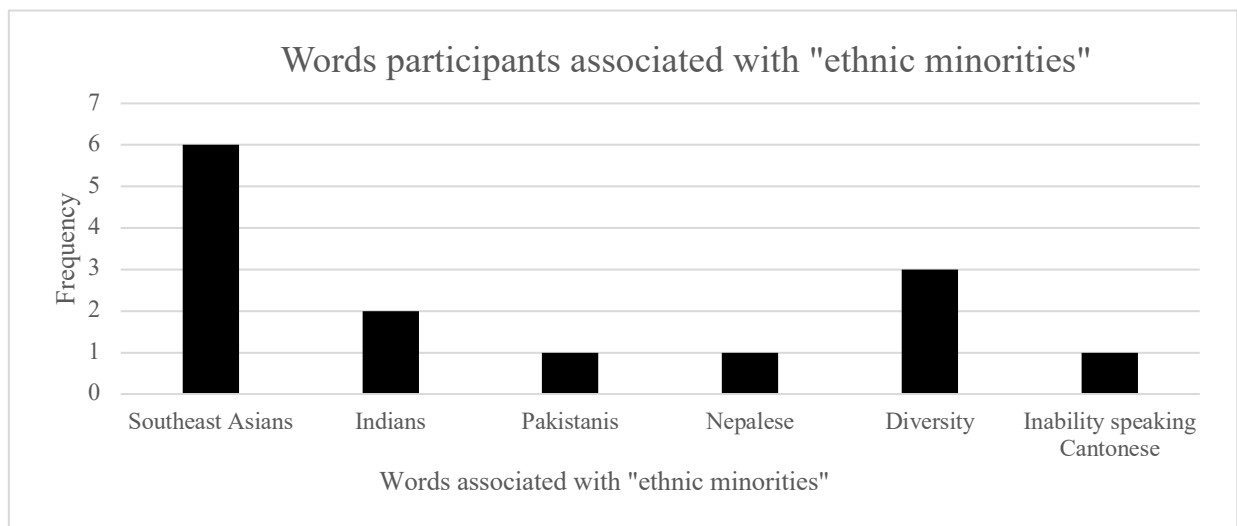Figure 5: Words the participants associated with the definition of "Hong Kongers"

Figure 6: Words the participants associated with "ethnic minorities"

4   Discussion

4.1   *Language attitudes towards non-native accents*   Looking back at the first research question, Hong Kongers have positive attitudes towards Tagalog and English Cantonese, and negative attitudes towards Thai Cantonese.

As predicted, the non-native guises had lower mean ratings than the native guises, and the English guise had higher mean ratings than the Thai guise. However, the Tagalog guise having the highest mean ratings was unexpected. As mentioned in Section 3.2, most of the participants misperceived the race of the speakers and their attitudes were influenced by the perceived race of the speakers instead of the actual race of the speakers. The language attitudes of the participants match the prediction when considering the perceived race of each non-native guise, where perception of being Western leads to higher ratings, while perception of being Southeast Asian leads to lower ratings.

The above suggests that, unlike what was predicted, most Hong Kongers are unable to deduce the race of non-native Cantonese speakers based on their speech. This goes against the findings of Baugh (2003) and Douglas and Garvey (2001) that listeners can infer the race of a speaker based on the speaker's speech. This might be explained by the difference in racial make-up. The aforementioned studies were conducted in the United States

which has a racially diverse population, while the current study is done in Hong Kong, which has a 92% Chinese population (Census and Statistics Department, 2016). As a result, Chinese Hong Kongers are less exposed to ethnic minorities than White Americans. This lack of exposure could lead to Chinese Hong Kongers being unfamiliar with the characteristics of individual non-native Cantonese accents, thus resulting in the observed inability to deduce the race of non-native speakers.

4.2   *Presence of linguistic profiling*   Regarding the second research question, there is linguistic profiling of non-native Cantonese accents by native Hong Kong Cantonese speakers.

Although the participant's language attitudes differed from the prediction, there is still a positive correlation between the participant's evaluation of the guises and their personal evaluation of ethnic minorities. As mentioned in section 4.1, the participants misperceived the race of the speakers, and their ratings reflect their attitudes towards the perceived race of the speakers. Since the recordings that were more strongly associated with Westerners had higher average ratings than those that were strongly associated with Southeast Asians, it shows that there is linguistic profiling and Hong Kongers have negative attitudes towards Cantonese speakers that are perceived as Southeast Asian and positive attitudes towards Cantonese speakers that are perceived as Western.

One might question if there is linguistic profiling if the language attitudes of the participants do not reflect their attitudes towards the actual race of the speakers, however, the results still fit the definition of linguistic profiling. For a person to be taking part in linguistic profiling they must "make inferences about the speech they hear, and then act upon those inferences" (Baugh, 2018, p.63). For there to be linguistic profiling a listener does not have to make correct inferences about the race of a speaker, they simply have to act upon the inferred race of the speaker in a way that is based on their preexisting biases towards the inferred racial group. Considering that the participants saw Southeast Asians as less prestigious than Westerners (Figure 4) and that this attitude was reflected in their ratings, this shows that there was linguistic profiling of non-native Cantonese speakers based on the participants' (mis)perceived race of the speakers.

4.3   *Participants' (in)ability to perceive the race of ethnic minorities*   As mentioned above, most participants incorrectly guessed the race of the speakers and most Hong Kongers simply divide ethnic minorities into two big groups: Westerners and South and Southeast Asians.

Looking at the participants' attitudes towards ethnic minorities (Figure 4) and what they associate with ethnic minorities (Figure 6), it is clear that Hong Kongers only associate Asian minorities with "ethnic minorities" and ethnic minorities are separated based on whether they are Western or South and Southeast Asian. It is therefore likely that the language attitudes of Hong Kongers are the same for all speakers that are perceived to be South or Southeast Asian.

5   Conclusion

In conclusion, native Hong Kong Cantonese speakers had the most positive attitude towards the Tagalog accent, followed by the English accent and the Thai accent. It was also found that there was linguistic profiling and speakers that were perceived as Southeast Asian were viewed more negatively compared to speakers that were perceived as Western. It should be noted that most native Cantonese speakers struggled to deduce the race of non-native Cantonese speakers.

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