

Abstract of thesis entitled

The Acquisition of Linguistic Politeness Phenomena in Hong Kong Bilingual Children

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This thesis investigates how English-Cantonese bilingual children acquire the politeness rules. The main research questions are: (1) what are the politeness patterns used by bilingual children in the developmental stages and how the usage is different from their monolingual counterparts; (2) how bilingual children acquire the socio-cultural aspects in their learning process so as to facilitate the precise use of politeness strategies.

Based on our findings, there is scarcely any use of explicit politeness device found in our bilingual male subject's speech. The use of utterance particles with different tones appears to be the principal politeness strategy that our bilingual male subject is able and willing to use throughout the period of recording. Compared with a monolingual subject who uses terms of address quite often as politeness device, we scarcely find any softening strategies such as the politeness markers that our bilingual male subject uses to reduce the force of requests. Comparison is also made by examining the data of our bilingual female subject. Her speech is thought of as an intermediate between the monolingual male subject and the bilingual male subject. She is found to adopt various politeness devices such as proper



kinship terms and politeness markers, which are also discovered in our monolingual male subject's data.

One of the reasons to explain these phenomena is the two languages' simultaneous development which makes it difficult for the bilingual children to acquire the linguistic structure as well as social and pragmatic meanings at the same time. This may result in a delay in acquiring the polite speech. In addition, the problem of transfer, which has been discovered in our bilingual subjects' data, may also affect the level of politeness. Such phenomena may reflect that influences from two cultures may exert pragmatic effects on bilingual development.