

Exemplary Capstone Projects

2021

(Independent research projects by final year English Majors)

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PREFACE

It is with great pride that I introduce the 2021 volume of the Exemplary Capstone Project of the Department of English at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. The Capstone Project requires final year students to carry out an independent research project under the supervision of a faculty member in the Department. The Projects cover a range of areas in Applied English Linguistics, English Literary Studies, and Creative Writing. The Exemplary Capstone Projects in this volume have been nominated by faculty members as representing the best of the Capstone Projects in 2021. The eight projects nominated this year exemplify the rigorous scholarship, excellent English communication skills, imagination, and creativity that the Department encourages in all of our students. These projects include work on language learning through gaming, English-Cantonese code-switching, justice in Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, and the influence of Dante's *Divine Comedy* on Blake's 'A Memorable Fancy'. The range of topics highlight the diversity in the skills and content knowledge the Department fosters in our students, not only topic selection but also in theoretical and methodological approaches to the topic. A sincere congratulations to all the students whose work is published in this volume.

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Investigating the motivation of English language learning and use: Case studies of English majors from Hong Kong and South Korea

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ABSTRACT

As the lingua franca of this globalized world, English is emphasized in different countries and regions around the globe, while motivation is a substantial element that leads to language learning success. This has resulted in numerous studies focusing on English language learning and using motivations, trying to promote their international status by enhancing the learners' English proficiency. Meanwhile, Hong Kong and South Korea share similar English educational backgrounds and cultures, and South Korea has been gaining popularity in Hong Kong in recent years. In light of this phenomenon, this capstone project intends to investigate the English learners' learning and using motivational development in Hong Kong and South Korea by interviewing two English majors from each place. This project discovered the participants' different developmental trajectories, suggesting that English language learning and using motivations can be fluctuated by various factors despite the similar contexts. Through identifying these factors, the project wishes to seek better ways to boost the English learners' motivations in their individual contexts.

1 INTRODUCTION

Motivation plays a significant role in language learning success (Gardner, 1985), prompting scholars to conduct many studies to identify factors that hinder or boost language learning motivations, hoping to find better ways for language learners to improve and succeed. As the lingua franca of the globe with elevating utilitarian value in this globalized world (Bourdieu, 1977; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011), many countries/regions emphasize English and English learning motivation becomes intriguing to scholars as people are eager to promote their national competence through enhancing their English levels.

Similar to many Asian countries/regions, Hong Kong and South Korea emphasize English even when it is not their native language (Kirkpatrick & Bui, 2016). Their emphases are proven by Hong Kong having English as one of its official languages and South Korea's "recursive move to establish English as the second official language" (Chung & Choi, 2016). Additionally, English is a compulsory subject for Primary one to Secondary six students in Hong Kong as the Government believes that high English levels can "sustain Hong Kong's status as an international city" ("English language teaching and learning", 2015). Meanwhile, English is officially taught to South Koreans from primary three to secondary three as the Government regards English as the "driving force" in developing their country (MoE of Korea, 2008, p. 41). As Ushioda and Dörnyei (2009) observed, English's substantial status brings different countries/regions to include English in their education curriculums. This further motivates students to learn the language as a school subject (Dörnyei, 1990), and this observation applies to the contexts of Hong Kong and South Korea.

Knowing the similar English learning contexts of Hong Kong and South Korea, this study is curious to know whether their English learners are motivated similarly by examining their undergraduate English majors' motivational development. It also wishes to bring the conclusion to a larger context, seeking better ways to boost the English learners' motivations

and proficiency levels in their individual contexts (e.g., Hong Kong secondary schools).

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 L2 motivation theories

As English is a second language (L2) in Hong Kong and South Korea, this study takes different scholars' studies on L2 motivation as a reference. According to Dörnyei (2005), L2 motivation research could be divided into three periods: The social-psychological period (1959–1990), The cognitive-situated period (1990s), and The process-oriented period (pp .66-67). By going through the significant studies in these periods, we see how L2 motivation research has developed and what different focuses they drew on.

As suggested by its name, L2 motivation studies in the first period mainly took the social-psychological approach. One substantial idea was the theory of integrative and instrumental orientations in L2 learning, which respectively means the “willingness to become a member of another language group” and the “desire to gain social recognition or economic advantage through knowledge of a foreign language” (Gardner & Lambert, 1972, p.14). Hence, whether a person is culturally driven by the L2 community or practically driven by benefits becomes the bifurcation point. Additionally, self-confidence was also a significant motivational factor in L2 learning (Clément, 1980; Clément & Kruidenier, 1985).

Desired to “narrow down the macro-perspective of L2 motivation” (Dörnyei, 2005, p.74), scholars moved to study how L2 motivation “operates in actual learning situations” (Dörnyei, 2005) in the cognitive-situated period. The studies considered more cognitive concepts, like how one “thinks about one’s abilities, possibilities, limitations” (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 74). Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 1985) was an influential approach taken in this period, which suggests that motivation consists of three psychological needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2002). It discusses the ideas of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, which are “doing because it is inherently interesting or

enjoyable” and “doing because it leads to a separable outcome” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p.55). Meanwhile, Kim Noels (2001) found intrinsic and extrinsic motivations associable with Gardner and Lambert’s integrated and instrumental orientations. Both of them demonstrate and analyze L2 motivation as naturally driven by internal factors (e.g., self-desire and enjoyment), and purposely driven by external factors (e.g., economic advantages and social regulations), illustrating how L2 motivation studies relate and moved on.

Moving on to the process-oriented period, the spotlight started to shift to the “dynamic character and temporal variation” (Dörnyei, 2005, p.83), which was somewhat neglected before (Dörnyei, 2005). Dörnyei (2005) argued that there was a need to adopt the “process-oriented approach” (p.83) to study the “ongoing changes of motivation over time” (p.83). The complex dynamic systems theory (CDST) was thus established. It uses a “person-in-context” approach (Ushioda, 2009, p.215) and looks beyond social psychology and cognitive theories (Ushioda, 2012). Ushioda suggested that we should evaluate in a “more holistic perspective” (2012, p. 63) and “capture the mutually constitutive relationship between persons and the contexts in which they act -- a relationship that is dynamic, complex and non-linear” (2009, p. 218). Recalling the SDT and the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Ryan & Deci, 2000) as an example, the distinction between is not an exact opposite. Instead of being “invariantly nonautonomous” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 60), SDT perceives extrinsically motivated behaviours as having the capacity to “vary greatly in the degree to which it is autonomous” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 61).

Here, we see how L2 motivation studies developed by investigating different aspects of L2 motivation. However, moving to a different focus and thinking beyond the original perspectives does not mean we have “abandoned the original perspectives” (Ushioda, 2012, p. 62). From the illustrations above, we can see how one concept leads to the other and how they relate and “continued to have explanatory significance” (Ushioda, 2012, p. 62). Hence,

studies should be conducted continuously in this everchanging world to keep track of the L2 motivation development with reference to previous studies, giving rise to this research that studies in rarely studied contexts -- Hong Kong and South Korea in the 21st century.

2.2 English learning and using motivations in Hong Kong and South Korea

As English has been globalized and served as the lingua franca (Widdowson, 1994; Crystal, 2003), its supremacy is highlighted internationally. Phillipson (2009) commented that “internationalization means English-medium higher education” (p. 37), and Kirkpatrick (2011) suggested that “internationalization” often results in “Englishization” as schools are using English as the medium of instruction because of its value (p.3). Hong Kong and South Korea also acknowledge English’s utilitarian value (Bourdieu, 1977; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011) and “Englishize” themselves by teaching English at schools from the primary level (Dörnyei, 1990; Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2009). In this section, we will glance through some empirical studies regarding English learning and using motivations in these places.

2.2.1 English learning and using motivations in Hong Kong

Studies reveal that Hong Kong students are highly driven by extrinsic motivation, especially the practical academic and business needs shaped by Hong Kong’s socio-economic and political context (Lai, 1999; Yang & Lau, 2003). Besides, parents’ strong emphasis on children’s academics under the examination-oriented culture is a vital extrinsic motivation for English learners in Hong Kong (McBride-Chang & Chang, 1998). However, when focusing on English learners at the tertiary level, there is an increasing interest in the language and its culture, resulting in Hong Kong English learners’ growing intrinsic motivation (Chan, 2005).

2.2.2 English learning and using motivations in South Korea

It was found that the South Korean EFL high school and middle school students are mainly extrinsically motivated in learning English (Lee, 2002; Duvernay, 2007). They consider it “one of the school subjects” (Kang, 2000), and the university entrance

examination is one of their substantial motivations (Lee, 2002). Similar to Hong Kong's situation, parents play a crucial role in South Korean students' English learning and using motivations (Duvernay, 2007). They are more intrinsically motivated as they get older when more freedom in learning is granted during and after university (Lee, 2002). Additionally, the spreading popularity of Western culture in South Korea has boosted South Koreans' intrinsic motivation to learn and use English (Duvernay, 2007).

Although much research was done on L2 motivation theories and English learning motivation in Hong Kong and South Korea, comparisons between Hong Kong and South Korean English learners are lacking despite their similar educational and cultural backgrounds. Hence, in this study, a close comparison will be made between English learners' learning and using motivations in Hong Kong and South Korea with the acknowledgement and aid of the early L2 motivation theories. In view of the similar phenomenon where the English learners from both countries/regions have increasing intrinsic motivation as they grow, this study will concentrate on more experienced English learners -- undergraduate and graduates who majored in English between 2012-2022.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study employed a multiple-case study design with quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate the development of the English learning and using motivations of four English Majors from Hong Kong and South Korea.

For the research design, the study adopted the quantitative approach at the beginning stage with a questionnaire to develop a general understanding of the participants' English learning and using backgrounds before going in-depth through interviews. Later, the study took the qualitative approach with interviews as it is "more sensitive to exploring and representing the dynamic nature of motivational processes" (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 62). Hence, it is suitable for studying the dynamic development of the participants'

motivations. Meanwhile, a multiple-case study was employed to apply the replication logic to different experiments and bring the findings to a more generalized context (Yin, 2003).

This study targeted four English majors as the participants, two from Hong Kong and two from South Korea. English majors are supposed to be the English professionals contributing to the globalization of their countries/regions and elevating their international status (Ramos, 2014), hence responding to their governments' objectives in promoting English learning ("English language teaching and learning", 2015; MoE of Korea, 2008). Thus, English majors are an excellent fit to be the study subject to demonstrate and reflect the English learning of their countries/regions according to the governments' initiatives. Meanwhile, Steward (1989, 1990) argued that a significant proportion of English majors is interested in or going into teaching, prompting this study to target one English major who does and one who does not want to be an English teacher from each place. As an English major who wants to be an English teacher, the researcher's connection with these English majors further consolidated her interest in targeting them as the participants.

Participants' profiles

Name	Age	Gender	Nationality	Year of study at university	Medium of instruction in primary (Pri) & secondary (Sec) schools	1 st language	Career plan
Ivy	22	F	Chinese	4	Pri: Chinese Sec: English	Cantonese	English teacher
Ava	23	F	Chinese	4	Pri: English Sec: Chinese	Cantonese	Hasn't decided
Sam	23	M	South Korean	3	Korean	Korean	English teacher
Dan	26	M	South Korean	Graduated in 2020	Korean	Korean	Hasn't decided

The instruments involved in the data collection were questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, with questions designed based on the researcher's library research and previous understandings of this topic. The questionnaire has three parts of questions (see Appendix A), focusing on the participants' background information, English learning and

using motivations, and English learning and using attitudes. A widely-used instrument in case study research (Merriam, 1988), semi-structured interviews, were conducted individually after the questionnaire, with a fixed set of questions in the first part and tailor-made questions in the second part (see Appendix B). It allows more space for follow-up questions than structured interviews, so more detailed and distinctive comparisons can be made. This aligns with the study's purpose of digging into the interviewees' unique English learning and using experiences and motivational development at their different life stages. The data collection was started by setting up the questionnaire through a google form (see appendix C) and sending it to the researcher's friends and supervisor from the CUHK English department for a pilot study. In the meantime, invitation messages were sent to several potential participants from the researcher's social network, who were targeted on the basis of convenience sampling in this time-sensitive research. Then, the questionnaire was revised according to the feedback from the pilot study and distributed to the interviewees after they agreed to partake in this study. After the participants returned the completed questionnaire within a week, a set of fixed questions and four different sets of follow-up questions were designed based on the interviewees' responses, and were amended according to the supervisor's comments. Individual interviews were scheduled and conducted within a week after receiving their questionnaires. Each lasted for an hour and was recorded after receiving the interviewees' consent. Transcriptions were conducted immediately after the interviews with the aid of the jotted notes along with the interviews. After that, notable findings were drawn after re-reading the transcripts, extracting the major themes, and summarizing the similarities and differences between the participants' English learning and using motivations.

4 FINDINGS

4.1 A comparison between the participants who want and do not want to be English teachers

In this section, the participants are classified and compared by their career plans. Ivy and Sam are the ones who want to be English teachers, while Ava and Dan are the ones who do not. This classification is made in the hope of seeing what influences it will bring to the English learners' motivations when they have English teachers as their future career plan.

4.1.1 Similarities

4.1.1.1 Parental influence on their childhood

Except for Dan, all other 3 participants were highly motivated by their parents in learning English as their parents "wanted them to study English" (Questionnaire). One common practice that their parents did was to expose them to English since they were small through English media. Ivy's parents repeatedly showed her "Disney cartoons and Harry Potter" and read her English bedtime stories when she was a kid (Interview). Ava's parents also "intentionally chose Disney channel but not the local tv channel" (Interview) for her since she was a kid, and Sam's parents showed him American animations (Interview). The participants admitted that their early exposure to English media had ignited their interest in English because of the fun content, hence increasing their English learning motivation when they grew up. The parents of Ivy and Ava also sent them to English-medium playgroups before they started schooling and hired English tutors for them since primary school. This echoes with the findings of McBride-Chang and Chang (1998), which says Chinese parents emphasize academic achievement under the examination-oriented education. Thus, sending their children to receive English education at an early stage has become a common practice in Hong Kong. Meanwhile, Ivy and Ava believed that this had paved their English learning

foundation and enhanced their motivation as they met helpful tutors who assisted them in gaining more knowledge of English “effectively in a fun way” (e.g., media or games) (Interview). As for Sam, his parents brought him abroad to America for five years when he was 10. Sam stated that this had boosted his English learning motivation to a large extent as he was put in an English community since he was young (Interview). Hence, their parents exposing them to English media, instructors, and community at an early age was a predominant source of their English learning motivation. Differently, Dan’s parents did not speak English nor brought their son to learn English since he was small, and he was motivated to learn English at a later stage (i.e., after university).

Regardless of the parental significance in the English learning motivation of Ivy, Ava, and Sam, they were less motivated by their parents in using English (Questionnaire). Ivy explained that her mom encouraged her to learn the language but only wanted her to use it “in the right context like speaking to foreigners” (Interview). Her mom did not want her to use English in Hong Kong with Cantonese speakers as it was “unnecessary” and was like “showing off” (Interview), aligning with Richard’s study (1998) that points out the social norm of Chinese regarding speaking English in Chinese contexts unrequired. For Ava, she was not motivated by her parents in using English as she felt “disconnected from her parents” (Interview) when she used English after she had learnt. It became a daily behaviour for her to express herself without relation to her parents, such as using at school (Interview). In the meantime, Sam was motivated to use English as he was spontaneously interested in it, not necessarily pushed by his parents.

4.1.1.2 Growing interests and intrinsic motivation

All participants had growing interests in English, which enhanced their English

learning and using intrinsic motivations. Ivy and Ava became “curious” and “inquisitive” learners (Interview) who were more excited to learn the language and its culture after knowing about the sociolinguistics of English in their English undergraduate degrees. This aligns with Chan’s (2005) study, which shows that Hong Kong students “demonstrated a growing interest in the language and its cultures” (p. 173) at the tertiary level. Sam also felt “thrilled” to learn and use English as he could “improve each time after he made a mistake” (Interview), primarily through conversations with natives. This supports Geddes’s (2016) findings of how South Korean students “show a strong preference for learning from native speakers” (p.714). Meanwhile, the American show “FRIENDS” ignited Dan’s interest in English after university. He was then motivated to learn and use English and discovered his extroverted self when using English, which further escalated his interest in the language and motivated him to learn and use it. This again demonstrates the influence of media on English learning and using motivations, where American culture has boosted many South Koreans’ intrinsic motivation in learning and using English. (Duvernay, 2007)

4.1.2 Differences

4.1.2.1 Extrinsic and Intrinsic motivation (phase shifts)

Although most of them were initially motivated by their parents, their motivation developed in different ways afterwards. Ivy and Sam were constantly intrinsically motivated after their parents introduced the language to them. They said they were “self-motivated” in learning and using English because of their “interests” in English (Interview) and were less driven by extrinsic motivations (e.g., academic results or school requirements).

On the other hand, there were phase shifts (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) in the L2 motivations of Ava and Dan, who were highly extrinsic motivated at the earlier stage. Referencing the taxonomy of human motivation proposed by Ryan and Deci (2000, p. 61), Ava was extrinsically motivated by “introjection” when she was in primary and secondary

education. “Introjection” is the second least autonomous form of extrinsic motivation, which associates with “ego-involvement” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p.61). Ava was motivated by her peers as they admired her more when she stood out with her better English level, so she wanted to achieve ego-enhancement by receiving her peers’ “approval” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 61), and “be respected as a good English user” (Interview) by learning and using more English. This is also illustrated in Zhou’s (2008) study that shows how Chinese students are motivated by peers’ admiration. Besides, Ava was motivated by her desire to earn good academic results (Interview), which is a common focus of many Hong Kong students (Lai, 1999). Later on, when Ava first attended the university, she shifted to being extrinsically motivated by “integration”. This is the most self-determined type of extrinsic motivations, and behaviours under this motivation are performed to accomplish particular goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000). After realizing that she would not stand out or be respected because of her English when all her classmates (i.e., English majors) performed well, Ava moved her focus to express herself better in English. Thus, she learnt and used English towards this goal when she first got into the university. Throughout her journey in studying for the English undergraduate degree, she got absorbed in the language when she learnt more about the history and sociolinguistics of the language. Eventually, she shifted and settled in the “intrinsically motivated” state out of interest. Ava’s phase shift from extrinsically to intrinsically motivated aligns with Chan’s (2005) study, which displays how Hong Kong students move to “autonomous learning” (p. 182) at the tertiary level.

On the other hand, Dan illustrated the state of “amotivation” when he was in primary and secondary education, meaning to have no motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000) to learn or use English. He chose English as his undergraduate degree simply because his public exam results met the requirements, and he believed that English is important as a “universal language” (Questionnaire). This perception of honoring English in this internationalized

world is also shared by many South Koreans (Kormos & Csizer, 2008). Besides, Dan thought English would be an “easier subject” (Interview) as he acquired the basic knowledge when he studied it as a compulsory subject in his earlier English education. Nevertheless, he became a shell-shocked doubter (Irie & S. Ryan, 2015) when he saw how other freshmen spoke fluent English because they had stayed abroad before. He was hopeless in learning the language as he felt like he could not compete with others. Hence, he stayed unmotivated even though he chose English as his major study. After Dan finished serving in the military and returned to university in year 3, he started to be extrinsically motivated by “introjection”. He wanted to attain ego-enhancement by avoiding guilt (Ryan & Deci, 2000) as he felt sorry for his parents, who paid for the tuition fee. He then transformed into a duty-bound learner bounded by family factors. It was only after graduation that he was “intrinsically motivated” by a genuine interest in English inflamed by American dramas, which is a recent trend in South Korea (Duvernay, 2007), where American culture has started to grow in South Korea and stimulates South Koreans’ interests and intrinsic motivations in learning and using English.

4.1.2.2 L2 self-identity: English user / learner

The participants answered differently to the question about their L2 self-identities. Ivy envisioned herself as an English learner as she believed that she could “never be perfect in English as a Hong Konger” (Interview), so she could always learn more about it. Meanwhile, she did not see “much necessity to use English in Hong Kong apart from academic reasons” (Interview). Thus, Ivy preferred to call herself a learner, not a user, as she seldom uses English in social contexts. This is similar to Li’s (2014) study that shows how Hong Kong students perceive themselves as learners rather than users as the “language use was only limited to academic settings” (p.209). Differently, Ava claimed herself as a user as she felt like she had “learnt enough English to express herself to a satisfactory level” (Interview), entering the “attractor state” (p.14) as suggested by De Bot & Larsen-Freeman (2011). Thus,

she called herself a user instead of a learner when she preferred to stay in this state without feeling the necessity to learn more. Meanwhile, Dan also called himself a user, but his rationale differed from Ava's. He exclusively linked English learning to studying English academically, restricting English learning in traditional classroom settings only. Thus, he identified himself as a learner when he did not plan to study English academically. Sam perceived himself as a learner and a user as he always "sees the space to improve" in English, while he "keeps using in daily life out of interest and his desire to improve" (Interview). Thus, he weighed his identity as an English learner and user equally. Here, we see that participants' eagerness to improve influences their L2 self-identifications, where they would perceive themselves as learners when they wished to improve their English.

4.1.2.3 Career plan

Ivy and Sam had a clear goal of being English teachers to share their positive teaching values. They wanted to encourage their students to enjoy learning and using English, easing the language anxiety commonly seen in their surrounding environment (Interview). Their thirst for knowledge and ability to share this belief became their greatest motivation in learning and using English. In the meantime, Ava and Dan were still planning for their future career. As English majors, they agreed that finding an English-related job would be good as they are interested in the language, yet they did not see this as a vital criterion for choosing their job. Hence, the career plans did not motivate them much in their English learning and using. This opposes the findings of Lai (1999) and Geddes (2016), which illustrate career as an essential motivation for Hong Kong and South Korean students in learning and using English.

The findings showed that the participants had similarities in their English learning and using motivations even if they had different career plans. Meanwhile, most of their differences were not brought by their different career plans. Therefore, having a career plan

of being an English teacher was not a crucial factor that differentiated the participants' English learning and using motivations. They differed due to their varied individual traits, experiences, and backgrounds, such as their interests in English, English learning experience, and family background.

4.2 A comparison between Hong Kong and South Korean participants

4.2.1 Similarities

In this section, the participants are classified and compared by the places they were living and studying in. Although all participants were mainly intrinsically motivated by now, different external factors had influenced them in their English journey, shaping their present identities and English learning and using attitudes.

4.2.1.1 Utilitarian value of English

All participants and their families acknowledged English's language capital (Bourdieu, 1991) as the lingua franca of this globalized world (Interview). They also saw the tendency to emphasize English in the communities where they were from (i.e., HK local schools & Seoul & Busan local schools). Nurtured in such a culture, the perception of "better English brings more income" (Questionnaire) has been implanted into them gradually. This "culturally inculcated value" (Oxford, 2012, p.127) of English had then motivated them to learn and use English, aligning with Du's (2018) study that delivers how Hong Kong students were motivated to master English because of its "social and financial capitals" (p.328), and also with Geddes's (2016) findings that reveal how South Korean students were highly motivated to learn English "for a better job" (p.711). Nevertheless, the participants in this study are not motivated by this instrumental factor anymore as they are now primarily motivated by intrinsic interests.

4.2.1.2 Not motivated by the exam-oriented culture

The participants admitted that their places had a strong exam-oriented culture that emphasized exams and results. However, they were not highly motivated by school classes or tutors that were bounded by the examination syllabus as those dull and uninspiring. This corresponds to the Hong Kong students in Li's (2014) study that found Hong Kong's exam-oriented English education demotivational and "dull" (p.95). The participants in this study were intensely motivated by non-exam-oriented ways of learning English, for example, media. As discussed, Ivy, Ava, and Sam were motivated by English shows when their parents showed them at a young age. They mentioned that they were still watching English shows because of their intriguing content and growing popularity on "Netflix and YouTube" (Interview). It became their interest instead of their parents' requirements. They also mentioned that the exam-oriented culture brought about the tutoring culture, where students try to improve their results further (Interview). This matches the studies of Eng (2019) and Lee (2010) that explain how the tutoring industry has expanded in Hong Kong and South Korea because of the education policies and exam-oriented cultures in both places. Meanwhile, Ivy and Ava encountered encouraging tutors who taught in more interactive and engaging ways, such as playing games and reading storybooks, which motivated them to learn and use more English. In contrast, Dan met exam-oriented tutors and felt as if he was "forced to learn" instead of "motivated to learn" (Interview). This supports Zhan et al.'s (2013) findings on the higher effectiveness of interactive tutors on students' academics. Different from others, Sam did not attend any tutorial classes. He went to the Busan English Library (Interview), a library that only has English books, with many native English speakers going there to read. Sam would approach those natives and interact with them. Those interactions were his biggest motivation in learning and using English (Interview), again proving South Koreans' impulse to learn English from natives (Geddes, 2016)

4.2.2 Differences

4.2.2.1 Communicative Competence

Celce Murcia et al. (1995) proposed the idea of “communicative competence,” which is composed of six competences and includes the knowledge L2 learners need to acquire to be competent in that language. Socio-cultural and linguistic competence are two of the competences. The former refers to the socio-contextual factors concerning the language, such as age, gender, and power. (Celce-Murcia et al., 1995). These motivated Ivy and Ava to learn English as they were eager to look into how human and social cultures correlate to English use. This goes with Chan’s (2005) findings that uncover Hong Kong students’ interests in English cultures and history. Meanwhile, Sam and Dan emphasized linguistic competence, including the morphological and syntactic matters in English (Celce-Murcia et al., 1995). They were motivated to learn and use English to improve their grammatical accuracy. The researcher also observed this when they were always aware of and corrected their mistakes in the interviews. Besides, expressing themselves in English to communicate with natives was their core motivation in learning and using English. They were not engaged in English literature or linguistics classes but focused on communication classes (Interview). This corresponds to the findings of Geddes (2016), which discovered that South Korean students preferred to study the “communicative techniques” (p.708) when learning English.

4.2.2.2 Motivation from the school environment

Although all participants were barely motivated by the exam-oriented culture at schools, the school environment did influence their English learning and using motivations. Ivy and Ava had studied in English Medium Instruction (EMI) secondary and primary schools, respectively. They admitted that this allowed them to have more exposure to English, not limited to English lessons only. For example, schools would conduct other classes and extra-curricular activities in English (e.g., English drama), giving them chances to associate with

English-related activities and motivating them to learn and use English. This is proved in Chan's (2007) study indicating that EMI schools granting students more exposure to English can enhance their English learning and using motivations. In contrast, Sam and Dan were barely motivated by the school environment. Similar to what Mani and Trines (2018) pointed out, Sam and Dan mentioned that South Korean primary and high schools seldom offer EMI education. Hence, they attended local Korean schools, where English learning and using were "limited to the exam-oriented English lessons only" (Interview), and they were poorly motivated by this kind of English education.

4.2.2.3 Recognition of English

When asking about how the places they lived in affected their English motivations (Interview), Ivy and Ava admitted that as one of Hong Kong's official languages, English is stressed across places and times and is used in many businesses. Thus, Hong Kong motivated them to learn and use English as they recognized its importance in the social context. This is supported by Du's (2018) study, which discloses how Hong Kong emphasizes English where people can "occupy higher positions in the pecking order of Hong Kong society" (p.187) if they have a better English level. Nonetheless, Sam and Dan did not think South Korea influenced their motivations. They mentioned that South Korea does not stress English much in the practical operations of society and businesses. Instead, it claims English as vital because it is the lingua franca and teaches it at school for high scores. English is not necessary nor frequently used in the social context. Geddes's (2016) study also portrays this social phenomenon in South Korea, where "strong emphasis is placed upon systemized English tests (e.g. TOEIC or TOEFL), even for jobs which do not utilize English" (p.704). Hence, Sam and Dan were not motivated by their place as they only recognized English in the exam-oriented education context, which they found unhelpful in motivating their English learning and using (Interview).

From the findings, we observed that the participants shared some similarities in their English learning and using motivations as both places they lived in recognize English's value and stressed examinations. Meanwhile, they differentiated in some ways contributed by the variations of their living places. For example, they stressed different communicative competence, they were affected differently by the school environment, and they recognized English distinctively because of the dissimilar cultures and emphasis on the language.

5 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF KEY FINDINGS

In this section, the findings will be discussed and extended to a larger context to see what different stakeholders can do to boost English learners' learning and using motivations, especially their intrinsic motivation, which is more helpful in bringing deeper learning and better outcomes to English learners (Brown, 1994; Crooks, 1988), leading to our ultimate goal of improving learners' English proficiency.

The findings disclose that parents play a vital role in their English learning and using motivations regardless of the different contexts. Parents' desires for their children to learn English or exposing them to English at an early stage appear to be the factors that arouse learners' interests and motivate them in future learning. This aligns with different studies that illustrate parents' "positive influence" on children's L2 motivations (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Dörnyei, 2001; Chamber, 2001), conveying that school is not the only environment for L2 learning. Hence, all parents can refer to this for future implications, cultivating their children's English learning interests earlier by providing a suitable English learning home environment. Referencing our participants' experiences, parents can show their children English media or send them to English playgroups.

On the other hand, the school environment still matters. Both Hong Kong participants admitted the encouraging effects their EMI schools brought to their English learning and using motivations. This was in contrast to the South Korean participants, who were not

studying in EMI schools or motivated by schools. This corresponds to Baker (1992), who suggested that delivering curriculum or holding extra-curricular activities in L2 changes language attitudes. Chan (2007) also discovered that EMI students in Hong Kong have more “constructive language attitudes” (p.229) and are more motivated and active in learning when compared to non-EMI students. Hence, Hong Kong should keep this practice or implement this in more schools. South Korea can also take this as a reference and accept EMI in more of its schools.

Meanwhile, English media deserves credit as all participants were highly motivated by it, where they can “derive entertainment and learning” (Hasan et al., 2020, p. 22) simultaneously. This form of “edutainment,” meaning to educate in an “entertaining style” (HarperCollins, n.d.), can stimulate students’ motivations in learning a language (Juma, 2018). This suggests that stakeholders like parents and teachers can utilize media to stimulate students’ interest in English, motivating them to learn and use the language. For instance, they can show them English shows or design teaching materials with trending English media.

In the meantime, all participants criticized the exam-oriented English education in their places, which were especially obvious in primary and secondary education. Kirkpatrick and Zang (2011) suggested that this exam-oriented education is commonly seen in Asia and it “de-motivates” (p.40) students, aligning with our participants’ comments. Taking this as a reference, Hong Kong, South Korea, and even other countries/regions, should try to de-emphasize examinations in their education systems. Stakeholders, like education policymakers or schools, can create a more liberal English learning and using environment that allows students to have diverse goals and stresses. For example, they can design less restrained policies and open-ended materials instead of requiring students to give model answers for better results. This may enhance students' L2 intrinsic motivations because of the

"freedom" (Lee, 2002), moving them away from being "surface" and "shallow" learners (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Harlen & Crick, 2003).

From how the Hong Kong participants in this study were more interested in socio-linguistics while those from South Korea emphasized more on communication, we discovered that people from different places and cultures have varied emphasis on learning and using English. Thus, stakeholders from different places can find out the general interest of their people in learning and using English and take the local context into account. For instance, based on this study, both Hong Kong participants were more intrinsically motivated when they knew more about the sociolinguistics of English, but they only got this chance in tertiary education. Thus, instead of teaching English grammar or examination-related knowledge, Hong Kong Education Bureau can consider including the socio-linguistic-related content since secondary school to boost students' interest and intrinsic motivation at an earlier stage.

Throughout the study, we see that the participants' L2 motivations were shaped by various factors in different contexts and times with phase shifts. Even in a similar context (e.g., same major, career plan, living place), there were still dissimilarities in their English learning and using motivations. This complexity supports the CDST suggested by Larsen-Freeman & Cameron (2008), implying that stakeholders can elevate students' English learning and using motivations in varied ways, not confined to a fixed direction or rule, and have to revise according to the changes.

This study has certainly drawn some insightful findings from the first-handed information. Nevertheless, there are several limitations, including the small sampling size of four participants, with two Hong Kong females and two South Korean males. Besides, it only involves one questionnaire and a one-off interview. Moreover, only English majors are included as the study subject of this research. Thus, it is hard to generalize the findings and

represent all students. Future studies on English motivations can be conducted as a longitudinal study with more participants of different ages and genders, and conduct more interviews at different stages to draw more findings. They can also focus on the Hong Kong context with a larger group of participants, such as comparing the English learning and using motivations of English and non-English majors in Hong Kong, or investigating the motivational differences between Hong Kong students from EMI and Chinese medium schools (CMI) schools. Similar research can also be conducted with different populations from other Asian countries/regions with similar backgrounds to Hong Kong, such as comparing Japan or Taiwan with Hong Kong.

6 CRITICAL REFLECTION ON PROJECT AND LEARNING

This project intrinsically links to my past, present, and future. It connects to my knowledge gained from my past English courses as an English major, such as the topic of L2 acquisition learnt from linguistics courses, providing me with some background knowledge to conduct this study. The study also influences my present by developing my skills in writing a research paper and deepening my understanding of L2 motivations, especially in Hong Kong and South Korean contexts. As an English major who wants to be an English teacher, the results from this study can assist my future career by giving me insights on how I should teach my future students to improve their motivation. For example, I can utilize English media and draw students' focus away from examinations to stimulate their interests in English, boosting their intrinsic English learning and using motivations.

When working on this project, I saw my strength in analyzing and organizing points when processing the large amount of interview data. In the 1-hour interviews, all participants detailedly described their unique experiences and gave many valuable comments, giving me a massive amount of data to digest. Still, I managed to categorize the points and make relevant comparisons between different groups of participants, which I considered a laudable achievement. Nonetheless, my skills in relating my findings to literature and linguistic concepts are inadequate as I did not have much previous knowledge in linguistics due to the limited linguistics courses I attended. Hence, I had to spend plenty of time reading pieces of literature and trying to link up my findings to relevant linguistic principles. I believe that my understanding of linguistics has been deepened after this project, and I will strengthen myself by reading more linguistic literature to perform better when conducting similar research in the future.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Full version of the questionnaire

Capstone Questionnaire

My name is Jessie, a final-year student majoring in English at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. The purpose of this questionnaire is to do research for my capstone project, which discusses the learning motivations and attitudes of English Majors from Korea and Hong Kong. All information will only be used for this academic project and will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous. Thank you for your help!

*I agree to participate in this study and understand that my identity will not be revealed.

Yes

No

Part 1: Background information

1) Full Name: _____ 2) Year of birth: _____

3) Nationality: _____ 4) Gender: Female Male Prefer not to tell

5) Birthplace & Raised in which country: (Please also name the city if you are from Korea)

6) First language: _____ 7) University: _____

8) Major GPA (전공학점): eg. 3.4 out of 4.0 _____

9) Current year of study:

Year 1 Year 2 Year 3 Year 4 Year 5 Graduated Others: _____

10) Primary school: International school Local school Others: _____

11) Secondary school: International school Local school Others: _____

12) English proficiency tests taken & scores (if have any) eg. IELTS, 7.5 / TOEFL, 85

13) Contact information (Phone & Email)

eg. +852 / 010 xxxx xxxx / Kakaotalk ID (for Koreans) & abcd@gmail.com

Part 2: My motivations in learning and using English

Please answer to what extent do you agree with the following statements by circling a number from 1 to 6.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6

2.1 My motivations in LEARNING & choosing English as my major study

I am motivated to learn and choose English as my major study because...

1) I plan to study / live abroad after university	1	2	3	4	5	6
2) I have deep interest in English	1	2	3	4	5	6
3) My family wants me to study English	1	2	3	4	5	6
4) Studying English is useful for me to get a good job with high income	1	2	3	4	5	6
5) I plan to engage in a job related to English in the future (e.g. Translators, Teachers, Journalists etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	6
6) Studying English makes me feel proud because I feel like I am better than others when I am good at English	1	2	3	4	5	6
7) Many people around me/in my country are weak in English and I want to help them	1	2	3	4	5	6
8) English is an important international language. It's necessary for me to learn and improve it	1	2	3	4	5	6
9) I want to be an English teacher in the future. If you've answered 4-6, please answer Question (a-f). If you've answered 1-3, please move to Question (f).	1	2	3	4	5	6
(a) I want to be an English teacher because I want my country to improve its international status	1	2	3	4	5	6
(b) I want to be an English teacher because it is a stable job with a high income	1	2	3	4	5	6
(c) I want to be an English teacher because I appreciate English and I want to share with the youngsters	1	2	3	4	5	6
(d) I want to be an English teacher because I enjoy the process of teaching	1	2	3	4	5	6

(e) Any other motivations in wanting to be an English teacher. If yes, please specify.

(f) Any other motivations in LEARNING & choosing English as your major study. If yes, please specify.

2.2 My motivations in USING English

I am using English because...

1) I have deep interest in English	1	2	3	4	5	6
2) Practice makes perfect and I want to improve my English	1	2	3	4	5	6
3) My parents want me to use more English	1	2	3	4	5	6
4) I have to fulfil the requirements of my school / teachers	1	2	3	4	5	6
5) Using English makes me feel proud	1	2	3	4	5	6
6) Many people in my social circle are using English	1	2	3	4	5	6
7) Any other motivations in USING English. If yes, please specify.						

Part 3: My attitudes in Learning & Using English

Please answer to what extent do you agree with the following statements by circling a number from 1 to 6.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6

3.1 My attitudes in LEARNING English

1) I am enthusiastic in learning English	1	2	3	4	5	6
2) I am working hard to improve my English	1	2	3	4	5	6
3) I am passively learning English. When someone teaches, I learn	1	2	3	4	5	6
4) I learn English just to fulfil the expectations from others / the society	1	2	3	4	5	6
5) Learning English is easy	1	2	3	4	5	6
6) Learning English is interesting	1	2	3	4	5	6
7) Any other attitudes you have in LEARNING English. If yes, please specify.						

3.2 My attitudes in USING English

1) I enjoy myself when I am using English	1	2	3	4	5	6
2) I am confident at speaking in English	1	2	3	4	5	6
3) I am confident at writing in English	1	2	3	4	5	6
4) I am confident at reading English	1	2	3	4	5	6
5) I tend to use English than other languages if I have the choice. If you've answered 4-6, please answer Question (g-i). If you've answered 1-3, please answer Question (j-l)	1	2	3	4	5	6
(g) I tend to use English because I can express myself better in English	1	2	3	4	5	6
(h) I tend to use English I want to impress others by using English	1	2	3	4	5	6
(i) I tend to use English I am more comfortable in using English	1	2	3	4	5	6

(j) I tend not to use English because I can express myself better in other languages	1	2	3	4	5	6
(k) I tend not to use English because I am afraid of using English	1	2	3	4	5	6
(l) I tend not to use English because I have to pay more attention and effort. It's tiring.	1	2	3	4	5	6
(g) I tend to use English because I can express myself better in English	1	2	3	4	5	6

7) Any other attitudes you have in USING English. If yes, please specify.

Any additional comments about your English learning / use:

Thanks for your time and participation! 도와주셔서 감사합니다!

Appendix B: Interview questions

Ivy

1. How would you describe the general English culture of your country?
 - a. Level (Level 1 Very good – Level 6 Very bad)
 - b. Learning & using motivation
 - c. Learning & using attitude
2. How would you describe the general English culture of your university (Only English major)
 - a. Level 1-6?
 - b. Learning & using motivation
 - c. Learning & using attitude
3. How would you describe yourself?
 - a. English Level (1-6)
 - b. Learning & using motivation (Eg. Are you self-motivated / motivated by external factors such as schools & family & social norms?)
 - c. Learning & using attitude
 - d. You consider yourself more as an English learner or user? Why (learn > use?)
4. Briefly describe the English education you have received (Eg. English-based primary & secondary school? When did you start learning English and how did your teachers teach English? How much have your schools affected your English learning / using? etc.)
5. Where do you mostly learn English from?
6. What is your favourite major course? Can you briefly describe the details and why you like this course?
7. What is your biggest **motivation** in learning & using English. Has it changed over the years of your undergraduate as an English major?
8. Has your attitude in English learning & using over the years of your undergraduate as an English major?
9. What is your future career plan & why? Has it been affected by the people around you?
10. Do you want to become an English tutor (과외선생님) in the future? & Why?
11. To what extent do you think Hong Kong has affected your English learning and using motivation and attitude?

Questions responding to your questionnaire answers:

1. Why are you so interested in English? (Level 6) [Part 2.1 Q2]
2. Why are you motivated by your family so much in English learning? Can you explain more about how your family affects you in your English learning and using? [Part 2.1 Q3]
3. Why do you think English is useful for you to get a good job with high income? [Part 2.1 Q4]
4. Why makes you think the people around you / in your country are weak in English? What makes them weak in English? [Part 2.1 Q7]
5. Why do you want to be an English teacher? [Part 2.1 Q9]
6. Why you chose English major but not English Education major?
7. You disagree with the statement of “I want to be an English teacher because it is a stable job with a high income”. Do you disagree because it is not a stable job with a high income? Or you disagree because this is not the reason that motivates you to be a teacher? [Part 2.1 Q9b]
8. Can you name some movies and cartoons that you watch the most? When did you start watching them & who introduced them to you? How do you think they have motivated you in learning English? [Part 2.1 Qf]
9. You are highly motivated by your family in learning English [Part 2.1 Q3] but less motivated by them in using English [Part 2.2 Q3], why?
10. You said you can express yourself better in other languages, what language is that? [Part 3.2 Q5]
11. You said you don't feel the need to use English in your daily life in Hong Kong and it seems like you're showing off, so you won't use English frequently. What if the context is changed to a foreign country? Would you prefer speaking to foreigners in English, or staying with Hong Kong people and speak in Cantonese?

Any additional comments?

Ava

1. How would you describe the general English culture of your country?
 - a. Level (Level 1 Very good – Level 6 Very bad)
 - b. Learning & using motivation
 - c. Learning & using attitude
2. How would you describe the general English culture of your university (Only English major)
 - a. Level 1-6?
 - b. Learning & using motivation
 - c. Learning & using attitude
3. How would you describe yourself?
 - a. English Level (1-6)
 - b. Learning & using motivation (Eg. Are you self-motivated / motivated by external factors such as schools & family & social norms?)
 - c. Learning & using attitude
 - d. You consider yourself more as an English learner or user? Why (learn > use?)
4. Briefly describe the English education you have received (Eg. English-based primary & secondary school? When did you start learning English and how did your teachers teach English? How much have your schools affected your English learning / using? etc.)
5. Where do you mostly learn English from?
6. What is your favourite major course? Can you briefly describe the details and why you like this course?
7. What is your biggest **motivation** in learning & using English. Has it changed over the years of your undergraduate as an English major?
8. Has your attitude in English learning & using over the years of your undergraduate as an English major?
9. What is your future career plan & why? Has it been affected by the people around you?
10. Do you want to become an English tutor (과외선생님) in the future? & Why?
11. To what extent do you think Hong Kong has affected your English learning and using motivation and attitude?

Questions responding to your questionnaire answers:

1. Why are you so interested in English? [Part 2.1 Q2]
2. Why are you motivated by your family so much in English learning? Can you explain more about how your family affects you in your English learning and using? [Part 2.1 Q3]
3. Why do you think English is useful for you to get a good job with high income? [Part 2.1 Q4]
4. You said you plan to engage in a job related to English, what is that & why? [Part 2.1 Q5]
5. Why do you feel proud and better than others when you're good at English? [Part 2.1 Q6]
6. Why don't you want to be an English teacher? [Part 2.1 Q9]
7. Why are you interested in humanities & why English? (Humanities is very broad, not only English) [Part 2.1 Qf]
8. You are highly motivated by your family in learning English [Part 2.1 Q3] but much less motivated by them in using English [Part 2.2 Q3], why?
9. Who are the people using English in your social circle? How much have they affected your English learning & using motivation and attitude?
10. You said you're highly enthusiastic in learning English [Part 3.1 Q1], but at the same time you're passively learning it [Part 3.1 Q3], you only learn when someone teaches, why?
11. You said you can express yourself better in English. Can you express yourself in Cantonese as clearly as in English?
12. Any additional comments?

Sam

1. How would you describe the general English culture of your country?
 - a. Level (Level 1 Very good - Level 6 Very bad)
 - b. Learning & using motivation
 - c. Learning & using attitude
2. How would you describe the general English culture of your university (Only English major)
 - a. Level 1-6?
 - b. Learning & using motivation
 - c. Learning & using attitude
3. How would you describe yourself?
 - a. English Level (1-6)
 - b. Learning & using motivation (Eg. Are you self-motivated / motivated by external factors such as schools & family & social norms?)
 - c. Learning & using attitude
 - d. You consider yourself more as an English learner or user? Why (learn > use?)
4. Briefly describe the English education you have received (Eg. English-based primary & secondary school? When did you start learning English and how did your teachers teach English? How much have your schools affected your English learning / using? etc.)
5. Where do you mostly learn English from?
6. What is your favourite major course? Can you briefly describe the details and why you like this course?
7. What is your biggest **motivation** in learning & using English. Has it changed over the years of your undergraduate as an English major?
8. Has your attitude in English learning & using over the years of your undergraduate as an English major?
9. What is your future career plan & why? Has it been affected by the people around you?
10. Do you want to become an English tutor (과외선생님) in the future? & Why?
11. To what extent do you think Korea has affected your English learning and using motivation and attitude?

Questions responding to your questionnaire answers:

1. [50:42] Why are you so interested in English & teaching? [Part 2.1 Q2]
2. [52:28] Why your family wants you to study English so much? Can you explain more about how your family affects you in your English learning and using? (Eg. Early education? Encouragement? English exercise? Etc.) [Part 2.1 Q3]
3. [55:26] Why do you think English is useful for you to get a good job with high income? [Part 2.1 Q4]
4. [25:46] You said you want to be a teacher. Why did you choose to be an English major instead of English Education major? [Part 2.1 Q9]
5. You mentioned that you are passively learning English. [Part 3.1 Q3] You learn only because someone teaches you, why is that? (Or you answered mistakenly?)
6. [1:01:03] You mentioned you tend to use English than other languages, can you express yourself in Korean well? [Part 3.2 Q5]
7. Any additional comments?

Dan

1. How would you describe the general English culture of your country?
 - a. Level (Level 1 Very good - Level 6 Very bad)
 - b. Learning & using motivation
 - c. Learning & using attitude
2. How would you describe the general English culture of your university (Only English major)
 - a. Level 1-6?
 - b. Learning & using motivation
 - c. Learning & using attitude
3. How would you describe yourself?
 - a. English Level (1-6)
 - b. Learning & using motivation (Eg. Are you self-motivated / motivated by external factors such as schools & family & social norms?)
 - c. Learning & using attitude
 - d. You consider yourself more as an English learner or user? Why (learn > use?)
4. Briefly describe the English education you have received (Eg. English-based primary & secondary school? When did you start learning English and how did your teachers teach English? How much have your schools affected your English learning / using? etc.)
5. Where do you mostly learn English from?
6. What is your favourite major course? Can you briefly describe the details and why you like this course?
7. What is your biggest **motivation** in learning & using English. Has it changed over the years of your undergraduate as an English major?
8. Has your attitude in English learning & using over the years of your undergraduate as an English major?
9. What is your future career plan & why? Has it been affected by the people around you?
10. Do you want to become an English tutor (과외선생님) in the future? & Why?
11. To what extent do you think Korea has affected your English learning and using motivation and attitude?

Questions responding to your questionnaire answers:

1. Why are you interested in English? [Part 2.1 Q2]
2. You are not really motivated by your family in learning and using English, why? What are your family's attitude / preference on your English learning and using? [Part 2.1 Q3]
3. Why do you think that studying English is not useful for getting a good job with high income? [Part 2.1 Q4]
4. Why don't you want to be an English teacher? [Part 2.1 Q9]
5. You mentioned that you chose English as your major study because it's a universal language. Can you elaborate more on that? What did you want to achieve when you chose this "universal language" as your major study? [Part 2.1 Q9f]
6. Can you name some movies and cartoons that you watch the most? When did you start watching them & who introduced them to you? How do you think they have motivated you in learning English? [Part 2.1 Qf]
7. Who are the people using English in your social circle? How much have they motivated you to learn and use English? [Part 2.2 Q6]
8. You are enthusiastic in learning English, but you are not so eager to improve it, why? [Part 3.1 Q1-2]
9. You said you could study harder if you have some English-speaking friends, why? [Part 3.1 Q7]
10. Why are you especially unconfident in writing English? [Part 3.2 Q3]
11. You said you could express yourself better in English, do you mean speaking in English only? Or also writing in English? Can you express yourself in Korean as clearly as in English? [Part 3.2 Q5]
12. You would claim that the "extrovert" person when you use English is your true self, or the "introvert" person when you use Korean is your true self? Which side do you like and why? [Part 3.2 Q6]

Any additional comments?

Appendix C: A screenshot of the google form questionnaire



Capstone questionnaire

 1155125965@link.cuhk.edu.hk (not shared) [Switch account](#) 

* Required

Part 1: Background information

1) Full Name: *

Your answer

2) Year of birth *

Your answer

3) Nationality *

Your answer

Effects of Single-Player Video Games on Incidental Vocabulary Learning

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Abstract

Amid COVID-19, vocabulary learning through digital video games becomes the prevailing trend. However, most of the studies' focus is on multiplayer online games. There is a lack of attention to single-player video games which do not require communication as much as the games above. This paper explores how single-player video games influence one's incidental vocabulary learning through the case study of *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (BOTW). Eight local undergraduates were split into two groups, where the experimental group played the game for four hours. It was found that single-player video games improved one's receptive knowledge to a marginal extent. Word frequency and context in video games did not have an impact on vocabulary acquisition due to its high cognitive demand. "Need" and "search" of Involvement Load Hypothesis had the most prominent effect on so, and pictures facilitated players to form the pathway between the semantic meanings and pictorial information.

Keywords: Digital vocabulary learning, Involvement Load Hypothesis, Trade-off Effect, Vocabulary Knowledge Scale

Introduction

With the rise of technology, vocabulary learning not only can be conducted in classrooms, but also can be assimilated into our daily lives. In conjunction with the pandemic COVID-19, online learning and gaming have become a new trend as more people stay at home and use their electronic devices more frequently. As a result, the chance of learning vocabulary incidentally increases, meaning “learners, who engage in a task, acquire vocabulary as a by-product” (Reynolds, 2017, p.467). To explain incidental vocabulary learning, Hulstijn and Laufer (2001) proposed the Involvement Load Hypothesis (ILH), a model involving motivational and cognitive dimensions: need, search and evaluation. Need refers to whether the task involves unknown words to complete so. The search component is the attempt to find the L2 form or meaning of the unknown words and evaluation means to choose the most suitable word by comparing among other words (Yanagisawa and Webb, 2021). Varying degree of each component, together with their combination influence the learning outcome of learners, as well as retention of the new words acquired.

In light of the prevalence of heavy reliance on technology, many scholars have tried to study whether incidental vocabulary learning occurs in digital gameplay, especially multiplayer online games (MMOG) and massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPG). They are games that can communicate with players to complete missions together in diversified means, Skype for instance. Zheng et al.,(2015) conducted a close case study on League of Legends, a typical MMORPG game. They discover their study subject acquires new vocabulary through confirmation from teammates and actions of the avatar. Jabbari and Eslami (2019) examined relevant articles related to MMOG and vocabulary learning, and they found that MMOG provides a low-language-anxiety environment to enrich their lexicon. Yet, most of the studies are based on the above two types of games. There is a lack of attention paid to incidental vocabulary learning from single-player video games. They

are games that only involve one player, so communication and discussion are not necessary during gameplay. As a gamer, it arouses my curiosity of whether only the above games can trigger the process. The relationship between single-player games and incidental vocabulary learning is still in its infancy, so it is worthwhile to investigate so and hence fill in this research gap. As a result, this study is going to examine the effectiveness of single-player video games on incidental vocabulary learning based on the game *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (BOTW).

Literature Review

Many studies have investigated incidental vocabulary learning of L2 in a game-based context, in which particular elements of the games have been picked up to explore the relationship between the two. Chun and Plass (1996) look into which type of multimedia annotations work the best in vocabulary acquisition. 103 students were asked to watch a video preview of the targeted text (a story in German) and they would read it individually for two consecutive days with a program. This program contained annotations of the target words in different representations: text only, text plus pictures, and text plus videos where the texts are in English. An immediate vocabulary test was done and it was found that words with text plus picture annotations got the highest percentage of correct answers, followed by text plus videos and text only. Chun and Plass attribute the results to dual-coding effects, meaning words are better remembered with the help of visual aids. This study lays a foundation for explaining acquisition of vocabulary in digital games in a multi-media aspect.

The relationship between ILH and the game is also examined since tasks and missions are incorporated into the game. ILH is proved to be predictive and it is also evidenced moderate to high involvement load leads to longer retention of words due to a higher degree

of attention to the word and fortification of the pathway between meaning and form (Yanagisawa and Webb, 2021; Nassaji and Hu, 2012). In particular, elements of ILH are considered to see their individual effectiveness contributing to incidental vocabulary learning. Reynolds (2017) discovered that search is the most influential component inducing incidental vocabulary learning in the case study of the game “Draw Something”, followed by need and evaluation. The game, yet, is educational by nature. Players must consult the dictionary in order to win more coins brought by difficult words. Therefore, it cannot conclude whether non-educational games have the same distribution on the effectiveness of each ILH component. Different from the conclusion drawn by Reynolds (2017), Yanagisawa and Webb (2021) carried out a meta-analysis of research articles related ILH model. They found that evaluation is the most crucial component contributing to vocabulary acquisition, followed by need and search. This is because tasks with strong evaluation not only enable learners pay attention to the new word itself, but also overall syntagmatic combination through comparison and contrast of word meanings. For the effectiveness of ILH, the time spent on the task is not positively correlated to it, and no clear conclusion can be drawn for the factors frequency, aspect of vocabulary knowledge and L2 proficiency.

Multiple studies have also investigated how context, in association with other factors affect one’s vocabulary acquisition, particularly informativeness of the context and how it influences one’s inference of new word frequently. Carnine, Kameenui and Coyle (1984) explored whether contextual information is useful for learning a new word and how the form of contextual information and its proximity to the new word affects students’ learning. They discovered context, especially when contextual clues which are closer to the unfamiliar words, can help one to grab the meaning of new words more accurately than just encountering the word alone. Synonym is the most helpful for learners to reach the correct meaning. However, it remains unknown that what kind of context supports one’s acquisition

of new words more effectively. The study, moreover, does not fully simulate the reality of incidental vocabulary learning, such as encountering the same word multiple times when reading a book. To fill in the research gap of the relationship between informativeness of context and frequency of words on L2 vocabulary acquisition, Feng (2019) found that the repetition of target words in a more informative context is more effective than in a less informative context. Contrary to what Yanagisawa and Webb (2021) have found, regardless of the informativeness of context, one's vocabulary knowledge is better when he or she encounters the word more. In addition, how learners make use of the context to derive the meaning from a new word also deserves attention. Nassaji (2003) reveals that most people use repeating strategy to infer the meanings, but verifying and self-inquiry are more related to successful inferencing than other strategies. She and Hu (2012) also unveil inferencing strategies used change according to the extent of involvement load of the task, yet the degree of load does not have an impact on the rate of successful inference.

Research questions

Based on the research gap mentioned, the research questions of this study are as follows:

1. What are the effects of single-player games on learner's receptive knowledge and productive knowledge of words?
2. Does the exposure frequency and the context of the words influence one's vocabulary acquisition?
3. Does the multi-media (pictures and videos) influence one's vocabulary acquisition?
4. Which component(s) in ILH has the most prominent effect on one's vocabulary acquisition in single-player mode games?
5. Can single-player games actually stimulate incidental vocabulary acquisition?

Methodology

Eight participants were involved in this study, and they were split into two groups. All of them first took a pre-test of the words picked from the game. Participants in the experimental group had a four-hour gameplay and an immediate post-test was conducted afterwards. The participants were asked to use think-aloud technique, which means to speak out their thinking process and comments, and to show their inference to the words during the gameplay (Nassaji, 2003). For the control group, they were asked to take the pre-test and post-test. The time range between the two was at least four hours so that we can compare the results with the experimental group fairly. The pre-test and post-test are based on the Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS) to measure the depth of knowledge of each word (See Appendix 6). Its working principle will be elaborated in the later section.

Participants

The participants include 3 males and 5 females. Their L1 is Cantonese and they are all studying as an undergraduate. The average age of the participants is 20.5. They all started acquiring English as L2 at the age of 3 (around the first year of kindergarten). Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English Test (CPE) of B2 level and the updated Vocabulary Level Test (UVL) are conducted first to find participants who have similar English proficiency and vocabulary size. Scores of English Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE) are also asked and the average score is 5.125 (out of 7 (5**)) as in HKDSE). Based on the scores, the participants are randomly assorted into the experimental and control group. (See Appendix 1 for demographic information)

The Game- The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild (BOTW)

BOTW is one of the biggest works in Nintendo. It is an open-world game where Link, the protagonist was put into a slumber for 100 years to save the kingdom Hyrule. This single-player game is an integration of action-adventure and puzzle-solving. The player explores

Hyrule and finishes the main task, defeating Calamity Ganon, the final boss of the game who wishes to conquer the whole Hyrule. In the process, the player needs to defeat monster tribes, thinks of methods to reach certain places and encounters a variety of weapons and items to fight. They can also mix and match the materials they have picked up to cook food. By controlling Link to talk to non-player characters (NPCs), they will ask him to perform some side quests.

Seeing that there are sets of vocabulary descriptions for each item, it is a decent tool to investigate whether single-player games can help ESL learners acquire new vocabulary, especially low-frequency words because they serve as distinct benchmarks. “Denizens” and “melee”, for instance, are unusual words used in daily life. Apart from that, many unfamiliar words appear in different kinds of context, such as in conversations, game descriptions and sometimes with the support of pictures. The game is useful for investigating in which context (with pictures or not) and which component(s) in ILH facilitate(s) vocabulary acquisition.

The Route

The game at first asks the player to complete a tutorial session, known as the first main quest, before proceeding to free exploration. The route designed for this study (See Appendix 2) starts from “The Isolated Plateau” and ends with completing the second main quest “Seeking Out Impa” and visiting Ta’loh Naeg Shrine in Kakariko Village. In the process, the player will come across the words which have already appeared in the first main quest, and more advanced weapons, new items, monsters and NPCs. They are in the form of game descriptions, headings and conversations. The players will also chance upon new words in the form of a video. They acquire advanced combating skills at Ta’loh Naeg Shrine in Kakariko Village, where they should read the game descriptions to finish so. Not only has this route fulfilled the gameplay time, but also has provided numerous opportunities for them

to reencounter old words and chance upon new words. It is also designed based on ILH and how different types of multimedia affect the acquisition of new vocabulary.

The Target Words

26 words are picked in this test. They can be categorised into five types according to the context- “Item and Item Description” (seven words) , “Conversation with important NPCs in video form” (five words), “Game Description” (four words), “Weapon and Weapon Description” (five words), and “Conversation with non-important NPCs and with important NPCs but not in video form” (five words). Tables 3 and 4 (see Appendix 3) show the meaning looked up in Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford University Press, 1989) (except the word “carmesque”), part of speech, the context, support by pictures of any, and frequency of the words appeared. They are categorized into “varies”, “1”, “3”, “5” and “10” respectively.

Vocabulary Knowledge Scale test (VKS)

Nation and Hunston (2013) assert knowing a word involves two aspects of knowledge: receptive and productive knowledge. Receptive knowledge use “involves perceiving the form of a word while listening or reading and retrieving its meaning” (P.47), while productive knowledge use “involves wanting to express a meaning through speaking or writing and retrieving and producing the appropriate spoken or written word form” (P.47). To measure both receptive and productive knowledge words, Paribakht and Wesche (1993) invent the Vocabulary Knowledge Scale test (VKS). This test uses a 5-point scale to measure learners’ self-perceived and demonstrated knowledge. For self-report knowledge, the scale ranges from no knowledge to comprehensive knowledge of the word, which is denoted as category I to V. For demonstrated knowledge, the scale ranges from total unfamiliarity to advanced use of the word. The two figures (see Appendix 3) show the self-report scale and the meaning behind the difference between self-report and demonstrated results.

In Figure X, categories I to IV represent the extent of self-perceived receptive knowledge, and category V represents that of self-perceived productive knowledge. In Figure Y, wrong responses of III, IV and V can lead to a possible score of 2, meaning the participant's vocabulary knowledge is indeed only up to recognition level, but not the semantic and pragmatic level. A score of 3 signifies the participant knows the semantic meaning of the word. A score of 4 indicates one can incorporate the word in a sentence but it is grammatically incorrect. Wrongly conjugating the word or the word class not matching the sentence, for instance. A score of 5 is given if one is able to generate a sentence and the part of speech of the word is correct. In other words, scores 1-3 measure the degree of receptive knowledge and scores 4-5 measure that of productive knowledge. Without notifying the possible score scale, participants can honestly answer the self-reported category. VKS can also track whether single-player games help one gain a deeper understanding of the words and even elevate their understanding from receptive to a productive level.

Results

Distribution of VKS Score

The scores that the participants have obtained in VKS in pre-test and post-test are shown in Tables 5 and 6 (see Appendix 4). For the experimental group, it was found that there was an increase of the percentage of obtaining a score of 2 to 5. For instance, for the category of "Item and Item Description", a dramatic decrease of score 1 from 67.86% to 17.86% was discovered and the percentage of score 2 skyrocketed to 60.17%. There was also a rise in the percentage of scores 4 and 5 from 0% to 3.57% and 14.29% respectively. In particular, the words "maracas", "paraglider", and "claymore" had the largest improvement of word knowledge among the candidates, which were mostly moving from score from 1 to

5. Most words (13 in total) only showed a minimal improvement from 1 to 2 or even remained the same score, such as “elixir”. To look into each participant, P2 and P3 got the most number of items which obtain scores 4 to 5. To illustrate, P2 scored 2 for the word “flurry” in the pre-test, and she attained a score of 5 in the post-test. For the overall score increase of each category, the “Item and Item description” section had the highest percentage increase of 65%, followed by 52% in “Conversation with trivial NPCs and important NPCs (non-video form)”, 37.5% in “Conversation with important NPCs (video)”, 33.3% in “weapon & weapon description”, and 28.125% in “game description” at last.

For the control group, there was only a percentage increase in the score of 2 as seen in the table while that of scores 3, 4 and 5 remain the same. To exemplify, for the category of “Weapon & Weapon Description”, there was a drop of score 1 from 45% to 30% and a rise was observed in score 2 from 50% to 65%, while the percentage of scoring 3, 4 and 5 remained 5%, 0% and 0% respectively. It was told that once the participants recognize the word appeared in the pre-test and they have not encountered the word before, they shall tick category II in the post-test. However, it was found that some participants still selected category I i.e. obtain a score of 1 in VKS in the post-test. P7, for example, chose category I for most of the words (21 in total) in the pre-test. It was discovered the words which she selected category I in the post-test were the same as that in the pre-test, such as “club”. A percentage rise in the total score for each category was also found, but it was not as significant as that of the experimental group. To illustrate, an 18.6% of percentage increase was observed in the category of “item and item description”, but that of the experimental group is 65%.

Observations during the Gameplay

The participants show some common features when they are playing the game. To explain in a more detailed way, P2 and P3 are discussed together while P1 and P4 are

grouped into one class. To begin with, all of them read game descriptions and conversations with NPCs but the amount of attention differs. P2 and P3 mostly repeated after them. In turn, they could follow the game instructions and hence finish the tasks easily. However, P1 and P4 tended to skip the conversations later without noticing that the game instructions were there, so they could not do the tasks by themselves. In “The Isolated Plateau”, the old man (an NPC) asked the player to press the right stick on the console, turn on the scope mode and mark up all the shrines in the map. When the game instruction popped up, P2 and P3 studied carefully and repeat after the instruction given by the NPC like “press this thing, and this. OK”. Therefore, they managed to find all the shrines as required. In contrast, P1 and P4 only sometimes read after the conversations. Most of the time they just quickly pressed A to proceed the conversation, so they missed the game instructions.

The same phenomenon can be seen in item descriptions and NPCs. P2 and P3 sometimes read after them, such as wood. They randomly studied the weapon descriptions, normal items like amber and recipes, but tended to skip the food they picked up like acorn and mushrooms. Sometimes they also skipped the descriptions when they recognized the functions of the items at the first sight. Like P2 and P3, P1 and P4 read the descriptions randomly as well, but they did not grasp the function of items. P1, for example, she cooked the screws and gears to make dubious food but she did not pay attention to their description that they were used for making ancient tools. For NPCs, P2 and P3 always interacted with NPCs to get more information and bought a chance of fetching some useful items. For P1 and P4, they often needed my encouragement and advice to interact with them.

Lastly, all of them voluntarily reacted to the game in forms of interjection (e.g. swearing words), confirmation (e.g. saying “OK” like the above) and comments (e.g. “The NPCs look so old!”). In terms of enjoyment, P1 and P4 wished to finish the game as soon as possible by pressing the A button continuously to proceed and by asking for help. P2 and P3

paid close attention to the game and they tried their best to solve the quests by themselves first unless they really needed assistance. For the videos in the game, all of them did not watch them seriously, but they took this time as a little rest for them.

Discussion

In this section, discussion will be made based on the research questions stated above.

1. What are the effects of single-player games on learner's receptive knowledge and productive knowledge of words?

Single-player games help learners gain receptive knowledge of words in large part, but rarely to the extent of meaning retrieval. According to Table 5, the percentage of attaining a score 3 and 4 is always significantly smaller than that of a score of 2 in post-test. To exemplify, for the "Conversation with important NPCs (video)" class, the percentage of score 2 in the post-test was 60% while that of scores 3 and 4 were only 10% and 0% respectively. Linking back to VKS, a score of 2 means that participants select category II, "I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means", suggesting that their receptive knowledge gained is only up to recognition of forms. However, we do see that there is a small increase in the number of participants getting a score of 3 while we cannot observe a change in that for the control group. For the "Weapon and Weapon Description" class, for instance, there was an increase of 25% of score 3 in the experimental group while it remained 5% for the control group, implying the game helps them to elevate their receptive knowledge to retrieval of meaning. To look into detail, the word which nearly all participants reach a score of 3 in the post-test is "claymore". The great difference between the percentages of 3 and 4 may be due to participants' lack of confidence in composing a sentence.

There is merely a slight achievement regarding vocabulary productive knowledge. The percentage of getting a score of 4 and 5 either remains the same or an increase of not more than five answers. A rise of 14.29% of score 5 was found for the “Item and Item Description” category while that remained 5% for the “Weapon and Weapon Description” class, for example. The same percentage is found in the pre- and post-test of some categories since some participants have already mastered full knowledge of the word and they did not gain productive knowledge. P2, for instance has already known the word “inflict” beforehand, and other participants did not gain productive knowledge of the words in the “Weapon and Weapon Description” class after the gameplay, so the percentage remains 5%. As expected, that in the control group remains the same. The word that nearly all participants in the experimental group reach a score of 5 is “paraglider”. Again, the low percentage of getting 4 or 5 may be attributed to inconfidence of the participants. They are not sure about the word meaning, let alone forming a sentence of it.

The Trade-Off Effect proposed by Skehan (1999) can explain the above results. According to this theory, learners have limited attentional capacity and they may happen to attain one aspect of performance at the expense of another. “If a task demands a lot of attention on its content (because it is complex or puzzling), there will be less attention available to be devoted to its language” (Skehan and Foster, 2001, p. 189). Put differently, if a task is cognitively-demanding, learners tend to direct most of their attention to completion of the task rather than the linguistic items used. In this case, BOTW is a cognitively-demanding game since it requires players to perform multiple tasks at the same time. Knowing how to use the controls on the console, looking around the environment to stay alert, and solving puzzles in shrines, for instance. Participants divert most of their attention on completing the tasks, so they do not have surplus attention to look into the language in detail. Although the game requires players to read instructions and conversation with NPCs,

they just superficially process the vocabulary items and grab the main meaning of the whole passage to complete the missions instead.

2. Does the exposure frequency and the context of the words influence one's vocabulary acquisition?

This study finds that the frequency of words does not have a clear relationship with one's vocabulary acquisition, so as the context. Even some words occur more frequently, the learning outcome is not proportional to it. Take the word "calamity" as an example. It occurred about 10 times in each gameplay, but the highest VKS score obtained by the participants was only 2, which adheres to the conclusion drawn by Yanagisawa and Webb (2021). At the same time, it is in contrast with what Feng (2019) found- the repetition of target words in a more informative context is more effective than in a less informative context. The word "claymore" is one of the words which have the most improvement, but it appears merely in the heading like "traveller's claymore". Surely, "travellers" does not help players to derive the meaning.

It is possible that the Trade-off Effect also overrides the influence brought by frequency and context. "Only those aspects receiving enough attention will reach optimal performance while processes under limited attention become erroneous" (Sample and Michel, 2014, p. 27). Learners prioritise completion of tasks, which requires the necessary skills performing at the same time as mentioned above, over particular wordings. Even the words have appeared multiple times, and the context is informative enough for learners to guess so, the cognitive demand of the game has already occupied most of their attention, so they merely acknowledge the fact that "I have seen this word before" when it reoccurs, but do not interpret the meaning of it. Without drilling on the meanings, they can only perceive the form of the word i.e. acquire new words receptively to a small extent. This study cannot reveal the influence on vocabulary learning brought by these two factors.

3. Does the multi-media (pictures and videos) influence one's vocabulary acquisition?

Pictures do influence one's vocabulary acquisition. However, it depends on the depiction of pictures so as not to mislead the players. As mentioned the words "maracas", "paraglider", and "claymore" obtain the most significant breakthrough of word knowledge. The participants at least can retrieve the meanings of these words i.e. a score of 3. Depicted in Tables 3 and 4, the graphics of these items exactly match with their meanings. Revealed in research question 2, the frequency of words does not have a clear relationship with learning of words. So, we can suggest that the improvement of word knowledge of these words is attributable to the assistance of visual aids, which is in line with what Chun and Plass (1996) have found. Dualing-coding effect explains pictorial information has encoded both verbal and nonverbal information through generating a lexical label (Bisson et al., 2015). This phenomenon is also known as the "picture superiority effect", meaning "having access to a picture during encoding will be beneficial for recall" (Bisson et al., 2015, p. 1310). Due to the distinctiveness of pictorial information, participants can remember the words better since "they benefit from a more direct connection to semantic representation" (Bisson et al., 2015, p. 1310). The words "maracas", "paraglider", and "claymore" encode the verbal information i.e. explaining what these words mean in words, and nonverbal information i.e. represented in pictures. Each picture is also exclusive to one item in the game, so the combination of these two informations, thus forms a specific meaning representation with one word only. Pictures are in constant and fixed quality. Learners can look at the picture for unlimited time (Chun and Plass, 1996). In the game, the visuals stay unless participants press A to proceed. They can spend their attention on them as long as they want to understand the pathway between the semantic meanings and the pictorial information provided.

For videos, they in general facilitate vocabulary acquisition to a minimal extent i.e. recognition level. As reflected by the second category "Conversation with important NPCs",

participants only attain a score of 2 at maximum in these words. The word “calamity”, for instance. All participants grab the negative connotation of this word, but they do not know what exactly “calamity” means, and even get misled by the graphics. P1 once asks me whether Calamity Ganon means a dragon as it is depicted as the picture in table 3. “Prowess” and “primal” appear when the players encounter the cutscene of Impa who explains the history of Hyrule. As mentioned above, however, they do not focus on the video, so they miss the opportunity to chance upon these words. They also appear once only in the cutscenes, and hence they have no learning of these words, let alone recognizing them. On top of that, videos are more transient and time-based than pictures, and “the pace of presentation of information is not sensitive to cognitive constraints of learners” (Chun and Plass, 1996, p. 193). Participants cannot pause the video to look into what information is actually conveyed at a particular point of time and digest what is happening. The cutscenes in this game cannot be paused as well, so participants do not have enough time to process the words. The visual aids of the video may also be sufficient to facilitate understanding of what the NPCs are talking about. Therefore, participants do not allocate their attention to these unknown words and thus leading to a low learning outcome.

4. Which component(s) in ILH has the most prominent effect on one’s vocabulary acquisition in single-player mode games?

Both the need and search components have the most prominent effect on learner’s vocabulary acquisition as reflected in this study. As mentioned above, “maracas”, “paraglider”, and “claymore” have the largest improvement of word knowledge among the candidates. What is worth mentioning is missions are made based on “paraglider” and “maracas”. “Need is strong when it is intrinsically motivated, that is, self-imposed by the learners” (Hulstijn and Laufer, 2001, p. 543), so learners must know the word in order to complete the missions. “The Isolated Plateau” mission is solely designed for players to obtain

the paraglider from the NPC. Learners, then, have a strong need of knowing what a paraglider is to finish this quest. It also facilitates transportation for the rest of the game, so it is a useful tool which saves time for players. Task-essentialness, therefore motivates players to remember this word, leading to effective learning. The same applies to “maracas”. The specific quest called “The Priceless Maracas” asks the player to help a NPC, Hestu to get back his maracas. They also have a strong need of knowing what maracas are to help them confirm they have completed the task. Although there is no specific task for “claymore”, it is one of the most helpful weapons at the beginning of the game. Its attack value is relatively higher than other weapons. Participants then always switch their weapon-in-hand to this and it is very efficient in killing enemies. Task-usefulness poses a deep impression of this word due to its value in the game, and hence remember it better. This also explains why “Item and Item Description” category obtains the highest increase in overall score.

Search is also one of the crucial components. Unlike traditional acts of search, participants seek clues from available resources, which are mostly pictures. As mentioned above, graphics do facilitate one’s vocabulary acquisition, but the criterion is that the picture should be the exact visualization of the word instead of just an abstract drawing. The three words above have a clear representation of the words as depicted in Tables 3 and 4, so their attempt to find meaning of the unknown words is achieved. Compared to other words which also have graphics to support so but a low score is obtained in the post-test, such as “dubious”, the graphic depicted is only a pixelated image with some dark colours, which is still an abstract illustration to the meaning of the word. Search can only be achieved successfully when the meaning of the word matches the graphics.

New Factor: Prior Knowledge

Among the four participants in the experimental group, surprisingly it is found that P2 and P3 achieve a higher learning outcome than P1 and P4. Such difference accounts for their

prior knowledge to the mechanism of games. Nation (2013) claims that “real world knowledge can play a vital part in guessing. Learners who already have a topic-related script or schema can use this to help guessing [new words]” (p. 364). P2 and P3 are gamers who often play games. They have rich experience of playing contemporary games which require players to explore the world, interact with NPCs to finish the tasks, and complete the challenges like Monster Hunter. As they have undergone “trainings” of playing games, they know where their attention should be paid despite a cascade of elements involved in a game, like the observations stated earlier. They also grab the general design of a game and they are already used to the functions of the buttons, explaining why they could finish the tasks faster than others. They know it is necessary to read the conversation with NPCs as they always provide useful information like other games do, and they know they should pick up whatever items they found since they will be useful for future use. For P1 and P4, they do not have the habit of gaming in their daily life. When they first play the game, they struggle with the functions with the buttons. They tend to skip the conversations with NPCs to proceed the game while they miss important information within. The Trade-off effect happens here since they are overwhelmed by the cognitive demand of the task. However, for P2 and P3, as they used to the design of games, there is surplus attention for them to focus on the language.

Conclusion

This part will be based on the last research question posed previously.

5. Can single-player games actually stimulate incidental vocabulary acquisition?

This study suggests that the answer is affirmative, but the effect is mostly to the extent of meaning retrieval. The Trade-off Effect raised by Skehan (1999) is proved to be true in this study. Due to the high cognitive demand of BOTW, participants allocate most of their

attention on task completion at the expense of their focus on the language. This effect also outweighs those brought by word frequency and their context, so we cannot observe a clear relationship of incidental vocabulary learning with these factors. However, if the participants have a gaming background, they can benefit from this kind of learning more than normal learners since the cognitive demand is a smaller burden to them. One of the most important elements of video games, multi-media, does promote learning, Task usefulness or essentialness, together with pictorial information assist learners to acquire vocabulary most effectively since they impose a strong “need” by themselves through missions and perform “search” for the unknown words from the environment and descriptions in ILH respectively, but only when they exist in form of pictures and they should be the exact representations of the meanings of the words. Otherwise, it creates misunderstanding and prevents learners from establishing the meaning-form linkage.

Compared to MMOGs and MMORPGs, single-player games also provide actions of avatar and also a low-language anxiety environment like what Zheng et al., (2015) and Jabbari and Eslami (2019) suggested, and thus promote vocabulary acquisition. “In online linguistic and social interaction, learners adopted polite expressions to build up collaborative relationships, ... and requests for assistance... and became increasingly positive toward gaming and language learning emerged in gaming” (Zhang et al., 2015, p.2). In other words, these two games facilitate learners to acquire vocabulary through socialization. However, as reflected by the frustrations of P1 and P4, single-player games involve more work since players have to guess unfamiliar words by themselves without seeking help or confirmation from a second player. Therefore, only P2 and P3, who have already had advanced gaming knowledge, develop a positive attitude to learning through gaming. Put differently, the disadvantage of single-mode games is lack of interaction to ensure themselves are on the right track of the game, but except for this drawback, other aspects like multimedia help also

achieve the same effectiveness like MMOGs and MMORPGs do.

Limitations and Suggestions

In this section, imitations are listed and the corresponding suggestions are given.

To begin with, the study period is too short. This project should be finished within two to three months, so the experiment time limit is shortened to two two-hour sessions only. As a result, we cannot obtain a clearer causal relationship between single-player games and incidental vocabulary learning. The participants indeed finished at a very early point. They have not saved the four Divine Beasts, completed challenges of the shrines and obtained the most crucial weapon in the game. When they have a longer time to adapt to the game, the cognitive demand gradually decreases and thus participants can have surplus attention on linguistic items. Therefore, a longitudinal study is recommended so that a clearer pattern and casual relationship of different factors can be observed.

Apart from that, there is a lack of training session of gameplay. As mentioned above, most attention is used to cope with the cognitive demand of the game. The four-hour gameplay is not enough for participants to adapt to the game, so they cannot pay attention to the vocabulary items, leading to a low learning outcome. A training session is suggested to first lower the cognitive demand. Hence, participants can learn the words more effectively and then we can investigate the relationship between frequency, context and vocabulary acquisition without the effect brought by the high cognitive demand.

Last but not least, the sampling size is too small. Only eight local undergraduates are found. As each gameplay consists of four hours in total, it is time-consuming. If more people are included, two to three months is very limited. Although this study concludes learners who have a gaming background attain a higher learning outcome, the sampling size is too small that we cannot guarantee if this applies to a wider scale. Therefore, a larger sampling size is

suggested so that a more valid conclusion can be drawn.

Pedagogical Implications

Despite the limitations above, this study still provides some insights on vocabulary learning through gaming. As reflected by the analysis, high cognitive demand gets in the way of allocating attention to linguistic items. For this reason, game industries shall adjust the cognitive demand according to the target learners. In the other way round, learners shall select games according to their English proficiency. Furthermore, more evaluation component shall be incorporated. As aforementioned, evaluation adds involvement load in the task. Not only does it require attention to the new word, but also collocations with other words. It is also found that the involvement load is the same compared to a task with need and search and that with need and evaluation, suggesting the more influential nature of the evaluation component (Laufer and Hulstij, 2001). The pattern of “task-essentialness or -usefulness + highly-relevant illustrations”, finally shall be incorporated as suggested in the conclusion. It allows learners to self-impose strong “need” and perform “search” easily.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Demographic Information of Participants in Experimental and Control Group

	P1	P2	P3	P4
Age	20	20	20	22
Gender	F		M	
Nationality	Hong Kong			
Mother Tongue	Cantonese			
Field of Study	Occupational Therapy	Double Major in Translation & Korean Studies	Social Work	Insurance, Finance and Actuarial Analysis
Year of Study	4			5
DSE Score	5*	5	5*	5

Table 1 Demographic Information of Participants in Experimental Group

	P5	P6	P7	P8
Age	20	20	20	22
Gender	M	F		
Nationality	Hong Kong			
Mother Tongue	Cantonese			
Field of Study	Professional Accountancy	IBBA	Music	Biomedical Science
Year of Study	3	3	4	5
DSE Score	5	4	5	5*

Table 2 Demographic Information of Participants in Control Group

Appendix 2: Game Route of this study



Fig.1 Designed Route for this study (The Great Plateau → Dueling Peaks Tower → Dueling Peaks Stable → Kakariko Village → Ta'loh Naeg Shrine)

Appendix 3: List of target words








	Word	Meaning	Part of Speech	Context (extract)	Supported by Picture (if any)	Frequency
Item & Item Description	Elixir	A strong extract or tincture	Noun	"A tooth obtained from a Bokoblin. It's worn down and not very sharp, but it's still pretty hard. Cook it alongside a critter to make an elixir " (Bokoblin Fang)		> 5
	Maracas	instrument made from a hollow gourd or gourd-shaped container filled with dried beans, etc., and played, usually in pairs, by being shaken	Noun	"Hestu's beloved maracas . He's been shaking them since he was two years old."		> 5
	Paraglider	A large kite-like structure having two flexible triangular sections joined side by side, and designed to glide with a passive load or with a pilot to control its flight	Noun	(description about the Great Plateau is surrounded by high walls and Link may die by jumping from it) "Of course, if you had a paraglider like mine, that would be quite another story"		> 5
	Iridescence	the intermingling and interchange of brilliant colours as in the rainbow, soap-bubbles, and mother-of-pearl; a play of glittering and changing colours	Noun	"A valuable ore that gives off a mesmerizing iridescence similar to the inside of a seashell. It contains the power of water"		< 5
	Dubious	Objectively doubtful; fraught with doubt or uncertainty; uncertain, undetermined; indistinct, ambiguous, vague	Adjective	" Dubious Food" as the heading		varies
	Buoyant	Having the power of floating, tending to float; floating	Adjective	"A spring used in ancient machinery. It is light and buoyant enough to float on water, and no matter how many times it's compressed, it never loses tension."		< 5
	Caramelesque	Having the quality of caramel	Adjective	"A fossilized resin with a caramelesque sheen to it. It's been valued as a component in decorations and crafting since ancient times."		< 5
Conversation with important NPC (video)	Resurrection	Revival or revitalization, esp. of a person who or thing which has fallen into inactivity, disuse, or obscurity	Noun	"And then, you were taken to the Shrine of Resurrection . Here you now stand revitalized, 100 years later."		< 5
	Calamity	A grievous disaster, an event or circumstance causing loss or misery; a distressing misfortune	Noun	"The history of the royal family of Hyrule ia also the history of Calamity Ganon, a primal evil that has endured over the ages"	 	≥ 10
	Denizen	An inhabitant, indweller, occupant (of a place, region, etc.). Used of persons, animals, and plants: chiefly poetic or rhetorical	Noun	"Hyrule was then blossoming as a highly advanced civilization. Even the most powerful monsters posed little threat to the denizens of the realm"		1
	Prowess	exceptional ability or talent in a particular field or undertaking; skill, expertise.	Noun	"The people thought it wise to utilize their technological prowess to ensure the safety of land, should Calamity Ganon ever return"		1
	Primal	Belonging to the earliest time or stage; original, first. Also: belonging to an ancient time; primitive, primeval.	Adjective	"The history of the royal family of Hyrule ia also the history of Calamity Ganon, a primal evil that has endured over the ages"		1

Table 3

Table of words of categories Item and Item Description and Conversation with Important NPC (video)

Note that the word “dubious” is labelled as “varies” since participants may not encounter this word unless they have a weird combination of food.


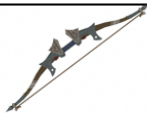
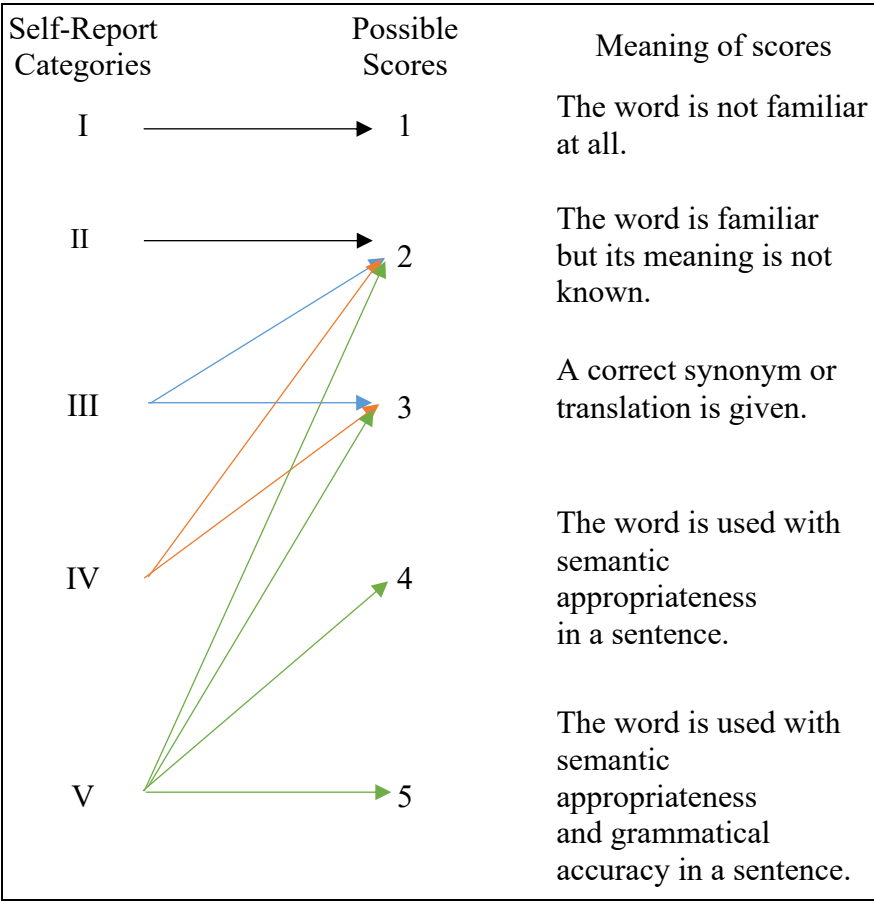
	Word	Meaning	Part of Speech	Context (extract)	Supported by Picture (if any)	Frequency
Game Description	Melee	A battle or engagement at close quarters, a hand-to-hand fight; a skirmish; a confused struggle or scuffle, esp. one involving many people	Noun	"You can't hold any melee weapons"		> 5
	Snare	A device for capturing small wild animals or birds, usually consisting of a string with a running noose in which a foot or the head may be caught	Noun	"Grab on to metallic objects using the magnetic energy that pours forth from the Magnesis rune. Objects held in the magnetic snare can be lifted up and moved freely"		< 3
	Flurry	A sharp and sudden shower; a sudden rush	Noun	" Flurry rush" as a button		> 5
	Parry	To ward off or turn aside a weapon or blow, esp. with a countermove	Verb	"You can repel an attack if you parry with your shield at just the right time. Strike back in the opening you create."		< 3
Weapon & Weapon Description	Claymore	The two-edged broadsword of the ancient Scottish Highlanders	Noun	"Traveller's claymore" as heading		> 5
	Club	A heavy stick or staff for use as a weapon, thin enough at one end to be grasped with the hand, and increasing in thickness and weight towards the other end	Noun	"Boko Club" and "Spiked Boko Club" as heading		> 10
	Jab	To thrust with the end or point of something; to poke roughly; to stab	Verb	"A reinforced Bokoblin club made to maximize damage. The sharpened bones jabbed into it make it a brutal weapon."		< 3
	Haphazardly	Haphazard: Dependent on chance or accident; lacking any obvious principle of organization --> In a haphazard manner; at random; casually	Adverb	"A spear haphazardly carved from a large tree branch"		≥ 1
	Inflict	To afflict, assail, trouble (a person) with something painful or disagreeable	Verb	"A bow designed for armed conflict. Inflicts more damage than a civilian bow, but it will still burn if it touches fire."		< 3
Conversation with trivial NPCs & important NPC (without video)	Entrust	To assign the responsibility for something valued or important to (a person, organization, etc.); to put one's trust in (a person, organization, etc.) with regard to a particular task or responsibility	Verb	"Before Princess Zelda went to nobly meet her fate. She entrusted me with some words she wished to say to you"		1
	Enigma	Something puzzling; an unsolved problem	Noun	"It would seem we have quite the enigma here"		1
	Peckish	Somewhat hungry	Adjective	"If you're feelin' a mite peckish , I've got just the thing to get your strength back. A nice hunk o' meat!"		≥ 1
	Hunk	A large piece cut off (e.g. from a loaf, cheese, etc.); a thick or clumsy piece, a lump; a hunch	Noun	"If you're feelin' a mite peckish, I've got just the thing to get your strength back. A nice hunk o' meat!"		≥ 1
	Shun	To abhor, detest, loathe	Verb	"Others fostered a hatred toward the kingdom that shunned them. These sad souls swore their allegiance to Ganon."- Cado		0-1

Table 4

Table of words of categories Game Description, Weapon and Weapon description, Conversation with trivial NPCs and important NPCs (non-video form)

Appendix 4- Figures explaining Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS)



Self-Report Categories	
I	I don't remember having seen this word before.
II	I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means.
III	I have seen this word before, and I think it means _____.(synonym or translation)
IV	I know this word. It means _____ (synonym or translation)
V	I can use this word in a sentence: _____ (Write a sentence.) (If you do this section, please also do Section IV.)

Figure Y

Figure X The scale of Self-Report Categories of VKS

VKS scoring categories- meaning of scores
and corresponding options

Appendix 5: Distribution of VKS Score

Experimental Group (with 4-hour gameplay)								
Variable	No. of words	time	VKS Scoring category					Total group score
			1	2	3	4	5	
Item & Item Description	7	pre-	67.86% (19)	25% (7)	7.14% (2)	0% (0)	0% (0)	40
		post-	17.86% (5)	60.71% (17)	3.57% (1)	3.57% (1)	14.29% (4)	66
Conversation with important NPCs (video)	5	pre-	75% (15)	10% (2)	5% (1)	0% (0)	10% (2)	32
		post-	20% (4)	60% (12)	10% (2)	0% (0)	10% (2)	44
Game Description	4	pre-	31.25% (5)	50% (8)	12.5% (2)	0% (0)	6.25% (1)	32
		post-	18.75% (3)	50% (8)	6.25% (1)	6.25% (1)	18.75% (3)	41
Weapon & Weapon Description	5	pre-	50% (10)	45% (9)	0% (0)	0% (0)	5% (1)	33
		post-	20% (4)	50% (10)	25% (5)	0% (0)	5% (1)	44
Conversation with trivial NPCs & important NPCs (without video)	5	pre-	75% (15)	25% (5)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	25
		post-	30% (6)	60% (12)	5% (1)	0% (0)	5% (1)	38

Table 5

Vocabulary Scores obtained in Pre- and Post-test by Experimental Group

Control Group								
Variable	No. of words	time	VKS Scoring category					Total group score
			1	2	3	4	5	
Item & Item Description	7	pre-	78.6% (22)	7.14% (2)	7.14% (2)	0% (0)	7.14% (2)	43
		post-	46.43% (13)	39.29% (11)	7.14% (2)	0% (0)	7.14% (2)	51
Conversation with important NPCs (video)	5	pre-	45% (9)	35% (7)	15% (3)	0% (0)	5% (1)	37
		post-	20% (4)	60% (12)	15% (3)	0% (0)	5% (1)	42
Game Description	4	pre-	50% (8)	50% (8)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	24
		post-	31.25% (5)	55% (11)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	27
Weapon & Weapon Description	5	pre-	45% (9)	50% (10)	5% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)	32
		post-	30% (6)	65% (13)	5% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)	36
Conversation with trivial NPCs & important NPCs (without video)	5	pre-	60% (12)	35% (7)	0% (0)	5% (1)	0% (0)	29
		post-	30% (6)	65% (13)	0% (0)	5% (1)	0% (0)	36

Table 6

Vocabulary Scores obtained in Pre- and Post-test by Control Group

Note that numbers in parathesis is the exact number of answers. For instance, (7) in the column of score 2 means that there are a total of 7 answers obtaining 2.

Appendix 6: Vocabulary Knowledge Scale Pre- /Post-Test

Vocabulary Knowledge Scale- Pre-test/ Post-test

Instructions: Tick the box that best describes your knowledge of the word. If you tick box III or IV, you can either write a synonym or a Chinese translation of the word. For box V, please write down a sentence using the word provided.

(If you have completed V, please also fill in IV)

1. Elixir

- I: I have never seen this word
- II: I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
- III: I have seen this word before, and I think it means _____
- IV: I know this word. It means _____
- V: I can use this word in a sentence:

2. Maracas

- I: I have never seen this word
- II: I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
- III: I have seen this word before, and I think it means
- IV: I know this word. It means _____
- V: I can use this word in a sentence:

3. Paraglider

- I: I have never seen this word
- II: I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
- III: I have seen this word before, and I think it means
- IV: I know this word. It means _____
- V: I can use this word in a sentence:

4. Iridescence

- I: I have never seen this word
- II: I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
- III: I have seen this word before, and I think it means
- IV: I know this word. It means _____
- V: I can use this word in a sentence:

5. Dubious

- I: I have never seen this word
- II: I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
- III: I have seen this word before, and I think it means
- IV: I know this word. It means _____
- V: I can use this word in a sentence:

6. Buoyant

- I: I have never seen this word
- II: I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
- III: I have seen this word before, and I think it means
- IV: I know this word. It means _____
- V: I can use this word in a sentence:

7. Caramellesque

- I: I have never seen this word
- II: I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
- III: I have seen this word before, and I think it means
- IV: I know this word. It means _____
- V: I can use this word in a sentence:

8. Resurrection

- I: I have never seen this word
- II: I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
- III: I have seen this word before, and I think it means
- IV: I know this word. It means _____
- V: I can use this word in a sentence:

9. Calamity

- I: I have never seen this word
- II: I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
- III: I have seen this word before, and I think it means
- IV: I know this word. It means _____
- V: I can use this word in a sentence:

10. Melee

- I: I have never seen this word
- II: I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
- III: I have seen this word before, and I think it means
- IV: I know this word. It means _____
- V: I can use this word in a sentence:

11. Denizen

- I: I have never seen this word
- II: I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
- III: I have seen this word before, and I think it means
- IV: I know this word. It means _____
- V: I can use this word in a sentence:

12. Snare

- I: I have never seen this word
- II: I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
- III: I have seen this word before, and I think it means
- IV: I know this word. It means _____
- V: I can use this word in a sentence:

13. Prowess

- I: I have never seen this word
- II: I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
- III: I have seen this word before, and I think it means
- IV: I know this word. It means _____
- V: I can use this word in a sentence:

14. Primal

- I: I have never seen this word
- II: I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
- III: I have seen this word before, and I think it means
- IV: I know this word. It means _____
- V: I can use this word in a sentence:

15. Claymore

- I: I have never seen this word
- II: I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
- III: I have seen this word before, and I think it means
- IV: I know this word. It means _____
- V: I can use this word in a sentence:

16. Club (except the meaning of a society and a place for people to gather)

- I: I have never seen this word
- II: I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
- III: I have seen this word before, and I think it means
- IV: I know this word. It means _____
- V: I can use this word in a sentence:

17. Parry (a physical action)

- I: I have never seen this word
- II: I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
- III: I have seen this word before, and I think it means
- IV: I know this word. It means _____
- V: I can use this word in a sentence:

18. Flurry

- I: I have never seen this word
- II: I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
- III: I have seen this word before, and I think it means
- IV: I know this word. It means _____
- V: I can use this word in a sentence:

19. Jab

- I: I have never seen this word
- II: I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
- III: I have seen this word before, and I think it means
- IV: I know this word. It means _____
- V: I can use this word in a sentence:

20. Haphazardly

- I: I have never seen this word
- II: I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
- III: I have seen this word before, and I think it means
- IV: I know this word. It means _____
- V: I can use this word in a sentence:

21. Inflict

- I: I have never seen this word
- II: I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
- III: I have seen this word before, and I think it means
- IV: I know this word. It means _____
- V: I can use this word in a sentence:

22. Shun

- I: I have never seen this word
- II: I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
- III: I have seen this word before, and I think it means
- IV: I know this word. It means _____
- V: I can use this word in a sentence:

23. Entrust

- I: I have never seen this word
- II: I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
- III: I have seen this word before, and I think it means
- IV: I know this word. It means _____
- V: I can use this word in a sentence:

24. Enigma

- I: I have never seen this word
- II: I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
- III: I have seen this word before, and I think it means
- IV: I know this word. It means _____
- V: I can use this word in a sentence:

25. Peckish

- I: I have never seen this word
- II: I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
- III: I have seen this word before, and I think it means
- IV: I know this word. It means _____
- V: I can use this word in a sentence:

26. Hunk

- I: I have never seen this word
- II: I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means
- III: I have seen this word before, and I think it means
- IV: I know this word. It means _____
- V: I can use this word in a sentence:

Constructing a Hongkonger Community on Instagram

Tsang Cho Kiu Natalie

Supervisor : Prof. Ron Darvin

1. Background of the Study

Hongkonger as a cultural and political identity

In Hong Kong, the discussion of identity involves three aspects: “ethnic identity”, with “95% of the population as ethnic Chinese”, “political identity”, discussing to what extent locals identify with the People’s Republic of China in their political values, alas, “cultural identity”, emphasizing on “the free market economy, the rule of law, individual freedom, and democratic institutions” (Flowerdew, 2004). Although the majority of the population is ethnic Chinese, historically, they are also “people [who] came to Hong Kong to escape Communist rule or are the children of such people” (Ma & Fung, 1999). Under British’s colonial policy, the city’s contact with Mainland China was hence minimised, this then created “a space for the creation of a local Hong Kong identity”, which is determined in terms of the “political and cultural differences between Hong Kong and the Mainland” (Ma & Fung, 1999).

The word “Hongkonger” was first used in 1870 by the California newspaper, *the Daily Independent*, to describe residents of Hong Kong in its former days as a British colony (Lam, 2014). Being officially added to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2014, “Hongkonger” is defined as “a native or inhabitant of Hong Kong” (Lam, 2014). Along with the city’s handover to the Chinese government and its backlash towards the Chinese political influence realised in local socio-political movements, such as the Umbrella Movement in 2014 and protests against the extradition bill in 2019, “Hongkonger” is used as an intentional choice of self-labelling, as locals involved in the movements make effort to differentiate themselves from the “mainlanders” prompted by the ideology of “anti-mainlandisation” (Lam, 2014). During the protests, slogans like “we are not Chinese, we are not British, we are Hongkongers”, “Hongkongers, build a nation” are commonly chanted by demonstrators and circulated (Ho, 2020). The public’s particular use of the term in these slogans depicts that “Hongkonger” is characterised by anti-mainland sentiments and a sense of continued individuality of the city. Locals regard it as the cultural and political identity embodying shared ideologies and values, such as “democracy”, “freedom of speech”, “difference from

China”, “resilience”, “compassion” and “unity in the darkest hours” (Time Out Hong Kong, 2019).

The Hongkonger identity and the platform of Instagram

Recent surveys show that a plurality of the Hong Kong population, around 66%, call themselves “Hongkongers”, while only 32% identify as “Chinese” in general (2018). By October 2021, there are 3,244,800 Instagram users in Hong Kong, accounting for 42.8% of its entire population (2021). As Instagram is a widely-used social networking site, locals perform as Hongkongers, which many of them identify with, on the platform. In their identity performances, they contribute, curate and mobilise information to demonstrate common cultural beliefs and political aspirations that been shaping and driving them. Hence, users have consequentially become politically influential on the platform. Participants’ online participation often shapes their offline engagement in a series of Movement-related events (Lee & Chan, 2016). Users’ performances of a Hongkonger identity on Instagram mark where identity coincides with digital technologies, this further influences the Hong Kong society in terms of Hong Kong people’s sense of identity and its socio-political climate.

About this study

Under the premise that the Hongkonger identity and Instagram as a popular social networking platform among locals are closely correlated, this paper examines local users’ performances of a Hongkonger identity, its relation with the construction of a Hongkonger community on Instagram to address the intricate relation between the individual identity and community, and to discuss its significance to the society under the use of social media.

Hence, this paper poses the following questions:

1. How do the selected users’ assemble their specific linguistic and semiotic resources to perform a Hongkonger identity? Hence, what are the patterns in the way they imagine what constitutes a Hongkonger identity?
2. How do these individual performances of identity facilitate the construction of a Hongkonger community on Instagram?

2. Theoretical Framework

Firstly, this paper takes reference on Blommaert's theory of "identity as semiotic" (2009). Under the theory, identity is "semiotic through and through" (Blommaert, 2009). The construction of identity involves a "semiotic process of representation" with uses of "symbols, narratives and textual genres" (Blommaert, 2009). This process is socially-conditioned, as semiotic practices depend on "context, occasion and purpose", in which users have to rely on the "available semiotic resources out of which recognisable identities can be constructed" (Blommaert, 2009). Blommaert describes identity as "particular forms of semiotic potential organised in a repertoire", in which people have to perform a particular identity "out of specific configurations of semiotic resources" (2009). In the process, "every act of semiosis is an act of identity in which [people] "give off information about [themselves]" (Blommaert, 2009). Bolander also suggests resources such as language and multimodality are significant for identity construction, especially in digital media (2017). Under technological advancements, there is "a tendency for individuals to perform identity work and to engage in interpersonal behaviour through various modes or channels, not solely language (Bolander & Locher, 2014). In social networking sites, "people combine images and other visual resources with the written word online" and this marks "a notable and progressive shift to increased multimodality (Bolander, 2017). Through "multimodal means", people are able to "make meaning" as "a way to position [themselves] and others" (Barton & Lee, 2013). HOWEVER, under such alterations, language is still considered as the "key means" that "remains central to practices of identity performances and constructions on social networking platforms" (Bolander, 2017; Barton & Lee, 2013).

This paper also draws on Anderson's notion of "imagined communities" to facilitate the discussion on identity performances and the construction of a community online (1991). "All communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact are imagined," as it is "impossible" for even "the smallest nations to know most of their fellow members, meet them or even hear from them" (Anderson, 1991). Imagination allows "an image of communion" to live in people's minds, in which they know they are "connected to each other" even without having to know or see each other (Anderson, 1991). People hence manifest their sense of affiliation towards one another with the use of text and media, i.e. print media, through the spread of images, language and ideologies (Anderson, 1991). This forges "indefinitely stretchable nets of kinship and clientship" among people who have never seen each other, this sense of belonging then allows an imagined community to be created and a national identity to grow (Anderson, 1991).

Boyd's construct of "networked publics" is intricately linked to the notion of "imagined communities" (2010; 1991). Boyd reveals that interactions and communication among people are very often limited physically, by space and time (2010). Yet, networked technologies allow people to "work around physical barriers to interaction" (Boyd, 2010). Hence, they are able to "connect across great distances and engage with asynchronously produced content over extended periods" (Boyd, 2010). Without having to meet, see or know each other, people are able to establish affinitive ties and perceive that they belong to certain "networked publics". "Networked publics" are defined as "publics that are restructured by networked technologies", which are "simultaneously a space and a[n] [imagined] collection of people" (Boyd, 2010). As the underlying structure of "networked publics", networked technologies constantly "reorganise how information flows and how people interact with information and each other", introducing new possible practices that shapes interactions in formulation of networked publics (Boyd, 2010). Therefore, social networking sites, i.e. Instagram, are "networked publics" as they "connect people en masse", "provide [them] the space for interactions and information" with "networked technologies shap[ing] and configure[ing] them" (Boyd, 2010). They reflect "a shift in the organization of online communities" and also "support pre-existing social relations", establishing intricate and significant links between people's online and offline lives (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

3. Review of Literature

Recent studies have explored on identity construction through various means on social networking platforms. Deumert specifically looks into how identities are constructed through creative orthography and the textual performances of images (2014). Users are able to draw on various forms and combinations of letters, words and symbols to perform "important social rituals", and to "publicly show [their] linguistic creativity and originality" (Deumert, 2014). Another study examines users' practices on profile pages and reactions to reveal insights on other participants' role in individual's identity construction. It is found that "identity claims in the status updates [are] supported in the reactions of others", which also resonated with Blommaert's view on identity, contending that the premise for the establishment of an identity is "to be recognised by others" (Bolander & Locher, 2014; 2009). While identity is both individually and socially constructed by others, this accentuated

the importance of others in the participation of individual identity construction, drawing links to the notion of community.

In light of the discussion, studies have also been done to examine the complex relation between social networking sites and local communities. Lee and Chau placed this discussion in light of Hong Kong's political context, i.e. the 2014 Umbrella Movement, as they study how local Instagrammers used multilingual hashtags to convey emotions and affect, asserting their "unique Hongkonger identities" and establishing "unity and solidarity" for the community (2018). The researchers conclude by saying "although [they] do not personally know most of the Instagrammers in [their] study, [they], as human beings with feelings, are inevitably directed by the emotional hashtags" (Lee & Chau, 2018). This shows under the interplay between language and emotions, hashtags as socio-technical structures link people across the platform. Gatti and Procentese also offer a relevant study on the significance of social networking sites and the local communities (2021). It is found that social media community-related practices help "overcome local communities' social and spatial constraints", hence "change citizens' experience of their local community... enhance[ing] their ties to both the community and its places" (Gatti & Procentese, 2021).

Over the decade, many studies revolve Facebook and Twitter as prominent social networking sites, Instagram has gradually emerged into the globe's fourth most-used social media with a 1393 million user population (Statista Research Department, 2021). Yet, compared to those of Facebook, fewer researches on Instagram were done. Hence, in light of both the emerging platform and Hongkonger identity arising from recent socio-political events, this study aims to address the gap of research. On identity construction, this study looks into how this specific context reflects other possible resources of creative use, such as Instagrammers' choice of colours and emojis to communicate political meanings. Socio-technical structures also play a crucial role in identity construction. According to Thorson, "hashtags [is] an important means to curate contents and connect those who were directly or indirectly involved in the events" (2013). While Lee and Chau's study places focus on hashtags' discourse functions, namely "fact", "opinion" and "emotion", another study also states hashtags are to "attach meanings", revealing how hashtags function to communicate meaning (2018; Gatti & Procentese, 2021). This study aims to do a further investigation of the functionality of hashtags, specifically, its categorisation function for curating information and the significance of it to the flow of information and establishment of communities. Overall, with the support from previous studies on social media and communities, this study aims to

do further exploration on the topic to address the intricate relation between social media and the community bridged by an investigation and discussion of individual identities. Hence, this study specifically examines individual identity performances on Instagram, so as to offer a close-up to how individual identity takes its place in the linkage of Instagrammers hence leading to the construction of community in social media.

4. Methodology

To achieve the purpose of this research, this study employs Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA). This methodology focuses on “how meaning is made through the use of multiple modes of communication as opposed to just language in all discourse” (Jones, 2012). This study looks into the multimodal dimension of discourse provided on the platform of Instagram, hence decodes meanings of texts designed with linguistic and visual semiotic tools, such as word choice, colours, layout, choice of emojis, positioning of elements etc. This method is appropriate because this study aims to explore how people assemble specific linguistic and semiotic resources to perform the identity and how a community is constructed through their semiotic practices.

This method involves the collection of a total of 30 pieces of content from 5 selected Instagram users or accounts, with 6 pieces of content from each for analysis. The selected users of the study are as follow: hannahhoney.daily (52.2K followers), writerffbd (21.3K followers), toniebleh (11.2K followers), mongjinia (10.6K followers), edenn312 (3K followers). The study has selected these five particular users and accounts according to the three main criterions. Firstly, users are required to have a strong following, ranging from 3K to 50K of followers, hence, are publicly recognised as influential users of Instagram. Moreover, they should have identified themselves as “Hongkongers” through various modes realised in bio descriptions, stories and posts etc. on Instagram. These two criterions ensure the chosen individuals are deemed as representations of Hongkongers on the platform among members of the community and that their posted content is publicly available to be studied. Furthermore, chosen users show intention to reach and communicate with other Hongkongers through promoting their own content and accounts to others, i.e. using the widely-used “#hongkonger” in their posts. This is to ensure the data collected from the individual users is relevant to how a Hongkonger community is constructed and operates on Instagram.

Data collected from the five accounts is “Hongkonger”- themed based. Any content posted and publicly available in the users’ Instagram profiles, such as story highlights, posts, captions and bio descriptions, was collected for the analysis of the study. After a screening process of posted content in the individuals’ profiles, 6 particular pieces of content from each user were retrieved and collected as data for the study. The chosen pieces of content are all related to the theme of “Hongkonger”. As mentioned in the background, Hongkonger is used as self-labelling by locals rooting for the pro-democracy camp, hence, any pro-democracy content is categorised as under the theme of “Hongkonger” in this study. Such as, captions in which Hong Kong flag emoji is used, stories with pro-democracy slogans and relevant hashtags, i.e. “Hong Kong add oil(#香港加油)”, are all collected for the study.

For data analysis, collected posts and stories were coded by which they highlight the notional color “yellow”, as related to the local pro-democracy political party (The Foreign Correspondents’ Club, 2020). Hence, any visual elements, supported by linguistic elements under the same story or post, highlighting the notion of “yellow” is categorized as expressions of the pro-democracy stance. In addition, the study coded content by their discourse functions, i.e. “fact”, “opinion” and “emotion”, hence this study particularly analyze those performing affective emotions towards Hong Kong, i.e. “#lovewhereyouborn” (Papacharissi, 2015). Alas, texts were coded by which they are specifically addressed to Hong Kong, with the use of word choices to depict the addresses, i.e. the Hong Kong flag emoji, “Hong Kong people” and sentences choices to address the message, i.e. imperatives, blessings. The data, coded as addressed to Hongkongers, was further categorized into four main purposes, namely to “inform recent political ideas and issues”, “recall past socio-political events”, “call for political actions” and “express personal care and concern.” Lastly, after coding, the data was found to fit into the three themes in which the selected individuals imagine what constitutes a Hongkonger identity, namely “pro-democracy”, “pride in the city of Hong Kong” and “a strong sense of political duty”.

5. Findings

1. Patterns found in individuals’ performances of a Hongkonger identity

After analysis of the collected data, this study has found that users utilise both linguistic and visual resources inter-semiotically in specific configurations to perform a Hongkonger

identity. Through their individual identity performances, it is concluded that a Hongkonger is collectively imagined as pro-democracy, exuding pride in the city and performing a strong sense of political duty.

1.1.Hongkonger as “pro-democracy”

Through the inter-semiotic use of visual and linguistic components, individuals’ use of the colour “yellow” reveals the pro-democracy political stance as imagined of a Hongkonger. Political camps in Hong Kong are colour-coded, in the colours of “yellow” and “blue. The colour “yellow” represents the pro-democracy supporters, who are against the extradition bill to China and oppose to the rule of the People’s Republic of China, while the “blue” camp is pro-government, pro-police and pro-Beijing (The Foreign Correspondents’ Club, 2020). All five users have assembled visual resources that highlight the symbolic colour “yellow” to communicate their pro-democracy political stances, such as the intentional framing of yellow objects and background in photos, i.e., clothes, a wall full of yellow memo paper, yellow heart emojis (“❤️”) in captions and stickers in stories.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

In the layout of the photos, the intentional framing of yellow objects allows the semiotic expression of their political stance. In Fig. 1, the user frames her yellow top as the centre, while in Fig. 2 the user chooses a bright yellow wall and frames it as the background.

Overall, users’ particular choices and way of framing the yellow objects communicate the object as information of high importance and salience in visual grammar, highlighting “yellow” as a theme. This facilitates the elucidation of its political ideation in Hong Kong’s context. However, the expression of the pro-democracy political stance through the notional colour yellow doesn’t solely rely on the use of visual resources. It is found that among user’s

common practices they very often come together with linguistic components as a combination to facilitate the interpretation process.



Fig. 3

In Fig. 3, yellow heart emojis (“❤️”) are used at the beginning of the caption, followed by the phrase, “Hong Kong people do not succumb to fate (不認命就是香港人的命)” and the hashtag of “Yellow Economic Circle (#黃色經濟圈)”. These two linguistic elements, an assertion of Hongkonger qualities opposing the rule of “fate” (by the government) and a depiction of “a collection of businesses openly promoting protest messages”, show linkage to the pro-democracy stance (Shen, 2020). This helps avoid the polysemous interpretations of the mere use of emojis and narrows down the reading under the political light. With regards to Fig. 1, instead of simply posting the photo itself, the user also provides sentences that enable a clearer and more refined interpretation of her intended identity to perform. She adds the sentence, ““Yellow” energises me”. In this utterance, the word “yellow” is added with quotation marks. The intentional use of the punctuation as a linguistic resource implies an alternative reading of the word in light of its symbolic meaning, hence, leads viewers to make suitable connections with the author’s particular colour choice in her clothing, derive an appropriate interpretation of “yellow”, as a pro-democracy stance.

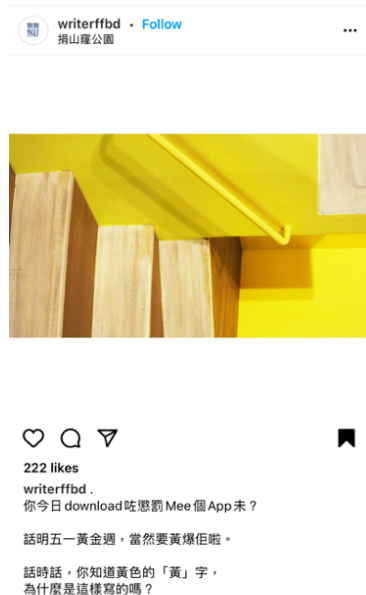


Fig. 4a

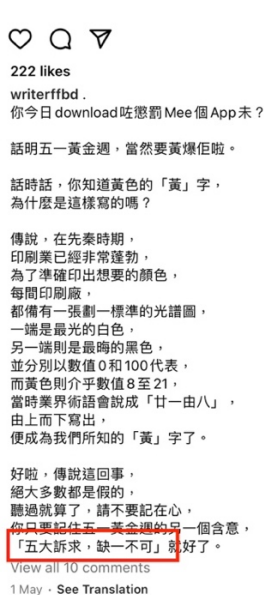


Fig. 4b

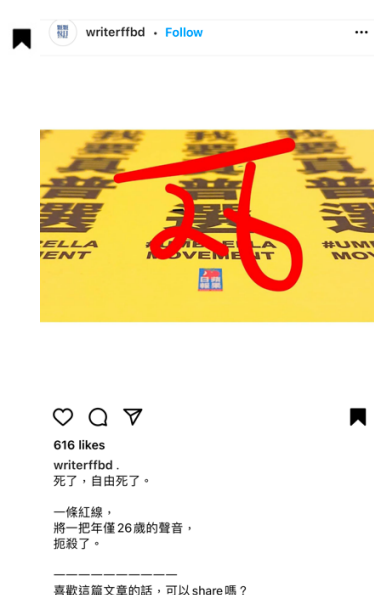


Fig. 5

In Fig. 4a, with the photo featuring a yellow wall, the user draws linguistic resources to perform his pro-democracy political identity. Similarly, the word “yellow” with direct quotations is used. The post is also complemented by the pro-democracy slogan, “Five demands, not one less (五大訴求，缺一不可)” at the end of its caption (Fig. 4b). In Fig. 5, the yellow background is placed together with pro-democracy slogans, “I want universal suffrage (我要真普選)” as linguistic resources in the photo to give a clear and particularised political stance.

In the above examples, individuals choose to utilise both visual and linguistic resources inter-semiotically, whereas language is required as a complement to contextualise and discern the specified political meaning out of the polysemous interpretations offered by the visual components. According to Bolander, although “individuals perform identity work[...]through various modes or channels, not solely language”, language still “remains central to the performance and construction of identity” (2017; Barton & Lee, 2013). In the above cases, yellow emojis and objects in photos are visual components used to express the pro-democracy stance. However, as visual elements, they are polysemous in nature, hence users also make use of wordings, slogans as complement resources. Such complement repairs, consolidates and reassures the interpreted ideational meaning developed in the viewer’s mind after looking at the photo itself, ensuring a more nuanced performance of the identity. This shows how identity performers explore their resources inter-semiotically to communicate a contextualised and clear message, in this case, their support of the pro-democracy political stance to their audience.

1.2. Hongkongers as exuding pride in Hong Kong

The users’ inclusion of “Hong Kong (香港)” or the “Hong Kong flag (🇭🇰)” emoji on their bios as profiles reveals Hongkonger is imagined as exuding pride in the city.



Fig. 6

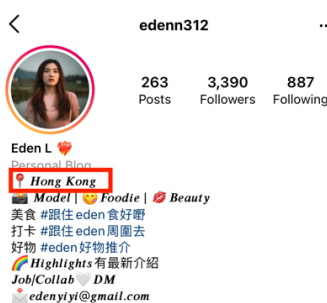


Fig. 7



Fig. 8

According to Boyd, “profile generation is an explicit act of writing oneself into being” (2010). In the process, participants “must determine how they want to present themselves”, hence people choose to give certain information in their bios/profiles to construct their identities (Boyd, 2010). The bio function allows users to express themselves through words, emojis and layouts of their own choice freely without a “questionnaire” design. Three of the users have included linguistic and visual elements related to Hong Kong (Fig. 6, 7, 8). Out of all semiotic choices users could choose from, the fact that they still include “Hong Kong” as their choice of information to provide about themselves show that users perceive “Hong Kong” as part an ideal representation of themselves to perform in the platform.

According to Blommaert, as people construct identities, they rely on multiples of semiotic resources that work together in “specific configurations” to “give out [certain] information about themselves” (2009). In their identity performances, the expression of pride in Hong Kong is performed by their inclusion of Hong Kong elements in their bios, also with the drawn support of their perception, affiliation, towards the city presented through words and emojis in their content posted.



Fig. 9

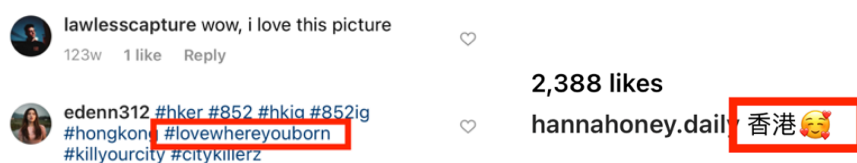


Fig. 10

Fig. 9 and 10 are both retrieved from the users who included Hong Kong elements in their bios in Fig. 7 and 8 respectively. In Fig. 9, the user assembles the “Hong Kong flag” emoji, related hashtags (#hk, #hker, #852, #hkig) to specifically draw a strong connection between her content and “Hong Kong”. With the established link with the theme of “Hong Kong” in her post, she includes words that carry sentiments alongside with these “Hong Kong” elements, such as the “#lovewhereyou[were]born”, implying that she loves Hong Kong as a place of her birth. In the caption, the sentence itself (“Let us walk together side by side and forge ahead (讓肩並肩的我們攜手向前走)”) and its position (followed by and placed below the “Hong Kong flag” emoji as a caption) further draws linkage between the user’s

experienced sense of unity and communion with the notion of “Hong Kong” (carried by the emoji). In Fig. 10, the user types “Hong Kong” alongside with the “loved-face” emoji. With the word supported by the emoji’s function of directly “invoking emotional reactions” as images, this combination of the use of sentiments in visual forms of emojis together with the word “Hong Kong” demonstrates the user’s general impression of affection towards Hong Kong (Kress, 2003).

Through retrieving the users’ posts, the study shows that users often link affective sentiments characterised by “love” and positive connotations of “unity and communion” with Hong Kong, the combinations of words and images allow users to communicate affection towards Hong Kong. Hence, this relates back to their particular use of “Hong Kong” elements in their bio descriptions. Their inclusion of “Hong Kong” to their bios reveals their willingness to publicly show they are associated with the city that manifests admirable qualities like unity and that they have shown they love. Therefore, with each act of semiosis carrying information about oneself, i.e. bio generation and creating posts about Hong Kong, identity performers depend on the range of available semiotic resources with each carrying pieces of information about themselves, hence gather them in specific configurations to construct a well-rounded identity that is characterised by their pride of being part of the city.

1.3. Hongkonger as performing a strong sense of political duty

The construction of a strong sense of duty is revealed from individuals’ own participation of political causes, their contribution in creating and spreading a shared repertoire of resources for the community and their constant acts to reach out and engage with their audiences as they inform, recall political events and call for political actions.



Fig. 11.

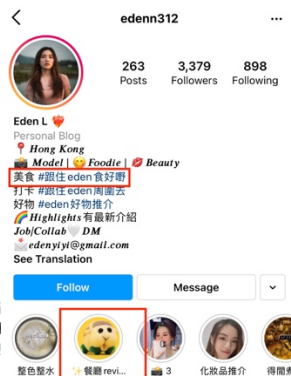


Fig. 12

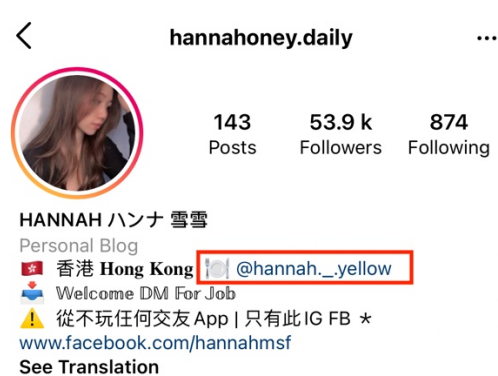


Fig.13

Users share a common practice as “yellow foodies”, specifically sharing about pro-democracy culinary businesses, also known as “yellow economic circle, in story highlights (Fig. 11, Fig. 12), posts (Fig. 17), hashtags (Fig. 12) or their own foodie accounts (Fig. 13). Out of the five users, two of them have created a story highlight about “food” (Fig. 11) or “food reviews” (Fig. 12), while two other choose to include food-related stories in their story highlights.



Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16

Among the collection of stories in the highlights, it is observed that many of them are related to yellow culinary businesses. Users often post their favourite restaurants or food shops framing the food itself, providing either a tag of the restaurant’s account, its location or a brief description in the story. Rather than solely labelling the restaurant as “yellow” (Fig. 16), some users utilise other visual resources in their photos to depict the businesses’ political stances, such as framing “yellow” propagandas in the restaurants (Fig. 14, 15).



224 likes
 edenn312
 請先 Yellopenrice 呢間 Pizzeria Jacomax 老闆同老闆娘講
 趣風趣又幽默又有條理，而且發揮 #黃色經濟圈 到極致，
 點都要支持啫～
 首先我哋呢啲雞翼怪一定要試下 Black pepper wings (香
 烤黑椒雞翼) 啫～ 烤雞翼最緊要外皮香脆，肉質嫩滑，鎖
 住水份，講到我都流口水 😋 鍾意雞翼嘅你要試下啫！
 然後我哋仲試左 Mexico Sicilia with Buffalo Cheese
 Piazza，有分 12 吋 / 20 吋，兩個人食 12 吋都唔需要擔心太
 多，份量剛剛好 😋 啖啖都好 juicy，皮薄得啱啱會好似食
 薯片咁，但皮邊又非常之脆口，下次要試下
 Gorgonzola & Apple 🍏 感覺好特別
 而且佢個位置好方便上環 A2 出口行幾步就到，今次排左
 30 分鐘左右，而且好好彩地載入龍尾二個人到去朝聖！
 所以話香港好多臥虎藏龍嘅餐廳等緊我哋去發掘～
 2 March 2020 · See Translation

Fig. 17



245 likes
 edenn312 【旺角良心居酒屋 | 高 CP 值 推薦 🍴🍷🍱】
 申子居酒屋位於旺角黑布街，一共有兩層，地下主要有
 bar 枱，樓上座位有分普通卡位，或者榻榻米，座位不會
 覺得擠迫，一般兩個人對坐，不過桌子就有點小，但是可
 以理解！整個裝修為日式風格，一入門口已有「打卡位」

Fig. 18

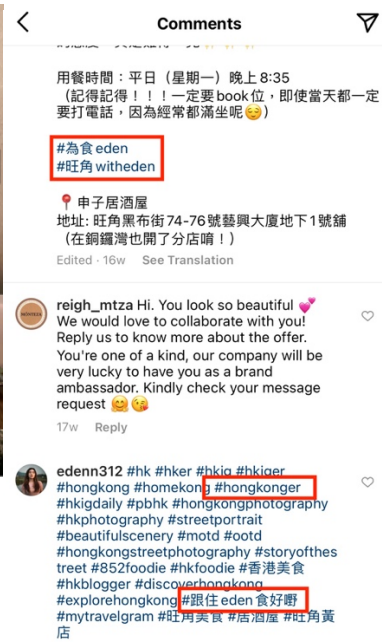


Fig. 19

Some users also create posts on food reviews, in which they provide detailed commentaries and specific information on the food and restaurants, i.e. booking arrangements, in the caption (Fig. 17, 18, 19), while another user chooses to open another sub-account for sharing “yellow” food tagged along with her main account through bio description (Fig. 13).

The individuals’ acts of dining in “yellow” restaurants and posting about it as stories or posts itself is a semiotic act that reveal their pro-democracy stance, this also shows how they perform a Hongkonger’s sense of duty by supporting the pro-democracy community. In their posted content about “yellow food”, the way users intentionally curate and spread the information through story highlights, hashtags also reveals how their strong sense of duty is reinforced in identity performance. No matter in posts or stories, users do not only post the food itself, they also consistently include names and locations of the shops in each story or post made as they create their foodie recommendations. With such information provided, other users who are interested are able to visit the restaurant. The users’ consistent inclusion of such information in their recommendations shows their intention to make the information knowable to other users, hence encouraging them to dine in “yellow” restaurants as well. In Fig. 11 and 12, the story highlight function is used as it operates differently from the conventional disappearing nature of stories in Instagram, it carries a collection of stories and stations on the accounts’ feeds so that other users are able to revisit and retrieve the information anytime. In Fig. 19, along with her food review, the user includes related

hashtags, such as “#hongkonger”, “#yelloweconomiccircle (黃色經濟圈)” and her own created hashtag “follow eden for good food (#跟住eden食好嘢).” For the convenience of others, the information of the restaurants she recommended can be revisited through the hashtags she included in both bio and posts. Moreover, she included more widely-used hashtags, i.e. “#hongkonger with 1.4 M accumulated posts. Hence, her posts of pro-democracy restaurants are able to reach a larger population of potential customers, specifically the other users who don’t follow them but follow or browse the hashtags.

Overall, users’ meticulous efforts in creating and making their content retrievable, more reachable to other Hongkongers with story highlights and hashtags forms a pool of information shared with people of common interest and political goals. This allows them to inform, encourage and direct more users to join the political cause of “supporting yellow businesses” as a result. This further reinforces the individuals’ sense of duty as not only supporters but as callers for support of the pro-democracy camp and its community, including businesses.

In their performance of a strong sense of duty, users also actively and constantly engage with their audience so as to gather them as a community.



Fig. 20



Fig. 21



Fig. 22



Fig. 23

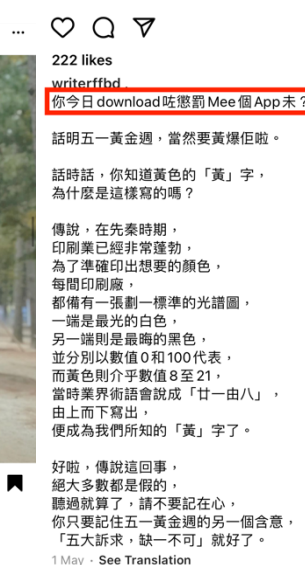


Fig. 24

Very often, users address to the audience in their captions as acts of engagement. Their captions serve for specific purposes: to inform recent political ideas and issues (i.e. the closure of the pro-democratic newspaper company, *Apple Daily* in Fig. 20), recall past socio-political events (i.e. suicidal cases as forms of protest in Fig. 21, past protests in Fig. 22) and call for political actions (i.e. asking people to vote for the district council election in Fig. 23, download “yellow” apps in Fig. 24). Rather than only showing they did the political actions themselves, their constant initiation and attempt to engage similar people to involve in the community and its events encourages others’ participation and cultivates a sense of relation under the same political dilemma and goals among scattered users. This reinforces their sense of duty as Hongkongers.

2. Individual identity performances and their role in the construction of a Hongkonger community on Instagram

In definition, networked publics are “shaped and configured by networked technologies”, they “connect people en masse” and “provide them with a space for interactions and information” (Boyd, 2010). This study uses Boyd’s construct of “networked publics” to explain how individual identity performances formulate a Hongkonger community on Instagram that matches the definitive characteristics of “networked publics” (2010). While the individuals’ performances offer its own significance to the construction, at the same time, under individual identity performances, pools of shared information configured by hashtags and story highlights are created functioning to gather and bond similar people, moreover,

interactions through text and media are prompted among users unveiling their developed affinity as an imagined community of Hongkongers.

2.1. Significance of the individual identity performances as Hongkongers

The users constantly gather resources to perform a Hongkonger identity in the found patterns of an imagined Hongkonger: pro-democracy, exuding pride and performing a strong sense of duty under the political goal. Individuals' identity performances do not only impact the users themselves, they alone also have significance in the construction of a Hongkonger community. According to Boyd, although an individual's running stream of updates and content are "arguably mundane", it gives the audience "a general sense of those around them" (2010). As the above individual users constantly create content to perform as Hongkongers on the platform, this simultaneously allows the audience to get to know these users in terms of their values, beliefs and political aspirations they demonstrate through gathering particular resources to construct their Hongkonger identities online. Then, the audience are to relate and decide to connect, engage with these particular individuals hence assimilate as part of their community. Therefore, in the process of observing these identity performances, it is said that the audience are able to "get the sense of the public constructed by those with whom they connect" (Boyd, 2010).

2.2. The formulation of a shared repertoire of information shaped by socio-technical structures for a Hongkonger community

The hashtag chosen in the study, "#hongkonger", is one of the most used hashtags related to Hong Kong with the accumulation of 1.4M posts. Under the use of hashtags, users can voluntarily browse, follow them to receive and contribute posts related to Hongkongers on daily basis uploaded to the feeds the hashtag's followers. The act of hashtagging expands individual performances of the Hongkonger identity that once were mere isolated acts remaining within the individual accounts into an act of sociality that connects content and accounts, it then enacts the construction of a Hongkonger community on Instagram.



Fig. 25



Fig. 26



Fig. 27



Fig. 28



Fig. 29

All five users include “#hongkonger” in their posts. Instead of including 1-2 hashtags, they type up a “cluster” of hashtags, with approximately 20-30 hashtags either at the end of each caption (Fig. 25, 26) or posted as a separate comment under their own posts (Fig. 27, 28, 29). The choice of putting the cluster of hashtags in these obscure places depicts that users do not intend viewers to pay detailed attention to each hashtag, deeming the cluster as low in communicative value. Moreover, the fact that “#hongkonger” is embedded into the clusters, not placed in an obvious position nor singled-out as so to highlight or explicitly showcase the users as “Hongkongers”, further reveals how users’ perceive the functionality of the hashtag. Rather than intending it to elicit information as words or phrases, the focus is on its

categorisation function as a sociotechnical structure. Hence, even put in unobvious places in the posts, the hashtag still functions to curate the users' posts, place them in the pool of content labelled as "#hongkonger", where it enables the post to reach more users, either its followers or people who browse it.

Under the creation and operation of a Hongkonger community, hashtags and story highlights are examples of "networked technologies" that shape the community, as they "reorganize how information flows" and "how people interact with information and each other" (Boyd, 2010). Per se, when users include particular hashtags, the posts tagged along with them will subsequently be sorted and placed into the feeds of the corresponding hashtags used. In this case, hashtags function to categorize content users share with other people. Simultaneously, the use of hashtags is to manage the flow of posted content, information is hence spread to more users who share the same interests. This shows how hashtags act as "networked technologies" that reorganise how information is organised and spread across the platform hence shape the ways users manage their information (Boyd, 2010). Furthermore, the hashtags link other users to contributors of the posts, as the individuals' accounts come along with the hashtagged posts. By linking users to users, hashtags act as a starting point initiating users' probe of more information available in these individuals' accounts, such as they are to discover more pro-democracy information as they click into the users' profiles and browse their personal food accounts, story highlights and other posts. With the shared repertoire of information and the users' prompted quest of more information, the use of hashtags overall increases their exposure of related information to the community. Shaped by the mere use of hashtags, members are to receive this influx of information through the hashtag feeds or newly discovered accounts with their hashtagged posts, this hence reinforces users shared values, beliefs and aspirations and cultivates the community's sense of togetherness. At the same time, hashtags are able to connect and gather scattered users, no matter viewers or contributors of the content, of the same interests and beliefs under the same post, this provides them with more chance for connection as they interact in the comments sections.

Overall, the section reveals how the individuals' sharing of information "gathers people of the same kind" which fulfils how "networked publics" operate, it also demonstrates how "networked technologies", i.e. hashtags, gives Hongkongers on Instagram an architecture as a community, as it shapes the creation and flow of their shared information, "introduces new possible practices and shapes the interactions that take place" (Boyd, 2010).

2.3. Interaction as a realisation of affinity among members

Under their performances of identity, individual users prompt responses from other users, the interactions made manifest members' affinity towards one another as an imagined community realised through text and media in the captions and comment sections.

2.3.1. Individuals' expression of affiliation towards a Hongkonger community



Fig. 30

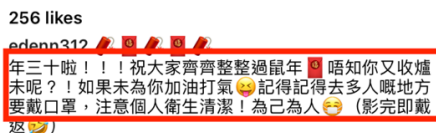


Fig. 31

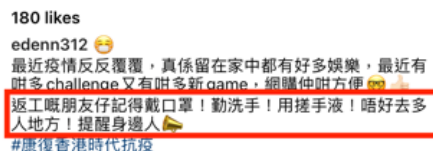


Fig. 32

Despite to inform, recall and call for action, users often express concern and care for their community members, through forms of festive blessings, i.e. “Happy Mid-Autumn Festival// Enjoy the reunion with your loved ones” (Fig. 30), “Wish you a reunited start of the year with your family// I don’t know if you have finally taken a year-end break from your work yet?! If you haven’t, I am rooting for you!” (Fig. 31), and reminders under crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, i.e., “Remember to wear a mask! Wash your hands regularly!” (Fig. 32). These captions show that the individuals display care and concern towards the well-being of other users, whom they have never met or personally know.

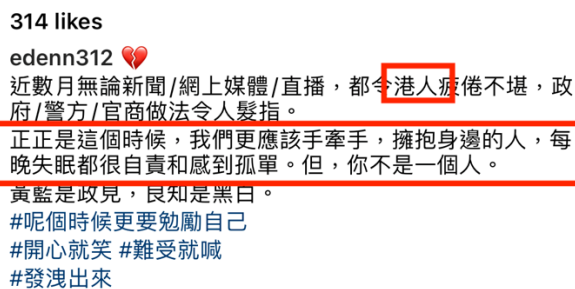


Fig. 33

In Fig. 33, the user directly displays her personal feeling of unity and togetherness among this imagined group. In her caption, she says “In times like this [when Hongkongers feel discouraged by the authorities’ decisions], we have to work hand in hand, hug the people around us, when you feel guilty and alone at night, know that you in fact are not alone.” Through the caption, the user specifically addresses to “Hongkongers (港人)” (seen in Fig. 33, first line of the caption) and assures that they are all in this together and well-supported. The user tries to reach out and encourage people she does not personally know, she also

acknowledges the connection between all members and points out that they shall rely on such connection to gain mental support in times of difficulty.

With reference to Anderson’s idea of “imagined communities”, it is “impossible for members of nation to know most of their fellow members, meet them or even hear from them” (1991). As a “networked public”, Instagram’s Hongkonger community remains virtual, whereas members don’t physically gather nor know each other entirely (Boyd, 2010). Yet, users show that they still feel “connected to [these] people they have never seen” (Anderson, 1991). Therefore, under “the image of their communion” in their minds, the well-being of other members has naturally become part of their concern, hence, not only do users often relate and address to this group of people, they also even show care for them when possible (Anderson, 1991). This demonstrates a sense of developed kinship as a Hongkonger community is constructed.

2.3.2. Others’ responses to individuals’ initiation of engagement

The selected individuals are observed to actively relate to other users, constantly initiate engagement through various purposes, such as to express care, call for action and invite responses and actions. As a result, prompted by the individuals’ posted content, other users who share the same imagination respond to their performances through comments to show agreement, support and encouragement.

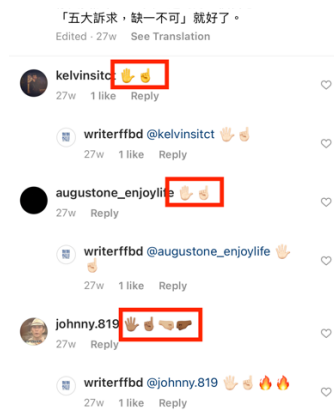


Fig. 34



Fig. 35



Fig. 36



Fig. 37

These users give forms of positive feedback with linguistic resources, i.e. relating and sharing of more information (Fig. 35), reiteration of the asserted call for action (Fig. 36) or political belief (Fig. 37). They also use emojis, i.e., the “fist-bump” emoji (third comment in Fig. 34), relevant emojis that carry political semiotics, like the “six-fingers” emoji (depicting the pro-democratic slogan “Five demands, not one less”) (Fig. 34). Such particular emojis are based on users’ mutual understanding of these images in the political light as a community. This particular use arises from the local context in which The National Security Law has been enacted since 2020. Under the law, “secession”, “subversion”, “terrorism” and “collusion with foreign forces” are all offences that “incur maximum penalties of life imprisonment” (Amnesty International, 2020). The Hong Kong government declared that “Liberate Hong Kong, the revolution of our times”, a common political slogan during the protests, “connotes ‘Hong Kong independence’ or ‘separating Hong Kong from China’, and effectively forbade its use (Amnesty International, 2020). Hence, any sources deemed to “be able to endanger national security” will lead to “criminal prosecution” (Amnesty International, 2020). Therefore, given that emojis as visual images are polysemous in nature compared with linguistic resources such as slogans, the use of emoji provides an alternative for users to subtly yet effectively communicate forbidden political meanings, i.e. “Five demands, not one less”. Despite the limitation of expressing their opinions in a politically-sensitive context, emojis allow members to communicate specific meaning with an “insider” language, whereas only members are able to understand each other, this further cultivates their sense of togetherness. As response to their comments, individuals like their comments or reply with the same emojis. The simple interactions above demonstrate how an individual account on Instagram is able to gather people with the same views, and demonstrate their imagined connection with one another as they exchange opinions and sentiments as forms of reinforcement to the sense of community and belonging to it.

Overall, the interactions reveal users’ developed and reinforced affinity under the construction of a Hongkonger community. Based on Anderson’s theory, affinity is imagined through text and media (1991). With the individual users’ prompt of interactions in their captions and the other users’ responses in the comments, it is observed that users are able to use words and emojis to show their developed care, communicate their support and encouragement to each other. The use of words and emojis are to realise their already-developed affinity and to continue cultivating stronger a sense of togetherness within the online community.

6. Conclusion

Through assembling various linguistic and semiotic resources in their identity performances, local users demonstrate a Hongkonger as pro-democracy, exuding pride in the city and performing a strong sense of political duty. These individual identity performances simultaneously construct a Hongkonger community on the platform, as individuals collectively create and spread a shared repertoire of information embodying political ideologies through socio-technical structures, i.e. hashtags and story highlights, interact with other members. Hence, affinity realised in forms of text and media observed in captions and comment sections is developed and continues to bond users, this cultivates a collectively imagined community of Hongkongers on Instagram.

According to Boyd and Ellison, “social networking sites support pre-existing social relations” (2007). A Hongkonger identity has surfaced across local socio-political movements. While individuals perform as Hongkongers on Instagram, they simultaneously gather as a Hongkonger community, in which they share information and interact with each other.

Slogans, such as “don’t forget your intentions (勿忘初心)” and “never forget (勿忘)”, are often spread, constantly reminding members not to give up on the pursuit of democracy and have their political demands fulfilled. This reveals the purpose of constructing of a Hongkonger community online --to preserve the Hongkonger identity. Users were initially scattered, yet, through grouping them together in a common space, i.e. under the same post on Instagram, where they share information and interact, the sense of developed belongingness fortifies their individual Hongkonger identity, whereas members are pro-democracy, proud of the city, dutiful, affiliated to each other and unified. Within a “networked public”, the observed Hongkonger identity continues be shaped with new information, interactions between members and designs of networked technologies.

According to Lee and Chan, participants’ online participation often shapes their offline engagement (2016). A Hongkonger identity and community bear tremendous potential to mobilise people, alter sociality, social climate and socio-political issues in the future, bringing both possibilities of development and obstruction. Hence, further studies shall be conducted to study the development of identity shaped by digital technologies, look into the subsequent potential areas of development and dangers of manipulation that might occur under the issue.

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**A study of Cantonese-English Code-switching in CUHK English Major and
Non-English Major Students' Daily Utterances**

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Abstract

As code-switching in the university context is under-researched, this study focuses on the use of Cantonese-English code-switching in Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) students' daily utterances. It first investigates students' code-switching motivations, habits, and characteristics in the CUHK context. Then, it explores the differences between the daily code-switching of English Majors and Non-English Majors. With reference to Chu's (2007) research, a set of questionnaire questions are designed to test whether the Principle of Economy and Expedient code-mixing are prominent motivations of CUHK students' code-switching. 8 group discussions and follow-up interviews are conducted to obtain data on students' natural language use. 96 minutes of speech data are transcribed to explore the qualitative aspects of code-switching in English Majors and Non-English Majors daily utterances. The present study suggests that the Principle of Economy and Expedient Code-mixing remain the key motivations for students' code-switching. In general, CUHK students frequently code-switch. Moreover, Age, interlocutors, English proficiency, formality, and social status are factors affecting students' code-switching likeliness. This study also showed that code-switching frequency or likeliness has no direct relationship with students' majors. However, English Majors tend to use more English adjectives, personal names, interjections, exclamatory sentences, and English words with syllables split.

1. Introduction

Hong Kong was colonized by the British Empire for more than 150 years. According to HKSAR Census and Statistics Department (2021), 59.7% of Hong Kong citizens aged 5 or above can speak English. Around 70% of the population claim to know how to read and write in English. As most Hong Kong citizens are of Chinese descent, they mainly share Cantonese or other Chinese dialects as their first language (HKSAR Census and Statistics Department, 2021). Both English and Chinese are the official languages of Hong Kong. Yet, with the British colonial administration's influence, most government documents and law documents are written only in English (Gibbons, 1987). English is a prominent language in the education field as well. Hong Kong citizens are taught English since kindergarten. Most Hong Kong citizens study in secondary schools and universities where English is the medium of instruction (Yau, 1993). The frequent contact with English act as a "catalyst" that intensifies Hong Kong citizens' code-switching (Li, 1998). They acquire many English vocabulary in their education. Moreover, they are used to communicating in English in lessons. Very often, English vocabulary comes up in Hongkongers' minds before the respective Cantonese term (Gibbons, 1987). Code-switching is a common practice among bilinguals. As a city full of Cantonese-English bilinguals, Cantonese-English code-switching is used in all discourses in Hong Kong, not only in daily informal conversations. (Setter, Wong, and Chan, 2010). Code-switching has become very common among Hongkongers and has integrated into the culture of Hong Kong. Nowadays, code-switching has even been regarded as a distinct feature of Hongkongers (Chan, 2003).

Previous research mainly focuses on the general motivation, phonological features, and syntactic features of code-switching in Hong Kong. Scholars have studied code-switching in all types of genres and formality. However, there are not many studies on code-switching in the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) context. The most recent research on CUHK

students' code-switching was dated back to 2007. Chu's (2007) primary focus is on code-switching induced by the Principle of Economy. Yet, he did not touch upon other aspects of code-switching, such as the categories and the characteristics of code-switching. Gibbons (1979) studied the phonology, semantics, and syntax of university students' code-switching. However, his study only examined the speech data from students at the University of Hong Kong. Therefore, this study aims at filling the gaps in the literature. The current research extends Chu's (2007) study on code-switching motivations and explores the effects of students' majors on the likeliness of code-switching. Only code-switching in CUHK students-CUHK students' interactions in a university daily-life context will be discussed. As Cantonese is most CUHK students' mother tongue, they most often use Cantonese instead of English in their University lives. Hence, only Cantonese to English code-switching will be studied.

Based on my previous subjective observations in CUHK, I propose the following hypotheses. (1) English proficiency is the main factor in code-switching likeliness. (2) English Majors tend to code-switch more than non-English majors. The subsequent research aims to verify these statements.

2. Literature Review

Literatures included in this session, except those related to terminology, are all studies based on code-switching situations in Hong Kong from the 20th century till the present.

2.1 Definitions of code-switching and code-mixing

As my research is focusing on "code-switching", it is crucial to provide a clear definition of this ambiguous concept. Grosjean (1982) stated that sometimes it is hard to find a clear boundary between "code-switching" and "code-mixing". Code-mixing can be a transfer of items from a lexical level to a sentential level. However, other scholars seemed to affirm

that code-mixing is below a sentential level. Muysken (2000) defined code-mixing as the “juxtaposition of two languages within the same sentence (Chan, 1999, P.11).” Bhatia and Ritchie (2004) also made a distinction between the two. They defined code-mixing as the usage of two languages within the same utterance. They termed code-mixing as “intra-sentential code-switching (Bhatia and Ritchie, 2004, P.323)” as the codes mixed are below a sentential level. Code-switching is the alternate of languages between sentences (Bhatia and Ritchie). Hence, the difference between code-mixing and code-switching is that they are intra-sentential and inter-sentential respectively.

Although scholars tended to view code-switching and code-mixing objectively, some scholars commented that negative emotions or prejudice are intertwined with the term “code-mixing”. Li (1999) and Beardsome (1991) stated that code-mixing might carry a negative connotation. According to Beardsome (1991), the code-mixing of two languages is considered the least-favoured speech style under monolingual social speech norms. As I aim to include both intra-sentential and inter-sentential switching of English and Cantonese, I adopted Li’s (1999) broader definition of code-switching in my study. Li’s (1999) definition is as below:

“Cantonese interspersed with English elements, especially single words, is generally referred to as the sociolinguistic phenomenon itself, code-mixing or (intra-sentential) code-switching. To avoid negative connotations associated with the term “codemixing”, in this study the more general term “code-switching” will be used to cover switching at both the inter- and intra-sentential levels” (P.7)

2.2 Relevant research in Hong Kong

In the 20th century, scholars are generally more interested in studying the motivations or reasons behind Hongkongers’ code-switching. Scholars started by analysing the speech data obtained from Hongkonger’s daily utterances from a sociolinguistic or discourse aspect. Tse (1992) found out that Hongkongers use code-switching when the English lexis are context-

specific and without an accurate Chinese equivalent. Code-switching can also serve as a euphemism to avoid culturally or situationally inappropriate or impolite Cantonese words. Code-switching can as well be an identity marker that reflects group solidarity. Similarly, Luke (1998) studied Hongkongers' code-switching motivations with only speech data. He identified two motivations for code-switching: "expedient code-mixing" and "orientation code-mixing" (Luke, 1998). He mentioned that there are two sets of spoken Cantonese. He termed them as "High Cantonese" and "Low Cantonese" respectively. "High Cantonese" consists of words with a formal register. This type of Cantonese is widely used in formal occasions such as written texts, news reports and television programs. On the contrary, "Low Cantonese" consists of informal words commonly used in daily conversations between L1 Cantonese speakers. Hongkongers normally use Low Cantonese when communicating with their friends and family members. Hence, the usage of Low Cantonese indicates the level of intimacy between interlocutors. Due to the absence of Low Cantonese forms, speakers resort to expedient code-mixing. They code-switch to fill the stylistic gaps when having a casual conversation. Expedient code-mixing is induced by pragmatic needs. In comparison, orientational code-mixing is induced by personal preference. It is an act to sculpt a self that is more educated and westernized (Luke, 1998).

Soon, scholars started to analyse written data on code-switching. Not only did they extend previous scholars' research on motivations, but they also focused more on the characteristics of code-switching. Yau (1993) analysed written data obtained from three domains: textbooks, magazines, and popular entertainment books. Code-switching is subject-specific, especially in the technology and business field. One prominent motivation for code-switching is that there is a lack of standardized Cantonese translation for English terms. Besides, with the increased contact with the western world, countless new Western concepts are introduced to Hongkongers before the Chinese translation is available. Similar to Yau's

findings, Li (1998) agreed that technology and business-related terms originating from the west are commonly code-switched. He added that code-switching is prominent in the domains of lifestyles, food, and fashion as well. Li (1998) investigated the linguistic-driven motivation of code-switching. He analysed newspapers collected from well-known local Chinese presses. According to Li (1998), Hongkongers' choice of code-switching originated from the Principle of Economy. To save effort, we tend to choose an expression that is syntactically and phonologically less complex. Names, acronyms, and idiomatic expressions are common items of code-switching.

Recent research agrees with Li's (1998) discussion of the Principle of Economy being the motivation of code-switching. Chu (2007) and Lee (2012) pointed out that Principle of Economy is still a prominent motivation in Hongkongers' code-switching nowadays. Unlike Li (1998), they based their research on spoken data. Chu (2007) based his study on 50 CUHK students. His results indicate the three main findings: (1) When the Cantonese and English counterpart has the same number of syllables, students tend to stick to Cantonese. (2) When the English counterpart contains fewer syllables than its Cantonese counterpart, students tend to use the English vocabulary. Chu (2007) also added that code-switching is a natural and casual way of speaking in informal situations. Code-switching is frequent among university students, and it has become a part of the university culture. Code-switching involving discourse-specific clipped words is used to display in-group membership (Chu, 2007). His findings also agree with Tse (1992) and Yau (1993) that people code-switch as Cantonese translation is not available. Li (2007) only focused on analysing informal speech. Yet, Lee (2012) attempted to include 60 hours of both formal and informal speech data in his research. He studied a corpus of recurring TV programs from Television Broadcast Limited. Apart from

principle of economy, he identified 7 categories of code-switching: specificity¹, euphemism², quotation³, doubling⁴, interjection⁵, register⁶, and personal name⁷. Lee (2012) stated that genre is the most dominant motivation for code-switching. The tendency of code-switching decrease with the increase of formality. Personal name is the second most dominant motivation. Teenagers are more likely to code-switch than adults in informal contexts. Most English segments being switched have no more than two words (Lee, 2012).

Regarding the linguistic characteristics of code-switching in Hong Kong, Gibbon (1987) and Luke (1998) both agreed that a high tone is given to the primary stressed syllable of the English word. Luke (1998) added that Hongkongers prefer disyllabic English words when they code-switch. He also stated that the English words code-switched are regulated by Cantonese grammar. Content words must be placed before Cantonese form words. Li (1998) also mentioned the convergence to Cantonese grammar. There are grammatical restrictions on where to insert the English verb or noun. He identified common Cantonese grammatical restrictions such as subject-predicate, verb-object, and subject-verb-object structures. Scholars tended to agree that code-switching has to agree with either English or Cantonese Grammar. Yet, Gibbons (1979) suggested that some code-switching exhibit neither Cantonese nor English grammar. On the other hand, scholars have studied the phonology of English words code-switched. Gibbons (1987) and Li (1998) suggested that the pronunciation of English words will be modified during code-switching. Due to the absence of consonants /r/ and many consonant clusters in Cantonese, many English consonants are replaced by similar-sounding Cantonese consonants. Cantonese words are either in CVC or CV structure. Therefore, the word-final

¹ The English expression is more specific/general than the Chinese counterpart

² The use of English equivalent to reduce the level of embarrassment

³ quoting other's English expressions

⁴ Cantonese expression following the English expression. Both expressions have the same meaning. The purpose is to emphasize the message.

⁵ Transitional expressions or adverbs are inserted into the Cantonese sentence

⁶ In informal settings, if the Low-Cantonese word is not available, people would use the English equivalent.

⁷ Address others using their English names

consonant cluster in an English word is usually simplified. Apart from consonant cluster modifications, Gibbons (1979), Gibbons (1987), and Li (1998) all discovered the modification in vowels. Vowels are often added to or deleted from an English word. Also, weak vowels are often replaced by strong vowels.

Scholars have discovered numerous code-switching motivations for spoken and written code-switching. As aforementioned, the Principle of Economy and expedient code-mixing seemed to be prominent motivations of code-switching in Hong Kong in the past. However, has Hongkongers' code-switching motivation changed over the years? Would there be any differences between the code-switching of English Majors and non-English majors in CUHK? Apart from the categories of code-switching addressed in previous research, are there any other interesting categories or characteristics of code-switching in the university context? With reference to Chu's (2007) research, this research continued the study of spoken code-switching induced by the Principle of Economy and expedient code-mixing. My research methods will be further explained in the following section.

3. Methodology

This research included both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Firstly, a total of 50 questionnaires targeting all undergraduate students from CUHK were distributed. This questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first part was about participants' basic personal information. English proficiency might be one of the factors contributing to the likeliness of code-switching. Thus, asking participants to specify their DSE results was necessary. In my analysis, participants with DSE levels 5* to 5** were categorized as with excellent English proficiency. Participants with level 5 were categorized as having above-average English proficiency. Participants with level 4 were regarded as having average English proficiency. Level 3 or below was considered as below average. I analysed whether there were

any correlations between participants' majors or English proficiencies and their likeliness of code-switching.

The second part consisted of multiple-choice questions asking which expressions participants prefer the most. To set questions in this section, common vocabulary CUHK students tend to switch from Cantonese to English was elicited. Then, daily expressions as relatable to students' university lives as possible were created. Each question was designed to include at most two elicited code-switch items. The choices provided were daily expressions ranging from including two code-switched items to none. Participants were required to choose the expression they usually use to convey the intended meaning stated in the question. This section aimed to ask participants to draw experiences from their daily lives and observe whether they code-switch the elicited items. This was to test whether the Principle of Economy proposed by Li (1998) applies to students' code-switching preferences. At the same time, this tested whether Luke's (1998) Expedient Code-mixing affects students' language preferences. The third section of this questionnaire was about students' code-switching habits and their views on code-switching. The extent to which factors such as age, English proficiency, social status, relationship with interlocutors, and formality affect CUHK students' code-switching likeliness was explored. The open-ended question towards the end of the questionnaire provided an opportunity for participants to freely explain the reasons for their certain attitudes towards code-switching.

Secondly, 8 12-minute group discussions were conducted through Zoom to obtain natural speech data from CUHK students. Participants were divided into two big groups each consisting of 4 English Majors and 4 Non-English Majors. Then, each group was further divided into 4 sub-groups. Group A was with 4 English Majors. Group B was with 4 Non-English Majors. Group C and D were both with 2 English Majors and 2 Non-English Majors. This grouping method aimed to test whether English Majors tend to code-switch more.

Moreover, it helped investigate whether English Majors code-switch more when they were talking to their fellow English Majors as compared to the Non-English Majors. 8 Year Four English Majors were invited. They were Karen, Emma, Mary, Emily, Sophie, Lily, Jack, and Bella. Another 8 Year Four Non-English Majors were invited. They were Angel, Lucy, John, Claire, Tom, Ruby, Alice, and Hailey.

Group 1				
1A	Karen (ENG, Lv5*)	Mary (ENG, Lv5**)	Lily (ENG, Lv5)	Emily (ENG, IB Lv5)
1B	Angel (HIST, Lv4)	Lucy (CHLL, Lv4)	John (IBBA, Lv3)	Alice (BSCI, Lv3)
1C	Karen (ENG, Lv5*)	Emily (ENG, IB Lv5)	Alice (BSCI, Lv3)	John (IBBA, Lv3)
1D	Lily (ENG, Lv5)	Mary (ENG, Lv5**)	Angel (HIST, Lv4)	Lucy (CHLL, Lv4)
Group 2				
2A	Sophie (ENG, Lv5*)	Emma (ENG, Lv5**)	Jack (ENG, Lv5*)	Bella (ENG, Lv5*)
2B	Claire (ARCH, Lv4)	Tom (CHED, Lv4)	Ruby (LSED, Lv4)	Hailey (LAWS, Lv5*)
2C	Sophie (ENG, Lv5*)	Jack (ENG, Lv5*)	Claire (ARCH, Lv4)	Tom (CHED, Lv4)
2D	Bella (ENG, Lv5*)	Emma (ENG, Lv5**)	Hailey (LAWS, Lv5*)	Ruby (LSED, Lv4)

*(Major course code, DSE English level)

Regarding the questions used in these group discussions, groups 1A, 1B, 2A, and 2B discussed Question 1. The question was *“The four of you just finished your lesson. There is a 4-hour lunch break before the next lesson. All four of you agreed to use this lunch break to discuss your coming group project which is about university life. Please discuss which canteen to go to, where to discuss your project, what project topics to work on, and what to include in your project.”* As for groups 1C, 1D, 2C, and 2D, they discussed Question 2. The question is *“First term course registration is approaching. You would like to register for a university general education course. However, you do not know which course you should select. Please discuss what university general education courses you will recommend to your friends and why.”* All participants, therefore, discussed both questions in their assigned groups.

Right after the discussion, I interviewed all the participants regarding their code-switching in the discussions so that they have a fresh memory of what happened. The questions focused on the following. (1) Whether they noticed they had used code-switching (2) Why did they code-switch for a certain item I marked down during the discussions (3) Whether there

were any differences talking to English majors and non-majors (4) Whether they were positive or negative about code-switching (5) Would the likeliness of code-switching change if they were talking to elderly or unfamiliar people.

The 96-minute speech data obtained from the group discussion was transcribed after the discussions. Then, items frequently code-switched in the discussion were sorted out. Next, the ratio of speech turns with code-switching to the total number of turns⁸, the average number of words code-switched per turn⁹, the percentage of code-switched words in the total number of words¹⁰, and the total number of words code-switched per group were calculated. After obtaining the data, I compared whether English majors code-switch more in general. The differences in the frequency of code-switching between English Major-English Major interactions and English Major-Non major interactions, if any, could then be explored. At the same time, I also investigated the characteristics and purposes of the code-switching used by students. Regarding the data obtained in the follow-up interview, I analysed participants' motivations for code-switching and the factors affecting their code-switching habits.

4. Questionnaire Findings

4.1 Principle of Economy

A. English simpler than Cantonese

Cantonese	English	Syllables	Follows Principle of Economy?
朋友 (10%)	Friend (90%)	2 vs 1	Yes
專題研習 (0%)	Project (100%)	4 vs 2	Yes
手提電腦 (10%)	Notebook (90%)	4 vs 2	Yes
辦公室 (0%)	Office (100%)	3 vs 2	Yes
大學圖書館 (0%)	U Lib (100%)	5 vs 2	Yes

⁸ Ratio of speech turns with code-switching = turns with code-switching/total number of turns. This is to calculate each participant's proportion of turns with code-switching. However, the results might be affected by the participants' speaking habits. For example, participants might code-switch a lot in each turn but took fewer turns to speak. This will result in a smaller ratio.

⁹ Average number of words code-switched per turn= total number of words code-switched/total number of turns. Again, the results will be affected by the number of turns participants took.

¹⁰ Percentage of words code-switched = total number of words code-switched/total number of words spoken.

學期 (2%)	Sem (98%)	2 vs 1	Yes
主席 (4%)	P (94%)	2 vs 1	Yes
飯堂 (0%)	Can (36%)	2 vs 1	Yes
阿媽 (98%)	Mom (0%)	2 vs 1	No
逸夫 (8%)	Shaw (92%)	2 vs 1	Yes
影印機 (4%)	Printer (96%)	3 vs 2	Yes
隱形眼鏡 (8%)	Con (92%)	4 vs 1	Yes

Table 1. Elicited items with English Simpler than Cantonese

When the English counterpart contained fewer syllables than the Chinese counterpart, more than 90% of the participants used the English form in their daily utterances. There was one exceptional case where participants chose the more complicated 2-syllable Cantonese counterpart over the 1-syllable English word. Thus, the results aligned with Li's (1998) and Chu's (2007) findings. This category abided the Principle of Economy.

B. Cantonese simpler than English

Cantonese	English	Syllables	Follows Principle of Economy?
教授 (2%)	Professor (98%)	2 vs 3	No
面試 (8%)	Interview (92%)	2 vs 3	No
匯報 (2%)	Presentation (24%)	2 vs 4	No
主席 (4%)	President (2%)	2 vs 3	Yes
燒烤 (6%)	Barbecue (0%)	2 vs 3	Yes
尋日 (98%)	Yesterday (2%)	2 vs 3	Yes
功課 (20%)	Assignment (80%)	2 vs 3	No

Table 2. Elicited items with Cantonese simpler than English

When the Cantonese form contained fewer syllables than the English form, the results were mixed. Although the English items had 1 to 2 more syllables than their Cantonese counterparts, 4/7 of the English items on the list were chosen by most participants. Participants only acted according to the Principle of Economy in three of the elicited items.

C. Cantonese and English have the same number of syllables

Cantonese	English	Syllables	Follows Principle of Economy?
助教 (6%)	Tutor (94%)	2	No

獎學金 (8%)	Scholarship (78%)	3	No
匯報 (2%)	Present (74%)	2	No
印 (12%)	Print (88%)	1	No
論文 (2%)	Essay (98%)	2	No
退學 (2%)	Quit U (98%)	2	No
燒嘢食 (30%)	BBQ (64%)	3	No
訂 (0%)	Book (100%)	1	No
查/睇 (14%)	Check (86%)	1	No
飯堂 (0%)	Canteen (64%)	2	No
阿媽 (98%)	Mother (2%)	2	Yes
老公 (98%)	Husband (2%)	2	Yes
家姐 (100%)	Sister (0%)	2	Yes
晏 (30%)	Lunch (70%)	1	No
炒 (98%)	Fire (2%)	1	Yes

Table 3. Elicited items with Cantonese and English Sharing the same number of syllables

According to the Li (1998), when the Cantonese and English form both shared the same number of syllables, there was no need to use the English form to save effort. However, the results suggested otherwise. Ranging from 64% to 100% of participants chose the English forms in 11 out of 15 items elicited. There were only four items where 98% or above preferred the Cantonese forms. Most items in this category flouted the Principle of Economy.

4.2 Expedient Mixing

A. High Cantonese and Low Cantonese form exist

HC	LC	English	Follows expedient mixing?
獎學金 (8%)	船 (14%)	Scholarship (78%)	No
複印 (0%)	印 (12%)	Print (88%)	No
燒烤 (6%)	燒嘢食 (30%)	BBQ/Barbecue (64%)	No
預訂 (0%)	訂 (0%)	Book (100%)	No
檢查 (0%)	查 (14%)	Check (82%)	No
食堂 (0%)	飯堂 (0%)	Canteen (64%) Can (36%)	No
母親 (0%)	阿媽 (98%)	Mother (2%) Mom (0%)	Yes
丈夫 (0%)	老公 (98%)	Husband (2%)	Yes
解僱 (0%)	炒魷魚/炒 (98%)	Fire (2%)	Yes
昨天 (0%)	尋日 (98%)	Yesterday (2%)	Yes

姐姐 (0%)	家姐 (100%)	Sister (0%)	Yes
逸夫書院 (0%)	逸夫 (8%)	Shaw (92%)	No
打印機 (0%)	影印機 (4%)	Printer (96%)	No
午飯 (0%)	晏 (30%)	Lunch (70%)	No

Table 4. Elicited items with both High Cantonese and Low Cantonese forms

Although the Low Cantonese form was available, only 5 out of 14 Cantonese items were preferred by at least 98% of the participants. In 64% of the elicited items, around 64% to 100% of participants chose the English form. 獎學金 and 燒烤 are two exceptional cases. Although they were High Cantonese forms, students preferred these forms over the English or the Low Cantonese forms. When both High and Low Cantonese form exist, the preference ranking of forms generally follows “English form > Low Cantonese form > High Cantonese form” pattern. Hence, the results indicated that expedient mixing (Luke, 1998) could not account for most students’ code-switching preferences.

B. Only High Cantonese form exists

HC	LC	English	Follows Expedient Mixing?
朋友 (10%)	/	Friend (90%)	Yes
專題研習 (0%)	/	Project (100%)	Yes
教授 (2%)	/	Professor (98%)	Yes
手提電腦 (10%)	/	Notebook (90%)	Yes
助教 (6%)	/	Tutor (94%)	Yes
辦公室 (0%)	/	Office (100%)	Yes
面試 (8%)	/	Interview (92%)	Yes
大學圖書館 (0%)	/	U Lib (100%)	Yes
匯報 (2%)	/	Presentation (24%) Present (74%)	Yes
論文 (2%)	/	Essay (98%)	Yes
學期 (2%)	/	Semester (0%) Sem (98%)	Yes
退學 (2%)	/	Quit U (98%)	Yes
主席 (4%)	/	P (94%) President (2%)	Yes
隱形眼鏡 (8%)	/	Contact lens (0%) Con (92%)	Yes
功課 (20%)	/	Assignment (80%)	Yes

Table 5. Elicited items with only High Cantonese form

In occasions where Low Cantonese forms were not available, generally more than 90% of the participants preferred the English forms over the High Cantonese forms. In cases where the High Cantonese forms were with 2 syllables, there were still participants, ranging from 2% to 20%, preferred the Cantonese forms. Yet, except from “隱形眼鏡”, no participants chose High Cantonese forms with 3 or more syllables. Therefore, when only High Cantonese forms exist, students code-switch to English in accordance with expedient mixing (Luke, 1998).

4.3 CUHK students' code-switching habits

96% of the students commented that they code-switch very often. Most students were conscious of their code-switching usage. On a scale from 0 never conscious to 6 always conscious, 60% of students chose 4 to 6. Only 24% chose 0-2 meaning they were not very conscious about their code-switching. Regarding the interlocutors students most often code-switch with, 80% of students ranked friends as first. 74% of the students ranked classmates as the second most often. 52% of the students ranked siblings as the third most often. They rarely code-switched with elderlies and strangers. 62% of the students would never code-switch with elderlies. 50% of students would rarely code-switch with strangers.

Generally, more than 50% of the students agreed that interlocutors' age, speakers' perceived closeness with his interlocutors, interlocutors' perceived English proficiency, the formality of conversation, and interlocutors' social status were the influential factors of their likeliness of code-switching. Among all the factors, all students agreed that interlocutors' age was the biggest factor. They would only code-switch with interlocutors of similar age. 96% agreed that the intimacy between the speaker and interlocutors is important, making it the second most prominent factor. The third most prominent factor was interlocutors' perceived English proficiency. 88% of the students stated that they would more likely code-switch with people with better English proficiency.

4.4 CUHK student's code-switching motivations

34% of students ranked “*It sounds more casual to use English words than the Cantonese counterparts*” and “*It is difficult to find the appropriate Cantonese counterparts*” as the main motivation. 38% ranked “*It is more efficient to use the English words than the Cantonese counterparts*” as the second main motivation. 52% of the student ranked “*It shows that I am well-educated*” as the second weakest motivation. 58% of the students ranked “*It shows my Hongkonger identity*” as the second weakest motivation. Hence, the casual tone, difficulty in finding Cantonese counterparts, and efficiency were the top motivations. Displaying regional identity and education level were not influential motivations for CUHK students' code-switching.

4.5 CUHK student's attitude toward code-switching

On a scale of 0 highly negative to 6 highly positive towards code-switching, 90% of students chose 4 to 6. Only 10% of students chose 1 to 3. This indicated that CUHK students were generally positive about code-switching. 24% of students stated that code-switching was effective and efficient. It facilitated communication between people of similar ages, backgrounds, and contexts. 18% of students commented that code-switching was a common habit of Hongkongers which set us apart from mainlanders. 20% stated that code-switching was normal as English was taught at schools. English was one of the official languages in Hong Kong. 12% commented that excessive or unnecessary code-switching might stir negative emotions in the listeners. 4% of students mentioned that code-switching with strong foreign accents to intentionally show off the speaker's English proficiency was unacceptable.

4.6 English Majors VS non-English Majors code-switching

English majors tend to code-switch more than non-English majors. 48% of English Majors code-switched for 82.76% of the elicited items while only 24% of non-English majors reached this percentage of code-switching. On a scale from 0 never code-switch to 6 code-

switch very often, the mean of English Majors was 5.2. Yet, the mean of non-English majors was 4.72.

4.7 English proficiency and code-switching frequency

On a scale from 0 never code-switch to 6 code-switch very often, participants with DSE level 3 or below all chose 5. The mean of participants with DSE level 4 was 5. Then, the mean for participants with DSE level 5 was 5.12. Lastly, the means for participants with DSE levels 5* and 5** were 4.93 and 4.57 respectively. Hence, the ranking of code-switching likeliness was DSE level 5 > level 3 or below & level 4 > level 5* > level 5**. Therefore, high English proficiency did not imply high code-switching frequency and vice versa.

5. Group discussion and follow-up interview findings

5.1 Percentage of code-switching in total number of words spoken

Group	Question	Total word count	Number of words code-switched	% of code-switching
1A	1	3069	186	6.06%
1B	1	2101	151	7.19%
1C	2	2918	235	8.05%
1D	2	2513	207	8.24%
2A	1	2341	148	6.32%
2B	1	2707	207	7.65%
2C	2	2434	194	7.97%
2D	2	2972	256	8.61%

Table 6. Percentage of code-switching

The average percentage of code-switching was 7.52%. In both Group 1 and Group 2, the percentage of code-switching increased when students were discussing the second question about university general education course recommendations. The percentage increased from 6-7% to around 8%. For Question 1, sub-groups B with purely non-English Majors (7.19% and 7.65%) had a higher code-switching percentage than sub-groups A with purely English Majors (6.06% and 6.32%). For Question 2, sub-groups D (8.24% and 8.61%) had a higher code-

switching percentage than sub-groups C (8.05% and 7.97%). Among all the groups, group 2D (8.61%) was with the highest percentage of code-switching.

5.2 Code-switching per turn

Group	Question	Total number of turns	Total number of words code-switched	Code-switching per turn
1A	1	206	186	1.11
1B	1	97	151	1.56
1C	2	108	235	2.18
1D	2	125	207	1.66
2A	1	238	148	0.62
2B	1	113	207	1.83
2C	2	97	194	2.00
2D	2	122	256	2.09

Table 7. Code-switching per turn

Group 2A was with the least average number of code-switching per turn (0.62/turn). Generally, students code-switched at least once in their turns. Among all the groups, Group 1C was with the highest number of code-switching per turn (2.18/turn). Students from that group generally used more than two English words in each turn they spoke. For Question 1, group 2B was with the highest code-switching per turn (1.83/turn). On average, all groups tended to code-switch once to twice each turn in Question 1. For Question 2, most groups used at least two English words in each turn. Again, the results indicated that there was significantly more code-switching in Question 2. The topic of discussions seemed to be a prominent factor in code-switching likeliness and frequency.

5.3 Total number of code-switching

Group	Question	Total number of words code-switched
1A	1	186
1B	1	151
1C	2	235
1D	2	207
2A	1	148
2B	1	207
2C	2	194
2D	2	256

Table 8. Total number of words code-switched

On average, all groups code-switched 198 English words in their discussion. Group 2D was with the most code-switching (256 words), whereas Group 2A was with the least code-switching (148 words). Group 2C was with the least code-switching in this question (194 words). For Question 1, the average number of words code-switched was 173. As for Question 2, the average number of words-code-switched was 223. More words were code-switched in Question 2, which was in line with findings in sections 5.1 and 5.2.

5.4 Ratio of turns with code-switching

Group	Question	Total number of turns	Total number of turns with code-switching	Ratio of turns with code-switching
1A	1	206	79	0.38
1B	1	97	57	0.58
1C	2	108	68	0.63
1D	2	125	63	0.50
2A	1	238	92	0.39
2B	1	113	64	0.57
2C	2	97	60	0.62
2D	2	122	77	0.63

Table 9. Ratio of turns with code-switching

Group 1C and 2D had the highest ratio of turns with code-switching (0.63). Therefore, they code-switch most frequently among all the groups. For Question 1, Group 1A had the lowest ratio (0.38), while Group 1B had the highest ratio (0.58). For Question 2, Group 1D was with the lowest ratio (0.50).

5.5 Code-switching consciousness

Interviewees were asked if they were conscious every time they code-switched. 68.75% of the interviewees thought that they were only half-conscious about their code-switching. 18.75% of the interviewees were completely conscious of their English usage. The remaining 12.5% were completely unaware of their English usage before they code-switched.

5.6 Motivations of code-switching

All interviewees mentioned that the difficulty recalling Cantonese terms prompted them to code-switch. Secondly, most interviewees stated that there was no Cantonese

translation for most university discourse-specific terms. Thirdly, interlocutors' influence was a motivation for code-switching. When others in the same group code-switch, interviewees felt more confident to code-switch. Fourthly, they mentioned that code-switching sounded casual and was thus suitable for daily informal conversations.

5.7 English Majors VS Non-English Majors code-switching

Participant	Major	Group	Average code-switching per turn	% of words code-switched	Ratio of turns with code-switching
Emily	ENGE	1A	1.61	10.28	0.47
Bella	ENGE	2A	0.63	6.88	0.39
Angel	HIST	1B	2.44	8.86	0.76
Hailey	LAWS	2B	2.29	9.97	0.73

Table 10. Participants with the highest frequency of code-switching in subgroups A and B

The table above summarized data of participants with the highest code-switching frequency/likeliness in subgroups A and B. In discussion groups with English Majors only (1A and 2A), Emily was with the highest average code-switching per turn (1.61/turn), percentage of words code-switched (10.28%) and ratio of turns with code-switching (0.47). In discussion groups with Non-English Majors only (1B and 2B), Hailey was with the highest percentage of words code-switched (9.97%). In comparison, Angel had the highest average number code-switching per turn (2.44/turn) and ratio of turns with code-switching (0.76). Among the four participants, Emily was with the highest percentage of words code-switched. On the other hand, Angel was with the highest average number of code-switching per turn and ratio of turns with code-switching.

Participant	Major	Group	Average code-switching per turn	% of words code-switched	Ratio of turns with code-switching
Emily	ENGE	1C	3.03	8.27	0.69
Angel	HIST	1D	2.18	9.39	0.62
Claire	ARCH	2C	2.13	10.53	0.73
Hailey	LAWS	2D	2.68	11.66	0.80

Table 11. Participants with the highest frequency of code-switching in subgroups C and D

In discussion groups mixed with English Majors and Non-English Majors (subgroups C and D), most of the participants with the highest frequency of code-switching were Non-English Majors. Emily was with the highest average code-switching per turn (3.03/turn). She code-switched at least three times in each turn she spoke. Hailey had the highest percentage of words code-switched (11.66%) and ratio of turns with code-switching (0.80).

87.5% of the interviewees thought that English Majors tend to code-switch more frequently than students from other majors. 1 interviewee mentioned that code-switching was not related to a student's major. It was related to personal preference and upbringing. The remaining 1 interviewee claimed she did not know enough CUHK English Majors to judge whether there were differences in code-switching likeliness.

5.8 Reasons for code-switching habit formation

Interviewees suggested possible reasons for their code-switching habits based on their personal experiences. 93.75% of the interviewees mentioned family members and peer influences. People they were close to used code-switching and thus they adopted similar ways of communicating. 56.25% of the interviewees considered code-switching as a part of the university culture. 37.5% of the interviewees stated that studying in English as Medium of Instructions (EMI) schools were the reason why they found using code-switching normal. They were used to learning, speaking, and thinking in English. 31.25% of the interviewees stated that their hobbies of watching western TV programmes and movies had increased their familiarity with English usage. 12.5% of interviewees commented that code-switching was a part of Hong Kong's language culture.

6. Discussions

6.1 Principle of Economy

My findings regarding the Principle of Economy were similar to Chu's (2007) findings. Both of our research was targeting CUHK students. When the English item contained fewer

syllables than the Cantonese counterpart, students tended to use the English form. Take this as an example,

Cantonese Sentence

今日我要同 朋友 傾 專題研習

Code-switched sentence

今日我要同 *friend* 傾 *project*

朋友 contains two syllables /pang4/ and /jau5/. In comparison, the English counterpart only consists of one syllable /frend/. At the same time, 專題研習 contains four syllables /zyun1/, /tai4/, /jin4/, and /zaap6/. Yet, the English counterpart only consists of two syllables /'prɒdʒ.ekt/. Hence, students inserted the English lexis “friend” and “project” into their Cantonese sentences. According to Li (1998), people tended to prefer expressions that they could use the least effort to produce. When they encountered lexis from another language, options easier than their first language would be made available for them to choose from. People would choose from whatever options help them reduce their effort (Li, 1998, P.175). This explained why most CUHK students would code-switch when the English word was phonologically easier to produce.

Nevertheless, my findings disagreed with Chu’s (2007) in instances where the Cantonese and English forms shared the same number of syllables. Chu (2007) suggested that more students tended to choose the Cantonese form in such cases. Yet, my findings suggested the opposite. When the Cantonese form contained the same number of syllables as the English counterparts, most students preferred the English form.

Cantonese Sentence

我哋要 印 份 論文 出 黎

Code-switched sentence

我哋要 *print* 份 *essay* 出 黎

For instance, 印 contains one syllable /jan3/. Print contains one syllable /print/ as well. Yet, most students chose “print” instead of “印”. The same goes for “論文” and “essay”. 論文 contains two syllables /leɔn6 man4/. Essay contains two syllables / 'es.eɪ/. Again, most students

chose “essay” instead of “論文”. Apart from that, my findings in instances where the Cantonese form was simpler than the English form were different from Chu’s (2007). Chu (2007) suggested that more students tended to choose the Cantonese form. This was because using the English form would not reduce any effort in producing the utterance. However, my results were mixed. In nearly half of the elicited items, more students preferred the Cantonese form. In the remaining items, more students preferred the English form.

Cantonese Sentence

1. 小明 尋日 比人炒咗
2. 呢個獎學金洗唔洗面試架？

Code-switched sentence

- 小明 *yesterday* 比人炒咗
- 呢個獎學金洗唔洗 *interview* 架？

In the first example, more students chose “尋日” instead of “yesterday”. 尋日 /cam4 jat6/ contains two syllables while yesterday /'jes.tə.dei/ contains three. According to Li’s (1998) Principle of Economy, students should choose 尋日. Most students preferred the Cantonese word as expected. On the contrary, more students chose the English form instead of the Cantonese form in the second example. 面試 /min6 si3/ contains two syllables while interview /'m.tə.vju:/ contains three. Although the English form has one more syllable than the Cantonese form, most students preferred using “interview”. The other English words preferred by students are “professor”, “presentation”, and “assignment”. The possible reasons will be discussed in later sections.

6.2 Expedient code-mixing

Most of my findings agreed with Luke’s (1998) proposal of Expedient Code-mixing. When only the High Cantonese form existed, most CUHK students would prefer the English counterparts. According to Luke (1998), the High Cantonese form was too formal and would sound awkward in casual conversations. Hence, there was a pragmatic need for students to code-switch to fill the stylistic gap.

High Cantonese form**Low Cantonese form****Code-switched sentence**

教授叫我地下星期帶自己	()叫我地下星期帶自	<i>Professor</i> 叫我地下星期帶
部手提電腦上堂	己部()上堂	自己部 <i>notebook</i> ?

In this example, the low Cantonese form of the two elicited Cantonese items do not exist. 教授 /gaau3 sau6/ contains two syllables but professor /prə'fes.ər/ contains three syllables. According to Li's (1998) Principle of Economy, there was no phonological need to choose the English form to reduce production effort. Yet, most students still preferred the English form. This could be explained by Luke's expedient code-mixing. The tone of 教授 was too formal for daily conversations among students. It was more suitable in formal written contexts. As for the 手提電腦 and notebook pair, students' preferences agreed with both the Principle of Economy and Expedient Code-mixing. Notebook /'nəʊt.bʊk/ contains two less syllables than 手提電腦 /sau2 tai4 din6 nou5/. Hence, according to the Principle of Economy, students were expected to choose the English form instead. Code-switching reduced the production effort of their utterances while maintaining the effectiveness of the message conveyed. Then, according to Expedient Code-mixing, students were expected to choose the English form. Notebook was the only informal form available as the Low Cantonese form was absent. Similar explanation goes for "Presentation, Interview, and assignment", the word choices that could not be explained by the Principle of Economy alone.

6.3 Exceptional Cases

The two sections above proved that motivations for code-mixing should not be considered alone. Motivations were interrelated. There could be more than one motivation behind each code-switching occurrence. After considering the Principle of Economy and Expedient Code-mixing, students' preferences in 7 elicited items could not be explained.

High Cantonese	Low Cantonese	English
獎學金 (8%)	船 (14%)	Scholarship (78%)
複印 (0%)	印 (12%)	Print (88%)
燒烤 (6%)	燒嘢食 (30%)	BBQ (64%)
預訂 (0%)	訂 (0%)	Book (100%)
查察 (0%)	查/睇 (14%)	Check (82%)
食堂 (0%)	飯堂 (0%)	Canteen (64%)
午飯	晏 (30%)	Lunch (70%)

Table 12. Exceptional Cases

Low Cantonese forms are available for all items. Hence, according to Luke’s Expedient Mixing, there was no need to switch to the English form. Their Low Cantonese forms either contained fewer syllables than or the same number of syllables as the English form. Therefore, according to the Principle of Economy, students should be using Cantonese forms instead. Yet, at least 60% of students tended to adopt the English form in their daily utterances. Therefore, there must be other reasons motivating the majority of students to code-switch. Regarding the “訂” and “book” pair, Li (2000) also studied this pair in his research. He suggested that Hongkongers code-switch because of the motivation of “specificity”. According to Li (2000), 訂 has a more specific meaning than book. 訂 refers to the reservation of a service or product where a deposit is required. Hence, if people say they “訂+object”, they are implying that payment is involved. However, deposit payment might not be necessary when people adopt the semantically more general “book + object”. Therefore, people code-switch to “communicate the meaning ‘make a reservation for which no money or deposit is required’ unambiguously (Li, 2000, P.313)”. This explained why students chose “book 房” instead of “訂房”. In CUHK, students are only required to book a room on an online system. No payment is required in the process. The “check” and “睇” pair could also be explained by the motivation of “specificity”. Check is a more general term. It means to find out about something with any kind of method. Yet, 睇 refers to verifying something by physically going to that place. You must verify something with your own eyes. Considering the expression “check 下邊間 canteen 少人啲”, a

person has many ways to find out which canteen has more vacancies. He does not have to visit the canteen one by one in person. Therefore, the word with a more generalized meaning “check” was preferred by most of the students.

Furthermore, the absence of exact translation might imply the difference in cultural perceptions of concepts between the Chinese and the Western cultures. Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis suggested that different concepts had completely different meanings in different cultures. Different cultural worldviews were expressed through languages. Hence, there might not be an exact translation of lexis as people from different cultural backgrounds experience the world quite differently (Sapir, 1929; Whorf, 1940). Take the lexical gap in the “check & 睇” pair as an example. It implied that Chinese people must pay whenever they want to reserve anything in the traditional Chinese culture. In Hong Kong, the new western idea of reserving things without having to pay in advance might have been introduced to the local community. However, there is no Cantonese lexis to express this concept due to the difference in cultural practices. Hence, people have to code-switch to ensure the clarity of their meaning.

6.4 Main factors affecting code-switching likeliness

Most CUHK students regarded age as the most influential factor in their code-switching likeliness. They commented that age is the primary indicator of perceived English proficiency. They tended to regard elderlies as with very limited English proficiency. This is an excerpt from one of the follow-up interviews I conducted.

I never code-switch with my grandma because I fear that she might not understand what I am talking about. The general education level back then was much lower than nowadays. A lot of the elderly in Hong Kong didn't receive much proper education. They regard English as “雞腸 (i.e. Chicken intestines)”. Hence, if I know they don't understand English, but I still choose to code-switch with them, they might think that

I'm laughing at their relatively lower English proficiency. Code-switching with elderlies will hence be disrespectful. (Lily, ENGE, Year 4)

Usually, people aged 60 or above are considered elderly. Hence, elderlies are born in 1962 or much earlier. Due to the inability to read and write English, it is common for elderlies to name English “雞腸 (i.e. Chicken intestines)”. It is because the long and tiny writing style of English is different from the square-like configuration of Chinese characters. Lily's comment on elderlies' education level could be supported by government data. According to the Hong Kong Population Census in 1961, only 1.61% of the total population in Hong Kong knew how to speak English. Most citizens spoke Cantonese and several other Chinese dialects only. Although children aged 5 to 14 had reached school age, 12.05% of them did not go to school. Hongkongers aged 6 to 19 should be attending either primary school or secondary school in nowadays education scheme. Yet, there was a total of 109,294 of them working instead of studying (HKSAR Census and Statistics Department, 1969, P.23-24). From 1960 to 1961, only 1396 people were enrolled in Universities in Hong Kong. Before that, there was only an average of 950 people enrolled in universities per year (HKSAR Census and Statistics Department, 1969, P.186).

The second most influential factor is the interlocutors involved in the conversation. Friends, classmates, and siblings were the top three interlocutors students would most often code-switch with. They were of similar age to the students. Therefore, they shared similar educational backgrounds and life experiences. Students commented that they felt more comfortable code-switching with familiar interlocutors. This is an excerpt from the interviews.

I would code-switch more with English Majors because we can easily understand each other. Plus, we are highly informal with each other. That's why I think I code-switched more during the first discussion with English Majors. It's more within my comfort zone. Plus, I know those people compared to the second batch where 2 of them are non-

English Majors. They might not understand what I'm saying so I tend to code-switch less, or at least I try not to do it as much as possible. (Emily, ENGE, Year 4)

Emily claimed that she tried to reduce the frequency of her code-switching in the second discussion with Non-English Majors. The statistics of her code-switching likeliness in the two discussions matched her claim. In her first discussion with English majors, the percentage of words code-switched was 10.28%. In comparison, the percentage dropped to 8.27% in her second discussion with Non-English Majors. According to Emily, the closer the relationship between the interlocutors, the more informal the conversation was. Hence, we see the two interrelated factors here: perceived closeness between interlocutors and the formality of the conversation. In the Questionnaire, most students agreed that they would code-switch much less in formal situations such as interviews, examinations, and meetings. This agrees with Lee's (2012) findings of code-switching decrease with the increasing formality.

The code-switching likeliness of an individual was also affected by his interlocutor's likeliness of code-switching. The following is an excerpt of my interviewee explaining the difference in code-switching likeliness in her two discussions. The second excerpt is another interviewee addressing her code-switching habit.

1. I code-switch more when my groupmates code-switch more than I do. After listening to them code-switch, I naturally code-switch more and more. Code-switching is "infectious". I don't have to worry about others viewing me as a show-off if they code-switch a lot as well. (Ruby, LSED, Year 4)
2. My code-switching likeliness differs across social circles. I find myself code-switch more with non-JUPAS (i.e. local students from international schools, local students from non-government funded schools, international students) friends. They code-switch a lot more often than other locals. So, when I talk to them, I code-switch more to fit in. (Emma, ENGE, Year 4)

Both interviewees would modify their speech styles to accommodate their interlocutors. This act of accommodating others could be explained by Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory. Giles (2007) and his fellow researchers stated that "salient social category memberships are often negotiated during an interaction through the process of accommodation (Giles & Ogay, 2007, P.294)". We communicate our in-group or out-group identity through our language use. Ruby and Emma's voluntary increase in code-switching frequency was supported by what Giles (2007) referred to as the "act of convergence". They adapted to their interlocutors' code-switching frequency and altered their speech styles. They code-switched more to accommodate their interlocutors' speech behaviours. Giles (2007) mentioned that the motive of convergence was to gain approval and social membership. Besides, it was used to ensure efficient and unambiguous communication. He stated "the more similar we are to our conversational partner, the more he or she will like or respect us, and the more social rewards we can expect (Giles, 2007, P.296)". Emma wanted to be regarded as a member of the community with higher English proficiency. On the other hand, Ruby wanted to sound the same as the rest of her groupmates.

6.5 Major code-switching motivations

The effectiveness and efficiency brought by code-switching was the top motivation of CUHK students' code-switching. This was explained in section 6.1 about Li's (1998) Principle of Economy. The informal tone of code-switching was also one of the top motivations. This was explained in section 6.2 about Luke's (1998) expedient code-mixing as well. The difficulty in thinking back to the appropriate Cantonese counterparts was the second most prominent motivation. Many of the interviewees found it very challenging to not code-switch without struggling to think about Cantonese expressions.

For many of the words I code-switched, I don't know how to express them in Cantonese.

For example, how can I express "deadline fighter" and "deadline" in Cantonese? When

I first encountered those concepts, I learnt the English version of them rather than the Chinese one. Or maybe it's because I'm so used to speaking English that my Cantonese got worse. (Bella, ENGE, Year 4)

Clyne (1991) pointed out that, very often, there might not be an equivalent of a foreign lexis in the native language. People encountered new concepts and experiences in a language different from their first language. With the lack of appropriate vocabulary in the first language, the lexical transfer occurred. Bella could not think of the Cantonese equivalent for “deadline fighter” and “deadline”. This was due to the absence of lexis in Cantonese. According to Li (1998), word-to-word translation was one of the ways to introduce an English new concept to Chinese. Unless the newly formed calques were widely used by the local media, people were not familiar with the coined Chinese forms. The calque of “deadline” is “死線”. Also, the calque of “deadline fighter” is “死線戰士”. Their presence is limited in both written and spoken Cantonese. When participants referred to the two concepts in the group discussions, none of them used “死線” or “死線戰士”. Due to their limited currency, many of the CUHK students found the Cantonese translation “awkward” and “unnatural”. Thus, they code-switched to cope with the lexical gap.

6.6 CUHK students' attitudes towards code-switching

CUHK students were generally very positive about code-switching. As mentioned in section 4.5, quite a lot of students considered code-switching as a cultural identity marker. Hongkongers generally have a certain level of English proficiency resulting from their trilingual and biliteracy education. English is a compulsory subject since Primary school. Therefore, Hongkongers have received at least twelve years of mandatory English education. Although Hongkongers and mainlanders are both ethnic Chinese, the ability to use English in their code-switching differentiates Hongkongers from mainlanders.

Code-switching is very common in Hong Kong. It shows how bilingual we are. I think code-switching has something to do with our local identity since some people might think that this is what sets Hongkongers apart from Mainlanders. Mainlanders may know how to speak Cantonese, but they certainly won't code-switch as we do. (Angel, HIST, Year 4)

Kirkpartrick (2014) suggested that code-switching was a natural way bilinguals communicate with each other. Indeed, according to Table 7, every group code-switched at least once in each turn participants spoke. Then, according to the findings in the questionnaire, none of the students only selected pure Cantonese expressions. These reflected that code-switching had become a common cultural practice among Hongkongers. Apart from that, my findings were highly coherent with Chan's (2019) research. 100% of his participants reported that they would use Cantonese-English code-switching. Chan (2019) regarded code-switching as a "widespread phenomenon and an essential element in Hong Kong (P.5)". He suggested that the "Hong Kong identity" was constructed through code-switching. Similar to my findings, Chan's (2019) participants stressed a lot about their differences from Mainlanders. This might relate to Kaeding's (2017) discussion of the rising "localism" in Hong Kong, especially among the younger generations. A significant proportion of Hong Kong citizens were affiliated with the Hong Kong identity but not the Hong Kong Chinese identity. They took a strong stance in insisting on Hong Kong's economic, political and cultural distinctiveness. Jackson (2020) also mentioned that there were two dimensions of identity: avowed and ascribed. When a person had a strong sense of belonging to Hong Kong, he would voluntarily exhibit the shared traits of average Hongkongers. The convergence to the shared behaviours was an act of exhibiting one's avowed identity. At the same time, that person wished others would ascribe him to the

identity of an in-group member. Therefore, it was very understandable that CUHK students would code-switch to act like “average” and “normal” Hongkongers.

Although the CUHK students showed high acceptance of Cantonese-English code-switching, nearly one-fifth of the students were against the overuse of code-switching.

1. I'm negative about code-switching when people code-switch too much. It would sound odd to me if someone said 'interesting' instead of '有趣' when his or her main discourse is in Cantonese. (Jack, ENGE, Year 4)
2. I would be annoyed if people use too much code-switching... But more importantly, I think I will get annoyed when people intentionally use a foreign accent to code-switch. For example, the American accent which includes many 'r' sound. The sudden switch to a foreign accent sounds so awkward. It is more like showing off. (Ruby, LSED, Year 4)

Interviewees agreed that there was no absolute definition of “too much code-switching”. It is subjective. The acceptance of code-switching frequency varies among people. However, Jack's example could be explained by Li's (1998) Principle of Economy. “有趣” contains two syllables while “interesting” contains three. There was no need to switch from Cantonese to English. Therefore, his judgment of whether his interlocutor's code-switching was excessive was based on efficiency and need. He would only be positive about code-switching that was induced by the need to reduce time and effort. Regarding Ruby's opinion on code-switching with a strong foreign accent, this kind of code-switching agreed with Luke's (1998) “Orientation mixing”. He suggested that people code-switch to show that they were more Westernized and well-educated. This type of code-mixing had nothing to do with pragmatic needs (Luke, 1998, P.149). On the other hand, Rhee (2001) stated that Cantonese is a non-rhotic language while English is a rhotic language. Due to the absence of alveolar /r/ in Cantonese consonants, the /r/ would not be produced when loaning an English word to

Cantonese. For instance, if “freezer” was loaned, it was normal for Cantonese people to pronounce it as [fi sa] (Rhee, 2001, P.5). Therefore, as mentioned by Ruby, the extra emphasis on rhoticity in code-switching might trigger listeners’ negative emotions. This type of code-switching was “too much” as it showed off a person’s English-speaking proficiency. The primary motive was to show that their pronunciation was more foreign and thus superior.

6.7 English Majors and Non-English Majors’ Code-switching

The questionnaire results reflected that English Majors tend to code-switch more often than non-English Majors. English Majors were aware of their frequent code-switching in their daily lives. Most of the interviewees also commented that English Majors were more comfortable using English. English majors were with relatively higher English proficiency. Therefore, most interviewees expected that English Majors would code-switch more frequently.

1. All English Majors’ assignments are in English. They are used to thinking in English instead of Cantonese. The more they use English, the more fluent they are. So, they code-switch more than us. (Hailey, LAWS, Year 4)
2. I feel like some English Majors are very comfortable using English, so they tend to code-switch more. The strong Western influence also plays a role. I’m sure most of us grew up watching lots of English TV shows and movies. Also, we love listening to American pop music. (Karen, ENGE, Year 4)

It was a common belief among students that English majors will code-switch more. As compared to other majors, their curriculum encouraged them to practice English more. Most of the English Majors were very westernized. They enjoyed exposing themselves to western cultures and entertainment. They generally had a highly positive attitude towards English. As a result, they were more willing to use English outside of the classroom. Students’ sharing indicated that the likeliness of code-switching was believed to have strong ties with the

following: (1) positive attitude towards English. (2) the willingness to use English. (3) chances of using English at school.

However, the data from the group discussions suggested otherwise. Non-Majors code-switched slightly more than English majors.

Group	Question	% of code-switching	Average Code-switching per turn	Ratio of turns with code-switching
1A	1	6.06	1.11	0.38
1B	1	7.19	1.56	0.58
2A	1	6.32	0.62	0.39
2B	1	7.65	1.83	0.57

Table 13. Summary of data in subgroups A and B

Compare the data between groups with purely English Majors (1A and 2A) and purely non-English Majors (1B and 2B). All three calculation methods showed very similar results. Subgroups B, with only Non-English Majors, code-switched more. On average, Non-English Majors used more English words in each turn they spoke. Also, their percentage of words code-switched in the total number of words was around 1% higher than English Majors. Then, if we review Table 11 in section 5.7¹¹, 3/4 of the participants on the list were Non-English Majors. Hailey, a Law student, had a very high percentage of code-switching. Her percentage was 3.39% higher than Emily, the only English Major on the list. Therefore, the results suggested that code-switching likeliness might not necessarily be related to whether the student was an English Major. As explained in section 6.5, the likeliness of code-switching was more related to students' language attitudes and avowed identity. Non-English Majors could be as westernized and as fond of English as English Majors.

To investigate the possible reason for the unexpected code-switching frequency of English Majors and non-English Majors, I asked Angel and Mary to reflect on their code-switching habits. Angel had the highest code-switching frequency among Non-English Majors

¹¹ Participants with the highest frequency of code-switching in subgroups C and D (groups mixed with two English Majors and two non-English Majors)

who participated in the group discussions while Mary had the lowest code-switching frequency among English Majors.

1. I think I code-switch more than other Non-English Majors. Maybe it's because my friends around me use a lot more code-switching than I do. They'll even use code-switching to swear. I'm quite sure before knowing those friends, I code-switch significantly less than I do now. After communicating with them for years, I developed a habit of code-switching quite constantly. (Angel, HIST, Year 4)
2. My relatively lower code-switching frequency may have something to do with my past experience. When I was in Secondary school, my friends were not interested in English or western pop culture. I was especially fond of listening to songs from One Direction. But my friends were only into Asian pop culture. I remember I spoke English in front of them once. They gave me a cold-eyed stare and told me "Don't act like a show-off". Some even called me a "港女 (Kong girl)"¹². Since then, I would think twice before I speak. Sometimes, I already have an English expression in mind. Yet, I will use Cantonese words to re-formulate my sentence. I guess I have developed a habit of subconsciously avoiding code-switching. (Mary, ENGE, Year 4)

From Angel's self-reflection, the possible reason for the unexpectedly high frequency of Non-English Major's code-switching was the act of convergence. As discussed in Section 6.3, people consciously and subconsciously adopt others' speech styles. Under Giles' (2007) Communication Accommodation Theory, Non-English Majors might accommodate others' code-switching frequency in their social circles. This explained why Angel was conscious of her change in code-switching habit before and after knowing her friends. Mary's self-reflection

¹² A derogatory term referring to young females in Hong Kong who enjoy catching others' attention. This type of girl usually shares the following characteristics: Narcissistic, xenophilic, and materialistic.

highlighted the factor of peer pressure. Clasen and Brown (1985) defined peer pressure as “the pressure imposed by peers to do something or to keep from doing something, no matter if you personally want it or not (P.458)” Feldman (2011) also pointed out that individuals felt the urge to adopt other’s values, beliefs, and behaviours with the increased contact with peers. Peer pressure was especially intense among teenagers. In this transitional stage, teenagers cared immensely about others’ opinions. In Mary’s experience, we see that her high school friends played an influential role in shaping her code-switching habit. Their rejection of code-switching usage had shaped Mary’s code-switching reluctance. Both students’ sharing indicated that code-switching frequency was a speech style acquired from a person’s surroundings. It would eventually be internalized and transformed into a habit.

Although the overall likeliness of English Majors’ code-switching was lower than Non-English Majors’, English Majors tended to include more varieties of code-switching in the group discussions. This will be further explained in the next section.

6.8 Categories of code-switching

A. English Adjectives: Most English majors tended to use more English adjectives to describe their subjects or objects. Non-English Majors mostly preferred using Cantonese adjectives.

1. 因為 anthro 佢本身就係研究一啲比較 obscure 嘅野 (Lily, ENGE, Group 1D)

[meaning: Because anthropology studies relatively obscure topics.]

2. 我記得有個 course 叫正向心理學，其實都好 chill (Jack, ENGE, Group 2C)

[meaning: I remember there was a course called Positive Psychology. In fact, it is quite chill.]

B. English Interjections: English Majors very often inserted English interjections into their sentences. English interjections were not found in non-English Majors' utterances. English Majors used "woah", "wow", and "oh" to show they were surprised. Moreover, they would use "yeah" and "oh" to show agreement with others' opinions. Lee (2012) identified this category in his analysis as well. However, unlike my findings, he suggested that English interjections were used as discourse markers.

1. **Yeah**...睇下你點吹囉其實都係 (Karen, ENGE, Group 1C)
[meaning: Yeah...it depends on how you elaborate.]
2. **Oh!** Med Can! 我覺得 med can 都幾好味架 (Emily, ENGE, Group 1A)
[meaning: Oh! Medicine Canteen! I think the food there is delicious.]

C. Exclamatory sentences: Most exclamatory sentences were identified in English Majors' utterances. They were rarely found in Non-English Majors' utterances. Only Hailey, a Law student with a high degree of code-switching likeliness, used English exclamations.

1. **That's everything!** 跟住(個餃子)居然冇咗 (Karen, ENGE, Group 1A)
2. **That is a must eat** 架喇! (Emily, ENGE, Group 1A)
3. **Oh my god!** 搞唔掂 (Hailey, LAWS, Group 2D)

D. Personal Names: This category was also identified in Lee's (2012) study. The use of English names was "orientation mixing" to show a person was Westernized (Luke, 1998). Being familiar with their groupmates, English Majors called others by their English names. Non-English Majors would directly comment on their groupmates' opinions without addressing their names.

1. **Bella** 好似唔係好知道 (Sophie, ENGE, Group 2A)
2. **Jack**, 你記唔記得我地係咪上過有個 course 叫 positive psychology 啊?
(Sophie, ENGE, Group 2C)

3. Bella 中意 Kpop 架喎 (Emma, ENGE, Group 2D)

According to Sophie, CUHK students introduced themselves by their English names. Only close friends knew each other's Chinese names. Addressing people by their English names could help maintain a "proper relationship distance". Sophie would only address her best friend with her Chinese name. CUHK students' usage of English names could be explained by Gu's (1990) study about Chinese politeness. Gu (1990) stated that Chinese given names are "kin familial address terms (P.250)". Only family members and close friends of a person were allowed to use Chinese given names. Others using it would be considered impolite. Except for senior family members, addressing others with their Chinese full names was the most offensive. Yet, it was always polite to others with their English first names. Li (1998) also shared a similar opinion that calling Chinese people by their Chinese given name was inappropriate. Chinese people would be embarrassed or offended. In CUHK, addressing classmates with their last names would be too formal. Therefore, most students would prefer using English names to introduce themselves and address others.

E. English words with syllables separated: This type of code-switching was only spotted in English major's utterances. Luke (1998) discovered that Hongkongers would split multisyllabic English words and insert a negative particle after the first syllable. With the "A-not-A (Luke, 1998, P.152)" pattern, the first syllable is repeated after the negative particle. However, my findings suggested that this pattern applied to monosyllabic words as well. In example one, "buy" was first separated by negative particle 唔 and repeated itself afterward. Not only negative particles could be used to split syllables of English words, but also the question particle. As shown in example two, the question particle 咩 was inserted between the two syllables of "exchange". A rhetorical question was then formulated.

1. 所以我覺得 Logic 好似你想點吹都得囉，睇下佢 buy 唔 buy 你個套囉 (Karen, ENGE, Group 1C)

[meaning: For the Logic coursework, I think you can elaborate in whatever ways you want. It only depends on whether the professor buys it or not.]

2. 宜家 COVID 喎，Ex 咩 change 啫！(Bella, ENGE, Group 2A)

[meaning: There's COVID everywhere. We can't go on an exchange, can we?]

F. Emphasis on Emotion: This category was only found in Ruby's utterances. She code-switched to emphasize her emotions. Usually, the English word code-switched carries a stronger connotation. In the following example, "sh*t" and "屎" both mean faeces. Yet, "sh*t" is a swear word in English while "屎" is an objective noun. Ruby intentionally code-switched to emphasize her anger and discontent.

1. 我覺得係 professor 嘅問題，因為佢第一次教啦，但係我覺得佢教到一擲 sh*t 咁樣囉。(Ruby, LSED, Group 2D)

[meaning: I think it's the professor's problem because it's his first-time teaching. His teaching is a total sh*t.]

G. University-context-specific terms: Regardless of their majors, students code-switched building names, canteen names, college names, course codes, course titles, professor's names, grades, and other academic or university-life related terms. The second discussion topic about course registration contributed most of the items in this category. English is the official teaching language of CUHK. Therefore, most university-related terms are in English. Most of the code-switching under this category was motivated by the Principle of Economy. Yet, some Cantonese translations of popular English terms, like the acronym included in the first example, were seldomly mentioned. Hence, students must code-switch whenever referring to them.

1. 我唔記得咗自己 reg 咩。我宜家上 CUSIS¹³睇下 (Bella, ENGE, Gp 2D)

[meaning: I forgot the courses I registered for. Let me check on CUSIS.]

2. 我 senior intake 啦，所以我淨係讀過 UGEA¹⁴一科 (Tom, CHED,

Group 2C)

[meaning: I am a “senior intake”, so I only took a UGEA course.]

3. 我 Year Four 嗰陣就想追 GPA¹⁵啦，咁我就報咗 Logic 喇 (John, IBBA,

Group 1C)

[meaning: I want to get a better GPA in Year Four. That’s why I took the

Logic course.]

H. Hong Kong English: Bolton (2002) regarded “Hong Kong English” as a branch of World English. It is a type of English used and understood by Hong Kong citizens. It has its phonological, semantical, and syntactical characteristics distinct from other English in the world. Bolton (2002) highlighted the creativity of invention in Hong Kong English, especially in English vocabulary. Both English Majors and Non-English Majors used “chur” and “hea” to describe the nature of university courses. The origin of these terms was debatable. Many believed that university students invented these words to describe their coursework. Both English terms do not exist in any prestigious English dictionaries and thus can only be understood by Hongkongers. When they are used to describe university courses, “Chur” refers to the intensive workload while “hea” is the exact opposite.

1. 即係一開始好似係幾 hea，但係去到近年就幾 chur 囉 (Mary, ENGE,

Group 1D)

¹³ Chinese University Student Information System

¹⁴ University General Education Area A. This short form is commonly used and displayed in course registration.

¹⁵ Grade Point Average. Most CUHK students did not know the Chinese translation of this term.

[meaning: At the beginning, this course was quite relaxing. But it became more demanding these few years.]

2. 呢...有科 Archi 一零零一啦，極度 chur 嚟 (Claire, ARCH, Gp 2C)

[meaning: There is a course named Architecture 1001. It is extremely demanding.]

Apart from vocabulary inventions, altering the part of speech of an English word was quite common among English Majors and Non-English Majors. In the first example below, the second “friend” was used as an adjective describing the degree of affiliation with friends. However, this part of speech does not exist in English dictionary entries. Normally, friend is either used as a noun or a verb. However, students invented a new part of speech and extended its original meaning. In the second example, “A” was used as a verb indicating the action of getting an A grade. Again, “A” was used as a noun but never a verb in English. Luke (1998) also discussed similar types of code-switching. Following the Cantonese grammar of “verb + grammatical marker”, English content words were placed in front of Chinese grammatical particles. This example takes the form of “A + perfective marker 㗎”.

1. 我覺得中學我嗰啲 friend 係 friend 過大學嘅 friend 架嚟 (Hailey, LAWS, Group 2B)

[meaning: I think I am closer to my secondary school friends than my university friends.]

2. 跟住個 project 輕鬆 A 㗎嚟嗰陣。 (Claire, ARCH, Year 4)

[meaning: At that time, I got an A for my project without paying much effort.]

I. Clipped forms: Both English Majors and Non-English Majors constantly communicated using clipped English words in the discussions. To make communications more

efficient, English words with two or more syllables were clipped. The clipped forms usually contain at most two syllables. In example one, the two-syllable “credit” was clipped to the single-syllable “cred”. In the second example, the four-syllable “Philosophy” was clipped to the two-syllable “Philo”.

1. 兩 cred 都咁 chur 嘅? (Lily, ENGE, Group 1D)

[meaning: How come a two-credit course is this demanding?]

2. 讀 Philo 啲人幫佢改咗個名叫“高 Grade 全”(Alice, ENGE, Group 1C)

[meaning: Those philosophy students gave him the nickname “gou1 grade cyun4”.]

7. Limitations

This is small-scale research with a limited sample size. There were only 66 CUHK students participated in the research. Regarding the questionnaire, as students were asked to reflect on their daily code-switching behaviours, the data were self-reported. There was no possible way to verify their answers. Thus, there might be understatements or exaggerations in their choices. Among the 50 replies to the questionnaire, there was a lack of participants with DSE level 3 or below¹⁶. Their replies might not be reliable enough to represent other DSE level 3 or below students’ code-switching likeliness and habits. Therefore, the correlations found between English proficiency and code-switching likeliness might not be accurate to reflect the general trend in CUHK.

Then, regarding the group discussions, all participants were from Year 4. Their code-switching behaviours could not represent CUHK students from other study years. Besides, code-switching likeliness was an individualized trait. There might be a possibility that participants invited code-switched way more or less frequently than other CUHK students in

¹⁶ There are 3 participants with DSE level 3 or below, summing up to 6% of the total number of participants only.

their respective majors. The extreme cases would affect the overall results and analysis of this research. At the same time, there were technological limitations. Due to the pandemic, conducting face-to-face group discussions was inappropriate. The group discussions must be done through Zoom. Unfortunately, when more than one participant spoke, the overlapped utterances of each participant most often could not be heard clearly. Furthermore, when there were internet instabilities, participants' utterances were shattered and lagging. With these instances, the word-to-word transcription might not be accurate. Due to the unfavourable audio quality, some code-switching or Cantonese expressions were lost in transcription. This affected the calculation of code-switching frequency and might in turn affect the answers to the research questions.

The limitations stated should be overcome by increasing the overall sample size. An approximately equal number of participants from all DSE levels and study years should be invited to fill in the questionnaire. To reduce the possibility of the effect of extreme cases, more participants of different majors and school years should be invited to join the group discussions. If possible, the discussions should be conducted in-person to prevent any technological limitations.

8. Conclusion

The present study proved that “English majors code-switch more” was only a stereotype among CUHK students. Being an English Major did not necessarily mean that students must code-switch more frequently. Similarly, being a Non-English Major did not imply that students would code-switch less. Code-switching likeliness was related to personal experience, especially students' upbringing and their peers. Students exercised the “act of convergence (Giles, 2007)” to accommodate their interlocutors in their social circles. In general, code-switching was a common phenomenon in the university context. Regardless of students' English proficiency, CUHK students code-switched quite frequently. They had remarkably

high acceptance of code-switching as well. Although the quantitative differences could not be explained by a student's major, there were significant qualitative differences between English Majors' and Non-English Majors' code-switching. More English adjectives, personal names, interjections, exclamatory sentences, and English words with syllables split were code-switched by English Majors. Many motivations for CUHK students' code-switching were explored in this research. Yet, Li's (1998) Principle of Economy and Luke's (1998) Expedient Code-mixing remained the most influential motivations. Students code-switched to suit the informal ambiance and to reduce the effort of speaking (Li, 1998). Among all the factors affecting code-switching frequency and likeliness, age, relationship with interlocutors, interlocutors' code-switching frequency, and the topic of conversation were agreed to be the most influential factors. English proficiency was not the crucial factor of code-switching. As aforementioned, code-switching in the university context was under-researched. This paper proved that code-switching in such context is a field worth studying. There are aspects of code-switching that previous studies have yet to explore. With the use of larger-scale qualitative and quantitative research methods, future studies may focus on the functions, syntax, and phonological features of code-switching in CUHK or other universities in Hong Kong. Furthermore, differentiation between students' code-mixing and code-switching can be explored.

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Appendix A

Data Summary for Discussion Groups with English Majors only

Group 1A				
Name	Ratio of turns with CS	Average CS per turn	% of words CS	Total no. of words CS
Karen Total no. of turns: 58 Total no. of words: 820 No. of turns with CS: 26	26/58 =0.45	46/58 =0.79	46/820 x 100% =5.61%	46
Mary Total no. of turns: 45 Total no. of words: 864 No. of turns with CS: 14	14/45 =0.31	28/45 =0.62	28/864 x 100% =3.24%	28
Lily Total no. of turns: 44 Total no. of words: 461 No. of turns with CS: 11	11/44 =0.25	17/44 =0.39	17/461 x 100% =3.69%	17
Emily Total no. of turns: 59 Total no. of words: 924 No. of turns with CS: 28	28/59 = 0.47	95/59 = 1.61	95/924 x 100% = 10.28%	95
Group Data	0.38	1.11	6.06%	186

Group 2A				
Name	Ratio of turns with CS	Average CS per turn	% of words CS	Total no. of words CS
Bella Total no. of turns: 92 Total no. of words: 843 No. of turns with CS: 36	36/92 =0.39	58/92 = 0.63	58/843 x 100% =6.88%	58
Emma Total no. of turns: 65 Total no. of words: 661 No. of turns with CS: 24	24/65 =0.37	42/65 = 0.65	42/661 =6.35%	42
Sophie Total no. of turns: 42 Total no. of words: 357 No. of turns with CS: 16	16/42 =0.38	25/42 =0.60	25/357 x 100% = 7.00%	25
Jack Total no. of turns: 39 Total no. of words: 480 No. of turns with CS: 16	16/39 = 0.41	23/39 =0.59	23/480 x 100% = 4.79%	23
Group Data	0.39	0.62	6.32%	148

Appendix B

Data Summary for Discussion Groups with Non-English Majors only

Group 1B				
Name	Ratio of turns with CS	Average CS per turn	% of words CS	Total no. of words CS
Angel Total no. of turns: 34 Total no. of words: 937 No. of turns with CS: 26	$26/34$ = 0.76	$83/34$ = 2.44	$83/937 \times 100\%$ = 8.86%	83
Lucy Total no. of turns: 24 Total no. of words: 319 No. of turns with CS: 11	$11/24$ =0.46	$21/24$ =0.88	$21/319 \times 100\%$ =6.58%	21
John Total no. of turns: 11 Total no. of words: 200 No. of turns with CS: 6	$6/11$ =0.55	$15/11$ =1.36	$15/200 \times 100\%$ =7.50%	15
Alice Total no. of turns: 28 Total no. of words: 645 No. of turns with CS: 14	$14/28$ =0.5	$32/28$ =1.14	$32/645 \times 100\%$ =4.96%	32
Group Data	0.58	1.56	7.19%	151

Group 2B				
Name	Ratio of turns with CS	Average CS per turn	% of words CS	Total no. of words CS
Claire Total no. of turns: 9 Total no. of words: 132 No. of turns with CS: 4	$4/9$ =0.44	$15/9$ =1.67	$15/132 \times 100\%$ = 11.36%	15
Ruby Total no. of turns: 40 Total no. of words: 1134 No. of turns with CS: 17	$17/40$ =0.43	$62/40$ =1.55	$62/1134 \times 100\%$ 5.47%	62
Tom Total no. of turns: 16 Total no. of words: 338 No. of turns with CS: 8	$8/16$ =0.5	$20/16$ =1.25	$20/338 \times 100\%$ =5.92%	20
Hailey Total no. of turns: 48 Total no. of words: 1103 No. of turns with CS: 35	$35/48$ = 0.73	$110/48$ = 2.29	$110/1103 \times 100\%$ =9.97%	110
Group Data	0.57	1.83	7.65%	207

Appendix C
Data Summary for Discussion Groups with mixed Majors

Group 1C				
Name	Ratio of turns with CS	Average CS per turn	% of words CS	Total no. of words CS
Karen Total no. of turns: 44 Total no. of words: 834 No. of turns with CS: 29	29/44 =0.66	67/44 =1.52	67/834 x 100% =8.03%	67
Emily Total no. of turns: 32 Total no. of words: 1173 No. of turns with CS: 22	22/32 = 0.69	97/32 = 3.03	97/1173 x 100% = 8.27%	97
John Total no. of turns: 13 Total no. of words: 448 No. of turns with CS: 9	9/13 =0.69	35/13 =2.69	35/448 x 100% =7.81%	35
Alice Total no. of turns: 19 Total no. of words: 463 No. of turns with CS: 8	8/19 =0.42	36/19 =1.89	36/463 x 100% =7.78%	36
Group Data	0.63	2.18	8.05%	235

Group 1D				
Name	Ratio of turns with CS	Average CS per turn	% of words CS	Total no. of words CS
Mary Total no. of turns: 48 Total no. of words: 1022 No. of turns with CS: 21	21/48 =0.44	66/48 =1.38	66/1022 x 100% =6.46%	66
Lily Total no. of turns: 42 Total no. of words: 608 No. of turns with CS: 20	20/42 =0.48	57/42 =1.36	57/608 x 100% =9.38%	57
Angel Total no. of turns: 34 Total no. of words: 788 No. of turns with CS: 21	21/34 = 0.62	74/34 = 2.18	74/788 x 100% = 9.39%	74
Lucy Total no. of turns: 1 Total no. of words: 95 No. of turns with CS: 1	1/1 =1	10/1 =10	10/95 x 100% =10.53%	10
Group Data	0.50	1.66	8.24%	207

Group 2C				
Name	Ratio of turns with CS	Average CS per turn	% of words CS	Total no. of words CS
Sophie Total no. of turns: 47 Total no. of words: 844 No. of turns with CS: 25	25/47 =0.53	65/47 =1.38	65/844 x 100% =7.70%	65
Jack Total no. of turns: 30 Total no. of words: 1067 No. of turns with CS: 19	19/30 =0.63	76/30 =2.53	76/1067 x 100% =7.12%	76
Claire Total no. of turns: 15 Total no. of words: 304 No. of turns with CS: 11	11/15 =0.73	32/15 =2.13	32/304 x 100% = 10.53%	32
Tom Total no. of turns: 5 Total no. of words: 219 No. of turns with CS: 5	5/5 = 1	21/5 = 4.2	21/219 x 100% =9.59%	21
Group Data	0.62	2.00	7.97%	194

Group 2D				
Name	Ratio of turns with CS	Average CS per turn	% of words CS	Total no. of words CS
Bella Total no. of turns: 39 Total no. of words: 672 No. of turns with CS: 20	20/39 =0.51	45/39 =1.15	45/672 x 100% 6.70%	45
Emma Total no. of turns: 22 Total no. of words: 514 No. of turns with CS: 12	12/22 =0.55	42/22 =1.91	42/514 x 100% =8.17%	42
Hailey Total no. of turns: 41 Total no. of words: 943 No. of turns with CS: 33	33/41 = 0.80	110/41 =2.68	110/943 x 100% = 11.66%	110
Ruby Total no. of turns: 20 Total no. of words: 843 No. of turns with CS: 12	12/20 =0.60	59/20 = 2.95	59/843 x 100% =7.00%	59
Group Data	0.63	2.09	8.61%	256

Appendix D

Questions in Questionnaire Section 2

1. Which of the following expressions do you usually use in your daily conversations?
(Intended meaning: I need to discuss how to work on the project with my friends today.)
 - A. 今日我要同 friend 傾 project
 - B. 今日我要同 friend 傾 專題研習
 - C. 今日我要同朋友傾 project
 - D. 今日我要同朋友傾專題研習

2. Which of the following expressions do you usually use in your daily conversations?
(Intended meaning: The professor asked us to bring our laptops to class next week.)
 - A. Professor 叫我地下星期帶自己部 notebook 上堂
 - B. Professor 叫我地下星期帶自己部手提電腦上堂
 - C. 教授叫我地下星期帶自己部 notebook 上堂
 - D. 教授叫我地下星期帶自己部手提電腦上堂

3. Which of the following expressions do you usually use in your daily conversations?
(Intended meaning: The tutor asked you to meet her at her office.)
 - A. 個 tutor 叫你去佢 office 搵佢
 - B. 個 tutor 叫你去佢辦公室搵佢
 - C. 個助教叫你去佢 office 搵佢
 - D. 個助教叫你去佢辦公室搵佢

4. Which of the following expressions do you usually use in your daily conversations?
(Intended meaning: Are there any interviews after you apply this scholarship?)
 - A. 呢個 scholarship 洗唔洗 interview 架?
 - B. 呢個 scholarship 洗唔洗面試架?
 - C. 呢個(隻)船洗唔洗 interview 架?
 - D. 呢個(隻)船洗唔洗面試架?
 - E. 呢個獎學金洗唔洗 interview 架?
 - F. 呢個獎學金洗唔洗面試架?

5. Which of the following expressions do you usually use in your daily conversations?
(Intended meaning: We'll discuss our presentation at the University Library tonight.)
 - A. 我哋今晚會喺 U Lib 傾個 present 要點做
 - B. 我哋今晚會喺 U Lib 傾個 presentation 要點做
 - C. 我哋今晚會喺 U Lib 傾個匯報要點做
 - D. 我哋今晚會喺大學圖書館傾個 present 要點做
 - E. 我哋今晚會喺大學圖書館傾個 presentation 要點做
 - F. 我哋今晚會喺大學圖書館傾個匯報要點做

6. Which of the following expressions do you usually use in your daily conversations?
(Intended meaning: We have to print our essays out.)
 - A. 我哋要 print 份 essay 出黎

- B. 我哋要 print 份論文出黎
 C. 我哋要印份 essay 出黎
 D. 我哋要印份論文出黎
7. Which of the following expressions do you usually use in your daily conversations?
 (Intended meaning: She drop out from university last semester.)
 A. 佢上個 sem 已經 quit 咗 U 喇!
 B. 佢上個 sem 已經退咗學喇!
 C. 佢上個 semester 已經 quit 左 U 喇!
 D. 佢上個 semester 已經退咗學喇!
 E. 佢上個學期已經 quit 咗 U 喇!
 F. 佢上個學期已經退咗學喇!
8. Which of the following expressions do you usually use in your daily conversations?
 (Intended meaning: Let's have a barbecue gathering.)
 A. 不如我哋莊聚去 BBQ?
 B. 不如我哋莊聚去 barbecue?
 C. 不如我哋莊聚去燒嘢食?
 D. 不如我哋莊聚去燒烤?
9. Which of the following expressions do you usually use in your daily conversations?
 (Intended meaning: The president asked her to book a room.)
 A. 個 P 叫佢去 book 房
 B. 個 P 叫佢去訂房
 C. 個 president 叫佢去 book 房
 D. 個 president 叫佢去訂房
 E. 個主席叫佢 book 房
 F. 個主席叫佢去訂房
10. Which of the following expressions do you usually use in your daily conversations?
 (Intended meaning: Ask him to check which canteen has fewer students.)
 A. 你叫佢幫手 check 下邊間 canteen 少人啲啦
 B. 你叫佢幫手 check 下邊間 can 少人啲啦
 C. 你叫佢幫手 check 下邊間飯堂少人啲啦
 D. 你叫佢幫手查(睇)下邊間 canteen 少人啲啦
 E. 你叫佢幫手查(睇)下邊間 can 少人啲啦
 F. 你叫佢幫手查(睇)下邊間飯堂少人啲啦
11. Which of the following expressions do you usually use in your daily conversations?
 (Intended meaning: My mom always says her husband is very intelligent.)
 A. 我 mother 成日都讚佢 husband 好叻
 B. 我 mother 成日都讚佢老公好叻
 C. 我 mom 成日都讚佢 husband 好叻
 D. 我 mom 成日都讚佢老公好叻
 E. 我阿媽成日都讚佢 husband 好叻
 F. 我阿媽成日都讚佢老公好叻

12. Which of the following expressions do you usually use in your daily conversations?
(Intended meaning: Siu Ming got sacked yesterday.)
- A. 小明 yesterday 比人 fire 咗
 - B. 小明 yesterday 比人炒咗/炒咗魷魚
 - C. 小明尋日比人 fire 咗
 - D. 小明尋日比人炒咗/炒咗魷魚
13. Which of the following expressions do you usually use in your daily conversations?
(Intended meaning: My sister bought me a pair of contact lenses.)
- A. 我 sister 買咗副 con 比我。
 - B. 我 sister 買咗副隱形眼鏡比我。
 - C. 我家姐買咗副 con 比我。
 - D. 我家姐買咗副隱形眼鏡比我。
14. Which of the following expressions do you usually use in your daily conversations?
(Intended meaning: Shaw's college general education assignment is very challenging.)
- A. Shaw 份書通 assignment 好難做
 - B. Shaw 份書通功課好難做
 - C. 逸夫份書通 assignment 好難做
 - D. 逸夫份書通功課好難做
15. Which of the following expressions do you usually use in your daily conversations?
(Intended meaning: He will give me back my printer at lunch time.)
- A. 佢食 lunch 果陣會比翻部 printer 我
 - B. 佢食 lunch 果陣會比翻部影印機我
 - C. 佢陣間食晏果陣會比翻部 printer 我
 - D. 佢陣間食晏果陣會比翻部影印機我

Gwai
Lam Hoi Tung Janice
Supervisor: Dr. Suzanne Wong

Preface: Ghosts in the house

There are ghosts in our house, as if the house isn't crowded enough. Blurry figures at the corner of my eye, slender shadows moving in darkness through door crevices, creaks in the wooden floor when everyone is in bed, dust patterns showing under frames and vases we never remember moving.

It has been a decade since I asked my mother about it. Mum said in Cantonese, "*Have ghost!*" At that moment, I thought—I trusted she believed me: as a child, I was too young to grasp the complications of the Cantonese language. In our culture, we do not believe in ghosts. Ghosts do not exist. Ghosts are nothing. When people, "*ghost believes,*" it means no one believes you, it is absurd that you think someone believes in what you say. Using "*ghost*" in a sentence dismisses the possibility of a happening. It negates and ridicules.

"The house is clean. Don't say that." Ghosts are also unclean, like dust lingering on derelicts. I don't believe ghosts have bad intentions like they are portrayed in old Asian movies, wherein they are always seeking revenge or reincarnation through murder or possession. I once read a theory saying that ghosts were merely people in another dimension, living in another time. That is why ghosts are able to walk through walls, because those walls do not exist for them, we do not exist for them. We are their ghosts. The idea of all of history living together astounds me and unnerves me at the same time. Imagine the chaos. We, and by extension, they are defending and invading at the same time. The closeness, the lack of distance in-between makes one inherently hostile to the other. But there is no escaping the closeness. We were born into it, and will die into it.

Pomelo leaves are bubbling in water in the middle of the dining room: a bitter, grassy, slightly citric warmth permeates the house, staining the sofa, the curtains, the clothes and bed sheets hanging by the window. The steam wards off bad luck in the air, Mum says, and the water washes off bad luck on the furniture and our bodies. It is a new year tradition, though it is the first time we boil the leaves before using them. Wafts of sour air displacing the scent of

medicinal oil; Gwai's wrinkled fingers shrinking into the dark, shrivelled leaves; the glass jars on the kitchen shelf fogging up, hiding the beads of dried osmanthus Gwai treasured in condensed warmth. We are ridding of death this year, Mum says. I don't think she realises that by doing so, this once unfamiliar scent is now fastened to death in our memory. I think Mum is just hoping the bitter remarks and tense silences that she and Gwai built between themselves will evaporate with the steam. Will the leaf water ward off Gwai too?

#1 White walls

My parents did not let me go anywhere on my own until I was seven, a week before Gwai was evicted from the elderly home.

That day, the school bus arrived ten minutes early. I was supposed to wait for Dad to come pick me up. But at the age of seven, I wanted to prove I could do everything on my own. I had asked my parents if I could walk to the park myself, but they always said I was not ready, that I was too young and I needed an adult to protect me. I thought I knew myself better than my parents. I thought I was ready. Seeing Dad was not around, I skipped my way into the lobby. The security guard greeted me with an affectionate smile that surfaced at the sight of a chubby-faced child in school uniform carrying a schoolbag almost as large as her, and he asked, "Waiting for your mum and dad?" I smiled back and shook my head. "No, I'm getting home by myself." The guard gave me a thumbs up and opened the door for me. I marched in with my head high and a proud smile.

I pressed the button for one of the elevators. Imagining my parents' faces when they knew I got home on my own—would they be shocked? Or proud of me?—I watched the elevator doors open and walked into the compartment. The doors closed behind me with a louder thud than I remembered. The damp air in the elevator smelled different, saltier than it did in the morning; the propelling fan in the ceiling sounded slower, going around with a loud swoop each turn. I looked through the panel by the door, but the number 4 was nowhere to be found. The overhead lights started to flicker—a blinding white instead of the usual warm yellow. I tried to reach the "open" button by standing on the tip of my toes, but I must have brushed past the panel. Instead of "open," the "17" button lit up. The walls began to hum, and after a quiet rumble, the elevator took off like a plane. I was knocked onto the floor, my schoolbag like a rock on my back. A stirring shot from my abdomen to my chest, my ears

began buzzing and swelling. I swallowed and held my breath, a trick Dad taught me when my ears were blocked the first time I flew on a plane. The buzzing, the humming, the swooping of the ceiling fan. Buzzing. Humming. Buzzing, buzzing... Finally, the elevator stopped, and the door separated, almost begrudgingly, to some familiar but different green walls.

Our family had moved into the building about two years ago. An emptiness resonated in the newly constructed halls. No story here. No birth or death happened yet. A blank slate. All four sides of the corridor were windowless, lined with ceramic tiles bespeckled with various shades of green, opaque grains of imitation jade glimmering under dim hallway lights. When we first moved in, I would run along the corridor knocking my knuckles on every tile, some rang hollow while others were muted by concrete. But once we had settled down, I began to realise how suffocating the green hallway was. An impenetrable emerald box, a forged sense of luxury and nature, sealed in with the scents of people living behind each door.

Everything on the seventeenth floor looked the same as what was on my floor, but the green walls and the pungent, still air were much colder. A pair of black leather shoes, ridiculously large, stood outside one of the doors, reminding me there were lives around. Movements gnarled and grumbled behind every tile: pots banging on counters, chairs being dragged across the floor, bare feet padding around, a doorknob turning. I needed to run. But the elevator was holding hits doors shut behind me. No matter, I did not want to take the elevator anymore. So I decided to take the stairs instead. The stairs were good, stairs were constant. All I had to do was count the floors. Thirteen floors. That was it. I knew there were two stairwells in our building, the two doors located on either side of the corridor on each floor, and one of them was right outside my home. The seventeenth floor should be identical to the fourth floor, so I ran toward the right side of the corridor where my home would be on the fourth floor, and pushed open the white door that stood stark against the greens.

There was something immediately eerie about the stairwells. The walls, the steps, all were bathing in thick layers of white paint. The odour of the paint was so strong and recent that not even the smell from the trash chutes could mask it. There was no sign or number to tell which level I was at. Still, I started descending the stairs, counting down at each turn. Each time my heel tapped against the floor, it echoed behind me. "It's normal," I comforted myself, "It's just an echo." Mum said the building was clean; no menacing ghosts were

lurking behind the months-old paint. But sometimes the echo sounded an eighth of a second too late, or like it was from more than one pair of feet.

At least with ghosts, you know they were once alive. Ghosts had stories and reasons. They were like us. The nothingness behind these white walls was somehow scarier because there was nothing known, and nothing to know about it. From nothingness springs imagination, stories of ghosts and monsters and everything else; a blank slate makes possible anything, the good, the bad, and everything in between. A person left in a room of empty walls either creates a colourful mural or goes mad. At the age of seven, I did not know what to make of these empty walls. I only heard echoes of snares and claws that were not there. I had to focus, focus on the counting as I trotted down the steps, hoping “four” would come faster.

“Five” came around, and suddenly there were thunderous movements behind me, like something on all four was chasing after me, about to pounce on me. I dashed down the final steps and out the door. I did not dare to turn back to see what it was in the stairs. My heart was racing so fast that it took me a few seconds to register the neighbourly, mixed scents of soap and stink, and the familiar patterns of green tiles I once ran through with my knuckles. Home was within steps. I let out a sigh and walked up to the doorbell, ready to be met with familiar faces decorated with disbelief. But no one came to the door. I rang the bell several times more, but no response, still. Dad must have gone down to pick me up and there was no one home. How furious would he be if he found out I had wandered off? My scalp went numb.

Without a second thought, I turned back and pushed the white door open again. The noises in the stairwell were long gone. I headed down to the lobby. Having now a set destination, I felt no need to count the stairs anymore, and my footsteps became lighter. But I never arrived at the lobby. The stairs just went on and on and on, the white in front of me looked the same as the white behind. My schoolbag grew heavier and heavier. Soon, I was exhausted. I thought I should go to the nearest floor and take the elevator instead. It was then I noticed there was no door at the next turn. Panicked, I went back up a few flights of stairs, but no doors could be found among the white. Either my shoes were weighing more or my legs were becoming weak, it was harder and harder to fight the weight on my back, trying to drag me off the edge of every step. I came to a halt. Nothing but white in front of my eyes. I

felt I had no choice but to turn and keep spiralling down. The chemical smell from the walls was displacing more and more of the air in my lungs. My breathing grew shallower by every second.

Eventually, I was led down to a long white hallway, the white walls and white floors melting into one another, not even a single lump or a textured fold in them. There was no sound but buzzing in my ears. I gulped and gasped for air, but whiteness filled my mouth and nose, creeping up and swelling in my head. The smell of white scraping the sides of my skull. I stumbled a few steps ahead before my schoolbag pulled me down on the floor. Head between my knees, I tried to block out the smell with one hand, and fend it off with the other, as a strange woman's voice began to croon next to my ears, inside my head, *it's okay. You're okay. You'll be safe soon. Remember what home smells like?* Listening to the voice, I buried my nose into the sleeves of my school cardigan, relieved by the faintest scent of fabric softener and home.

Once I felt the swelling had subsided a bit, I crawled away and bolted upstairs. No counting, I just ran until I found a door handle and yanked it open. Taking the elevator didn't seem so bad now. The elevator took me down one floor to the lobby. Dad was sitting in one of the lobby sofas, waiting for the school bus that he did not know had arrived and gone. It had only been less than fifteen minutes since I got off the bus. I ran toward Dad and threw my arms around him. I had never felt so relieved. He looked at me with wide eyes, and asked where I had gone. Not wanting to be reprimanded, I told him I went upstairs by myself but no one answered the door. I told him I was sorry, and promised I would never wander off on my own again. Surprisingly, he did not get mad, and even smiled a little bit. He patted me on my head and we walked home.

That night, Mum got takeaway for dinner again. I quietly munched on the strands of spinach Mum had mounted on my bowl. Mum said, as Dad picked up a piece of barbeque pork, "My mother is moving in with us next week."

"Why? Something wrong with the elderly home she's in now?" Dad asked. I could hear a sense of caution in his tone, likely already knowing the reason Gwai was leaving the elderly home.

“She got kicked out again,” Mum said with a sigh, and pushed rice into her mouth. “Got into a brawl with her roommate last week and knocked two teeth out of the other old lady.” We visited Gwai every few months. Mum and I would run errands for Gwai, getting her snacks and teabags or new appliances from the supermarket around the corner of the street, while Dad and Gwai sat in silence. Once Mum and I got back from the store, I knew it would not be long before she and Gwai started bickering about minute matters like us getting the wrong brand of tea, which would turn into a fight, although I never understood how, and it would always end with Mum leaving the building in a huff, forcing Dad and me to go with her. But several months later, we would go back again and repeat the same process.

From what Mum had told us, my grandmother was never an easy-going person; she had been kicked out from at least two elderly homes before. At one of her old residences, Gwai dumped water at her neighbour’s doorstep every time she walked past because the neighbour was snoring too loud at night. Gwai also put gnawed bones from her dinner into the uniform of one of the caretakers because she thought the caretaker had skimmed her meal.

“So it’s decided she is living with us? Just like that?”

“I have to care for her. She is my mother.”

“I respect her as your mother. But this is my house, too.”

“My brothers wouldn’t take her in. They said since we visited her every now and then, we probably get along with her best.”

“Why would they assume that?”

I knew I had no say in the matter, so I lost interest in the conversation and my mind began to wander, down the stairs and back into the white hallway. Whose voice was it that talked to me? I had never heard it before, not in real life, not even on the television. Did I enter another world? Perhaps I went into the wrong place. Perhaps that woman was going about her day in her world and saw a little girl with a giant schoolbag sobbing and panting on the floor, and wanted to comfort the little girl. Was I, like, a ghost in her world? Did she know I was a ghost? I hope I didn’t startle her when I disappeared up the stairs and went back into my own world.

A sudden raise in Dad's voice brought me back to reality. "Where is she going to sleep?"

"We'll empty out the storage cabinet. *Ah mui*'s room is large enough, we can move her bed to make room for sundries."

"Couldn't you have discussed this with me first?"

"How am I supposed to talk to you when you're always out late?" Mum dropped another pile of greens into my bowl, and said to me, "Why have you stopped eating? Here, eat more vegetables."

"You could've called me."

"And you would've cut me off so you could get back to your friend gatherings."

"Those were important business dinners. I have to entertain my clients. Besides, I'm here now. Can't we discuss this like civilised people?"

"You think I want to live under the same roof with her? I know she is difficult to live with, but at least she promised to take care of all the house. Do you want to have takeaway food for dinner every night? Or would you rather eat the food I cook?"

"You are the one who fired our helper."

Mum slammed down her bowl and chopsticks. "She stole my necklace."

"We found your necklace in the bathroom," Dad said, putting more food into his bowl.

"I never went into the bathroom with that necklace."

"I'm just saying, there is no evidence she stole it."

“You’d side with a stranger but never your wife, wouldn’t you? I don’t even know why I’m still married to you.”

At that remark, I quickly swallowed the spinach in my mouth and blurted out, “Do you hear voices talking to you sometimes?”

They were both taken aback. “What are you talking about?” Mum said.

“I tried to get home on my own today, but I got lost in the staircase. Then when I finally arrived home, no one answered the door, so I went back downstairs...”

Mum glared at Dad. “You didn’t pick her up on time?”

I jumped in before Dad could reply. “No, no, the school bus was early. I tried to come home on my own to surprise Dad. But no one answered the door, so I went back downstairs. I thought the stairs would take me back to the lobby, but there was just a long hallway instead. Everything there was white and I couldn’t breathe.”

Neither of my parents seemed worried. “Honey, that was just the emergency escape route in the building. One of the stairs leads to the lobby and the other leads to the emergency exit. Is there a door at the end of the hallway?”

“I don’t remember. I was really scared, and I didn’t know what to do, so I just sat there on the floor. Then, I heard a woman’s voice telling me it was okay, and I got better. I have never heard that voice before. Could it be a ghost?”

Or was I a ghost?

Mum rolled her eyes slightly. “I’ve told you, there are no ghosts here. Our home is clean. That voice is just you becoming more mature and taking care of yourself.”

“But there was a monster in the staircase too. It was chasing after me. Its footsteps were so noisy when it was running down.”

Dad laughed. “It was probably some other resident walking down the stairs. You kids these days are so creative.”

“Right, and it’s about time we let you grow up. You’re old enough to stop believing in this kind of nonsense,” Mum said. “How about this? From now on, you can walk home after getting off the school bus, and you can go to the park by yourself.”

“No! I’m not ready!”

Dad tapped his palm against the back of my head. “Trust us, *ah mui*. You got around the building safe and sound today. You are starting to be more independent. Trust yourself, that voice in your mind, even you are telling yourself that you want to grow up.”

I did not know if that was my inner voice. I did not know what was chasing after me in the stairs, if that was a person or a beast. I did not know if ghosts really existed, although I hope they do. I did not know if that white space was really the emergency exit. But that was where Mum and Dad left me, all alone in a vast, white sea of unknowns, of ghost knows. It was then I realised I had to listen to everything, every sound, every story, because I was responsible for creating my own answers to my questions.

#2 Float

The air was unbearably dense that morning. I was around eight years old. I got off the school bus and was passing through the school gates when I noticed the sky was much darker than it should have been. Clouds were thick, like dark wool crocheted to block the early-autumn air—and quiet, a muted filter over the sounds of birds chirping and bus engine roars. The school grounds were sprinkled with murmurs and whispers instead of the usual loud chatters and giggles. There was no grumbling behind the clouds, no sign of an oncoming storm. It was just as though the sun had set the day before and never risen again. The air was still and humid. I felt like drowning as I breathed. I did not pay too much mind, thinking it was just the thundering weather from summer still lingering. But things were awfully quiet that morning. Even until midday, the sky showed no sign of daylight, the clouds fixed in place, got darker, even. The air grew chillier with every minute. Other than that, the day went by normally, until the second recess.

It was a ten-minute break and everyone would rush to the bathroom after sitting in the classroom for hours. The girls were all chatting as we were waiting in line for our turns to use the stalls. I was second in line for the third innermost stall, and my friend, Mariah, was in front of me. The lights in the bathroom seemed much brighter in contrast with the dark from the outside; beads were sweating out from the wall tiles and puddled on the floor. I got a bit light-headed from the stuffy moisture. Mariah was rambling about classes and hobbies and soon, the stall next door popped open and a student walked out. Neither of us had noticed before, but the line in front of the now open stall had vanished. At the same time, the stall we were waiting for opened as well, and one of our classmates, Angie, came out without looking at us. How convenient. Mariah went into the stall Angie had exited, and I went into the other one. When the two of us returned to the classroom, Angie came over and asked us, “Did you see it too?”

I was confused. But Mariah replied without hesitation, “Yes.”

“What are you talking about?” I asked.

“There was a...*float*...in the bathroom stall.”

“Right. I had never seen one in a red dress, though.”

“What red dress? She was wearing a white dress.”

It took me a while to realise they were talking about ghosts. *Float*, in Cantonese, seemed to be a replacement word out of the taboo for ghosts. Both of them seemed oddly calm for someone who had just seen a ghost; not that I knew anyone else who had seen any ghosts.

“But I didn’t hear either of you scream,” I said, curious.

“Well, I’m used to seeing them,” Angie said. Mariah nodded in agreement.

“But did she try to hurt you? The ones in red are the vengeful ones, aren’t they?”

“I couldn’t see her face, she was facing the wall and had long hair reaching her waist. She didn’t move either, but I did feel an angry energy in the stall.”

“What’s that like, the angry energy?”

“I can’t say for sure. It’s just an instinct. Like feeling your Mum is angry at you when you walk into the living room, I guess.”

Mariah chimed in. “Mine was facing the door, and she had short hair.”

“Did you feel the anger from her?” I said.

“No. Quite the contrary. I felt calmed and safe in the stall.”

“I have felt presences in the playground near the ancient trees, but never in the bathroom,” Angie added, directing her focus to Mariah. The two went on talking, more and more excitedly, about all the encounters they had experienced. Soon, other classmates began to join in the conversation, some curious, some cynical. I was left silent, seated in amongst them all yet still left on the outside. My senses darted from one speaker to another, wanting to

absorb into my mind every bit of what Mariah and Angie knew, but the questions in me never subsided: What does a ghost look like? Can you talk to a ghost? Do they feel our emotions like Angie felt her ghost's? I spent the rest of the afternoon wallowing in blank unknowns, The sky remained dark the whole time.

“Do you think the two of them were aware of each other?” I said as Mariah and I were waiting to board the school bus home.

“Who?”

“The two ghosts...*floats* you saw.”

“I just saw one, so I wouldn't know.”

We settled into two neighbouring seats. “Did she suddenly appear or was she already in the stall when you went in?”

“I walked in, closed the door, and there she was.”

“Do you think she knew you were in there with her?”

“I don't know. It's best she didn't.”

“Why not?”

“My mum said as long as we left them alone, they wouldn't try to hurt us.”

“Did any of them try to hurt you?”

“No. The ones I've seen at home are all old and harmless. Mum said it was because where we lived used to be a retirement home.”

“Do they scare you?”

“I get startled, sometimes, when they appeared. But mostly, they are just standing or walking around. They don’t seem hostile, more confused.”

“Have you tried talking to them?”

“No. They don’t seem to see or hear us anyway. Let’s stop talking about this. It’s getting boring.”

I was not happy with Mariah’s answers. I wanted ghosts to see us, just like how we could see them. If I died and was left wandering around in a world I used to live in, I would want to see everything, how things had changed, and how the people I loved were doing. I would care. What was the point of staying behind if one had nothing left to care about? If ghosts, too, were too occupied with their own existence to care, how was dying different from living?

When I got home, Mum was lying on the sofa, said her migraines were acting up again and had to take some time off work. Gwai walked out of the kitchen and said to me, “Turn on the lights. She has been resting for a whole hour. And see if your father is going to be back for dinner.” I flicked on the light switch, and headed over the phone. Mum whined against the sudden brightness in the room.

“What’s the point of asking? He’s been out every night for the past week,” Mum said, an arm draped over her eyes to block out the lights.

“He’s your husband. Maybe if you care for him a bit more, he would be home more often.”

“Is that why your husband never stayed home?” The dial tone rang right in one of my ears, but I could still hear clearly the smirk behind Mum’s words. They never told me much about Grandpa, other than that he was a sailor. Knowing the call was only going to end up in Dad’s voicemail, I pulled away from the receiver, hoping to hear instead what had happened in the past.

“You—” Gwai was surely affected by what Mum had said, but she did not fight back. “That’s not the same. Your father was out at sea all the time to make a living. He couldn’t stay even if he wanted to.”

“Not even when he got cancer?”

“How would I know why he didn’t stay home when he was ill?” Gwai was trying to escape back into the kitchen. Mum yanked off the arm on her face and sat up, her eyes like claws stretching out toward Gwai’s back.

“How would you not know why he left us?”

Gwai stopped in her way. Everything was still as the sky outside, the only sound left in the house was the humming of the light bulbs. Then came faintly a mechanical female voice from the phone telling the caller to leave a voicemail. I set down the receiver.

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have yelled.” Mum’s voice was now as soft as the voice on the phone was.

“Get some rest if your head is hurting. Dinner is almost ready,” Gwai said without turning her head, and walked into the kitchen. Mum lied back down and hid her eyes behind her arm again. I went to turn off the living room lights, and went into the kitchen after Gwai.

Gwai was moving about near the stove as usual. “Grandpa was a sailor, right?” I asked, testing the waters. There were no changes on Gwai’s face, no words from her mouth. And I knew better than to keep pressing for answers. I helped set the dinner table. Gwai only handed me two sets of bowls and chopsticks, and I knew she was going to stay in her room for dinner.

After dinner, Mum seemed to be feeling better. I told her what Mariah and Angie had told me. She said, “Don’t be silly. You’re lucky you didn’t see the *float*.”

“But I want to know what it looks like.”

“They bring bad luck. Just be thankful you’ve never seen one.”

“Have you ever seen a *float*?”

“I have, actually. And I can tell you it was not fun.”

“Tell me.”

“All right. I must be around your age. One night, when everyone was asleep, I woke up feeling thirsty.” Mum had told me she used to sleep on the living room floor while her brothers and Gwai slept in another room. “There was a bit of moonlight from the outside, and I saw someone sitting by the windowsill, combing her long hair over her shoulder. Her face was completely turned away from me. I thought it was your grandmother, so I called out to her. I said, ‘Ma, why aren’t you sleeping?’ No answer. I went into the kitchen and got a glass of water. When I came back out, she was still there by the window. I climbed into my bedding.

“Then, I heard low humming coming from the window. I couldn’t make out any of the words, but the sad melody sounded strange, like a tune from old Chinese operas. It didn’t sound like your grandmother. She only listened to Western music. I said again, ‘Ma, go to sleep.’ But, almost as an immediate response, the humming got louder and began to come closer. I felt chills all over my body. I covered my head with my blanket, but I could still hear the voice. I don’t know how I fell asleep after that, but I did. Later, I found out your grandmother was never home that whole night. And neither of my brothers heard any humming either.

I looked at her, trying to picture a woman sitting by the window under dim moonlight. A woman who was supposed to look like Gwai. But I could not imagine Gwai with any figure younger than her wrinkled face, beady eyes, and curved back. I pictured Mum instead. I wondered what the ghost had wanted sitting in the same room with a sleeping, young girl, and why she was combing her hair. Was she waiting for someone? Did she mistake the girl for the person she wanted to see?

“I don’t know if that thing came to our house with an evil motive. But they don’t belong in our world, and it’s never a good thing if you saw one.”

“Were you scared?”

“At the time, of course. I was just a child back then. But you don’t have to worry, our house is clean; the feng shui here is good.”

“Did you have bad luck after that?”

Mum hesitated. “You can say that...Go shower. It’s getting late.” But what did the ghost do? What happened to Mum after that? Did it have anything to do with Gwai and Grandpa? My stomach might have been full from the food, but there was a big hole left in my imagination. I wanted more. It was cruel to tease a child with a drop of sugar and keep the lollipop out of their hands. I begged her to tell me more—I would not care even if the rest was fabricated—I wanted more. But Mum had sealed her lips, and shoved me toward the bathroom instead.

I turned off the lights in the bathroom before I went into the shower. I wanted to see if anyone would show up. As I was smearing bath gel bubbles on my body, I drafted, under my breath, questions I would ask if a ghost showed up: How did you die?—no, it would be rude to ask that right off the bat—How are you?—is there still the perception of being well or not when you’re dead?—What is your name? Did you live here? What are you looking for here? All of a sudden, I started hearing answers in my head, next to my ear. “*Sally.*” “*I lived here in the old building.*” Through the steam and the translucent shower curtain, I could make out a dark-haired figure near the bathroom door. It was a long time ago when we lived here.

“Why are you still around?” I asked in my head.

You remind me of my children. My Christine, and my Daisy.

“Those are lovely names. Why are you here in the bathroom?”

I loved bathing my children. They were always playing with the bubbles, always wanting to know what the soap tasted like.

I sniffed at the soap on my body, a plastic sweetness that came from the idea of a fruit. The label on the bottle read, “peach milk scented body wash”. I stuck my tongue out and scooped off a dollop of the white bubbles on my forearm: the peachy aroma spread in my mouth, but the bitter slime clung onto each lump on my tongue even as I tried to spit it out with force. I washed my mouth with the running water while still gagging on the self-contradicting sweet scent and bitter taste. I heard giggles in my head.

That was the same face my Daisy made.

“Why didn’t you stop them from eating the soap?”

There was no use trying. They would eat it anyway.

“If my mum was here, she would’ve scolded me right away.”

I never saw your mother in the bathroom with you. It was always the other lady.

“Lolo used to help me in the shower. She was our helper but she has gone home to Indonesia. Mum tried to bathe me once when I was four and Lolo was ill. But Mum kept getting soap in my eyes. It hurt a lot.”

It is hard to bathe a child, especially when she is splashing and playing around.

“Did you have a difficult time bathing your children too?”

With Christine it was easy. Daisy was the naughty one. But whenever I sang, she would sit still, and look up at me with googly eyes.

Love, if you say, Sally hummed, you won’t slip away, then I can go dreaming of forevermore.

It was an old lullaby I had heard Mum play as she got ready in the morning, but the timbre in Sally's voice was different: softer, slower, more delicate. From Sally's voice, I heard a mother's hand stroking the back of her child, and scooping up warm water to wash off the soap.

"But I," I sang along with Sally, "won't rest until I know that you will be here in the morning by my side..."

A knock rapped from outside the bathroom door. "Are you done in there? We're all waiting. Finished your shower quickly," Mum yelled.

"Okay!" I yelled back, and turned off the tap. I pulled open the curtain, expecting to see Sally at last. But in her place, there was Mum's jacket hanging on the door. "It was nice knowing you, Sally," I said toward the door, then got dressed and left the bathroom.

Later that night, I crawled into bed, but I could not sleep. Dad's keys jingled in the living room and I listened to my parents' muffled voice rising. I could not make out the words, nor did I want to. I sat up and looked down the alley next to my bed, where we stored boxes of photo albums, unused kitchen utensils and old Christmas decorations. The boxes were covered with white plastic sheets to keep off dust, Mum told me. Hill after hill of boxes, each domed like heads of ghosts under the white sheets.

"What was your story?" I whispered into the dark. I climbed down into the alley and sat among the ghosts. Between the ruffles of the plastic sheets and my breathing, I heard names and lives, and I would imagine the faces under every sheet as I listened. The stories lulled me to sleep every night. Unknown voices, creaks at midnight, a doll dropping onto the floor, a moved photo frame...Night by night, I grew familiar with the ghosts in our home.

#3 Things I have learnt when Gwai was around:

- the dewed buds of choy sum in the morning market can rival the beauty of baby breaths
- in dim lights, the yellow flowers are almost indistinguishable from the polyester beads hiding among the choy sum leaves
- both are to be discarded

I never understood why. Gwai only said, “Pesticides.” I used to believe that pesticides were a way to protect the flowers: Poison sprayed so that the flowers were picked off first, so that the blossoms were kept from being defiled by the mouth—an embalming effort to preserve beauty. Seeing the small beads float buoyant in the water among green scraps torn and fallen out from the stems. I hated the thought of wasting the flowers, so I fished them out from the sink and laid them out on a paper towel next to the kitchen window to dry. Gwai looked at the displayed yellow beads and said, “I taught your mother how to make dried flowers.” And added, “You little girls are always interested in collecting pretty things.” When Mum saw the drying flowers that night, she sucked her teeth and said, “You’re just wasting time. What’s the use of these?”

The yellow of the flowers paled within a day, the green sepals dulled. I poured them into a small, cleaned jam jar and sealed the cover with glue, hoping to retain the remaining colours. I placed the jar on my desk in the bedroom. After a few G.S. classes in school, I learnt that a flower bloomed having absorbed all the nutrients from the plant: she blossoms because the plant has given her every reason to. But the plant has no concept of good or bad, it gives what it is given, not knowing it could be giving poison, not knowing it has caused the flower’s wastage; the flower has no choice but to take and take. It is all a natural process: dependence is the cost of flourishing; to cut off the source of poison is to cut off the root of life; to be independent is to deplete a flower of the colours she has been given. The jar I put them in was nothing more than a glass casket, collecting dust with no spectators for the dying colours it held. I threw it away after a month.

Osmanthus was Gwai's favourite flower.

There were several osmanthus trees planted in the park nearby. When spring came around, after Gwai had bargained and argued with every vendor in the market, the two of us would take a detour home and stand underneath the trees for a few minutes. It was hard to make out individual blossoms: there were just white petals clustered among the green leaves. The spring breezes blowing by smelt especially clear, carrying in it the crisp, crystal scent of osmanthus. It was a scent like jasmine, only simpler, less sweet. I thought osmanthus, devoid of colour and fragrance, was far less interesting than any other flowers. But it was only when we were watching the osmanthus trees sway in the wind that Gwai would show on her face a weak, wrinkly smile.

Gwai also kept a can of dried osmanthus at the back of the kitchen cabinet. At around three in the afternoon every day, she would take a break from housework and bring out the dried osmanthus and a pot of boiling water. She would lay a spoonful of osmanthus at the bottom of her mug and pour the hot water into it, swirling the water stream around like a tornado stirring up the dried petals. Then, she would sit by the table for half an hour, sipping from the mug between her hands. On Sundays, Mum and I would join Gwai for her teatime. Mum switched between different teas every time, preferring anything else to the osmanthus tea. I drank the osmanthus tea with Gwai, and took sips from Mum's cup too. There were no layers in the flavour of the osmanthus tea: it was not as honeyed rich as the jasmine tea, and there was no reverberating bitterness like the pu'er tea; only the same note lasting from teeth to throat. But Gwai seemed to enjoy the simplicity, and the three of us would bask in the afternoon quiet for a half-hour.

Whenever I was not at school, I spent a lot of time following Gwai around the house, cleaning every corner. Most of the time we worked in silence. Occasionally, I would share anecdotes from school, or ask Gwai questions about her life before we lived together. She was never too keen to answer. Sometimes she would pretend to not have heard at all, and I would know not to pry further.

Once or twice, though, Gwai would open up a little, like when I asked her what she had wanted to do growing up, if she did not have to work at the factory. She said, without looking up from the pile of clothes we were folding, "I want to open a laundry shop."—there

are no temporal differentiation or tenses in Cantonese verbs—and it sounded as if the answer slipped out before she could catch it, as if the answer had been waiting for the question by her lips all her life. She did not say any more about it. I wondered if she meant she wanted it when she was young or if she was still thinking about it now at the age of sixty.

“Why didn’t you do it?” I asked, only half expecting an answer.

“No money. *That old thing* only sent enough money to support the children, and the factory didn’t pay much.” I figured from context and tone she was talking about her husband.

“If you had the money now, would you still want to open a laundry shop?”

She chuckled, a sound laced with acidity. “Your mother would be angry.”

“But it’s your dream. I could help out in the shop if it’s the hard work that worries Mum.”

“Stop talking about impossible things.” Gwai waved a hand at me, a signal for me to get back to folding the clothes. My hands kept working, but I was not ready to give up on my quest, feeling that I could still nuzzle a grain of answers from my grandmother’s sealing lips.

“The laundry shop around the block has just moved out. I can ask Mum and Dad if they could lend us money for the shop,” I continued with the fantasy—not realising how much it actually cost to own a shop, of course. Gwai looked at me, thoughtful, the corners of her lips twitched slightly, but the only reply I got was, “If you don’t want to get us in trouble, don’t tell your mother what we said today.”

One evening, Gwai and I were preparing a stew for dinner. Gwai pulled out an onion from the pile on the shelf. The root vegetable looked obscene: green tentacles stretching out from the helpless body, leering, disagreeing with the brown skins. The budding stem had leached from the bulb, drained all the knowledge and hope from another time, and left the layers of the old life to die, shrivelled, exhausted, irretrievable.

Gwai pushed the onion into my hands, motioning me to cut it. The deflating bulb felt rotten, mushy—held only together by a thin, flaky skin—against my palm. The green leaves, young and fleshy, threatened with a robust, spicy scent that once belonged to their root.

“Is this still safe to eat?”

Gwai only hummed and shoved my shoulder toward the chopping board. I placed the onion on the board and held a sharp knife against its middle. The knife kept sliding off, unable to cut through the soft-hard skins—the lack of buoyancy had created a different resistance, indenting where the knife struck. I forced the knife through, and the onion fought back, spitting juice into my eyes, but ineffective: not even its vilest acidic weapon was strong enough to make a child cry. The cross-sections ended up jagged; the layers were more often torn apart than sliced through, with most of the protective membranes still intact. I felt a mix of sorry and humoured at the sight. When I showed it to Gwai, she made no remark on the mutilation, only said, “Your mother is on her way home. Heat up the pan.” And so I did. Turned out, mushy, sprouted onions were still edible, and would make no difference in the presentation or the taste of a stew. No one else knew what pains the onion had gone through to sprout, and how, despite sprouting, it still had to carry on with its duty as food. But I would always know; the onion would always know.

“Are there spring onions in the stew?” Mum asked, poking and pushing around the slices of beef and mushy onion.

“Mo ah,” Gwai said flatly, dragging out each syllable, which meant no. “Why would I add spring onions? To hear you nag?”

“The onions we used had sprouted,” I said, “just a little bit. It’s still edible.”

“That’s spring onion. You know I hate spring onions,” Mum said to Gwai.

“Ma gwai fan,” Gwai mumbled under her breath. It meant “troublesome,” interjected by the infix ghost for intonation.

“I’m not looking for trouble. Spring onions make me sick,” Mum protested. “Is it wrong that I don’t want to be sick after working a whole day at school? Those kids are driving me insane.”

“Then why did you become a teacher? You never wanted to be a teacher,” Gwai said through chewing.

“What did you want to be, Mum?” I asked.

Mum did not say anything at first, but then she let out a reluctant answer. “An air hostess.”

I looked at her, shocked. “Why didn’t you become an air hostess? You’re not short-sighted. And you’d get to wear pretty suits every day.”

Mum tilted her head at me and pouted. “But then I wouldn’t be able to come home for days. You wouldn’t be able to see me all the time. Wouldn’t you be sad?”

I was about to object to how she was talking down to me like I was still a child but Gwai suddenly said, pointing at Mum with her chopsticks, “Don’t use your daughter as an excuse.”

“What are you saying?” Mum shot an accusatory squint back at Gwai.

“If you had become an air hostess, she wouldn’t even be here.” Gwai turned her chopsticks toward me.

That last statement, sounding completely innocuous to me, had somehow struck a chord with Gwai. As a response, she picked up her bowl and chopsticks and went straight into her room without another word.

Seven days after a death, we anticipate the deceased to find their way home. Mum decided to cook for dinner. She even went to the market herself.

“No more instant noodles or takeaway,” she said that morning, “and I don’t need your help. I’m going to do it all by myself. Ask if your dad is coming home for dinner.”

I called Dad. When he said he had to work overtime that night with the familiar, slightly guilty tone, I replied with relief, “It’s okay.” I didn’t want to hear more fights that night. Mum had probably expected Dad’s answer too, as she did not react to it at all.

I stood under the kitchen doorframe as Mum busied herself around the kitchen. “Your grandmother lived in a triad-ruled countryside before swimming her way to Hong Kong,” Mum told me. “She witnessed a boy’s chopped-off head roll over to the pile of trash she hid in. That was the moment she decided to leave home, or so she said. I wasn’t even ten years old at the time she told me. How messed up is that? But I felt special she told me that story. I didn’t care if it was real or not. I always felt special when she confided in me about what she had lived through. I would stand outside the kitchen, waiting for her to feed me, not with food, but with stories.”

My grandfather, the sailor, who had died long before I was born, was only home for a night every month or two. The only other thing Mum had told me about him was that she and her brothers would hide underneath the dining table when their father returned, just to catch scraps of meat falling off the pork leg he was gnawing on at late night. Gwai used to work at a factory making home décor pieces, plastic flowers that always looked one shade too rich to be real. She spent most of her time outside, working. Her children rarely got to see her during the day, let alone talk to her. Over weekends, Gwai would take home polyester fabric in a range of colours already cut out into droplet shapes, and she would make her children assemble the plastic flowers to earn some overtime. “We’d get smacked on the head if we talked back or stopped working.” Occasionally, Gwai would tell them stories of her own childhood while the children glued petals onto metal stems. “Not on purpose, she just needed to vent. And we were forced to listen to her, well, my brothers were. I quite enjoyed the stories.”

I nodded. As the choy sum soaked, Mum snapped off the roots and left the flowers behind.

“Aren’t you supposed to pick off the flowers?”

“No, they are edible. I read it online. The roots are the contaminated parts.”

“Grandma always told me to remove the flowers.”

“Well, she is not here anymore, is she?” There was no malice in her voice, only an effort to be authoritative, and perhaps a veil over her sadness.

Only the sounds of vegetable stems snapping remained for a moment. I asked eventually, “Are we going to save some of the food and leave it out tonight?”

“Yes, that’s the tradition.”

“Wouldn’t it upset Grandma to see the flowers on the vegetables?”

“She would find something else to pick at even if the flowers weren’t there. Plus, it’s only a superstitious act. We’re going to throw everything away tomorrow.”

An hour later, the yellow buds were glistening among dark, overcooked leaves. Fumes arose from the dish. A grassy scent lingered bitter at the top of my throat. I held my breath, trying to take in the toxins only one bit at a time.

After dinner, Mum took out Gwai’s bowl and chopsticks and set them on the cleaned dinner table. I moved the leftovers into a single plate, a round one with blue flowered vines carved into the white rim—Gwai loved using the plate when she cooked, said it had the largest surface and was the easiest to clean—and I sectioned the foods in the manner Gwai did when she wanted to stay in her own room for dinner. Mum watched as I spooned the remaining rice into the bowl in a neat mount. She looked like she was going to make a comment about how futile the ritual was, or slide in a remark about Gwai’s pickiness. But she remained quiet. It was impossible to know when she was thinking. When everything was set, we went on with our night.

As I lay in bed, I kept wondering if Gwai would really come back, if she would miss us enough to want to see us again. Tossing under the sheets, my eyes always returned to the darkness seeping through the door gap, hoping for a moving shadow or a blow of wind that would tell me of Gwai's presence.

I remember, whilst waiting, the ghost who would walk around at midnight when I was younger. Some nights, the floorboards would creak, or a shadow would flow across the dark crevice. The shadow never talked to me or came into my room. In my mind, it was an old man with a crooked back who had covered himself with a cloak in the cold, waiting for his family to come back for him. They had lived in the building that previously stood where our building was. The old man died; his family moved away, but his soul was stuck where he had passed. He watched them leave, abandoning him and the life they had spent together—the only life he knew—he had no choice but to wish them well, and wish they would come back too after they died. The old man walked around the house at midnight, trying to find a family member hiding behind a wall or a door, unrest without knowing his loved ones were all right. Did Gwai think of us when she became a ghost?

Finally, after hours of silence, a creak sounded outside in the living room. I crept out of bed and slowly opened the door, hoping to see Gwai. Everything was dark outside. From the darkness, the scent of osmanthus flowed over. A shadow of a woman stood next to the dining table. It was not Gwai—the woman was standing too upright to be my elderly grandmother with scoliosis—do ghosts return in their prime figure?—Then I heard a gulp, a mug set down on the table, and a sigh; the simple floral scent strengthened slightly at the exhale. The lean figure pulled out a chair and sat down near where Gwai's dinner was. The shadow did not move for a long while, and I kept my eyes on her the whole time. She did not seem to notice me. The two of us waited and waited in the dark. The woman finally stood up. In the gentlest whisper, she said, "Fan la." and went into Gwai's room. It was impossible to know if she meant "Go to sleep." or "I'm going to sleep."

The next morning, I got up and saw Mum pouring away the cold vegetables into the trash, the yellow flowers still intact. I did not tell Mum what I saw, or ask if she knew I was watching her in the dark that night.

#4 Waking terrors

My hunt for ghosts and stories was severed when Mid-Autumn Festival came the year I turned nine, one year since the journey began.

We celebrated the festival of family with a dinner at the home of one of my uncles in the countryside. Albeit well into September, the weather was warm like an early-August day. The four of us arrived in the afternoon, and Gwai and Mum went straight into the kitchen to help prepare for the hot pot. The other adults sat around the house, fanning themselves, lazing around in shallow summer breaths and idle conversations. I was left with my cousins and several other kids from next door who came over to play. Even just by a year or two, I was the youngest child, and the youngest child, by a subconscious tradition of hierarchy, was predisposed to being repelled by the older children.

We were playing a game of hide-and-seek in the clearing in front of the house, and soon, I found that everyone had ditched the game, left me in a bush, and instead crowded in a bedroom watching a movie. With the curtains closed, the room was submerged in darkness, except for the colour lights and intense music blaring from the television screen. I squeezed myself onto the bed with the rest of the children. No one seemed to mind my presence as every pair of eyes was glued onto the screen, and soon, I was captured too—the bald man in the television was trapped in an open-roof convertible, while a truck, as if pushed by a malicious, invisible hand, charged at the poor man who was oblivious, still rocking his head back and forth to the music playing on the radio. As the vehicles collided, a metal engine flew out from the truck and rammed right into the back of the man's head. Blood splattered everywhere. The fan, unfazed by the damage it had already done, continued drilling into the skull until it was soaking in mushy red remnants of flesh and brain.

When the music began to subside and I was finally able to peel my eyes off the screen, the room was already empty. Warm, slightly spicy steam from the hot pot broth was oozing in through the door gap, along with the yellow lights and muffled commotion in the living room. Mum's voice rang right outside the door, her shadows shifting through the gap, "*Ah mui!* Where has that naughty girl gone? Why is she always running around?" Upon hearing, I propped myself up with my palms, now covered in sweat I could feel was seeping into the bedsheets beneath me. I wanted to get up, but there was a strong force on my

shoulders, pushing me down, my legs too weak to move on their own. I was tied down, unable to leave, like the bald man in the car, forced to watch violence unfold in front of my eyes. Unlike in all the Cantonese dramas where ghosts looked humanly sad or vengeful or sensuous, this formless entity was brutal, bloodthirsty, merciless: panning its eyes across the crash scene to show a clear view of the bloody catastrophe, tricking the child in the room into thinking it was over, before giving one last thrust on the engine and popped the red, lacerated head off the poor, dead man—a final, sudden grip on me with a wicked snicker before releasing me back into the dark, knowing it had fulfilled its goal.

That night, still warm, I lay in bed and tried everything to fall asleep. But it got harder and harder to close my eyes. I was afraid that if I did, a giant, spinning engine fan would drop out of nowhere, its sharp blades slicing across my face over and over, and I would be forced to watch my own blood splatter on the walls. I winced at that image, my eyelids parted at once, opening only to more darkness. I stared at the blank walls in the dark. I could hear the sticky claws of viscous blood grabbing and releasing the textures of the wallpaper, creeping its way down into a pool of itself on the ground. I thought I was going to cry. I yanked the blanket over my head and covered my ears, the trickling sounds replaced by the pace of my heart pounding. I hid under the sheet for as long as I managed to breathe, then finally pushed away the blanket when the air turned into vacuum. The darkness returned to silence. I tossed and turned in the silent nothingness where everything became a hint of something sinister. A breeze, void of the autumn coolness it ought to be carrying, crawled over the plastic sheet ghosts in the alley and breathed on the hair at the crown of my head. I peeked down the dark alley and felt the returned stares of motionless, eyeless ghosts. I turned on the desk lamp, hoping the light would bring some comfort, but the silhouettes of everything sharpened and elongated toward me, like needles about to penetrate my chest. Footsteps outside hobbled close and closer, unhurriedly pacing in front of my door. Clothes hung by the window were like headless bodies lined up, waiting for me to join them, and I felt the engine blades on my neck again—honed, cold, unsparing, blood everywhere—and I woke up with a start.

The whole night, I was haunted by one dream after another: chased by an invisible monster up and down a staircase, the steps sucking in my feet; left behind by my family in a dark room in a haunted house, all my screams and yells unheard; in the white hallway stood the woman with the gentle voice, and she turned around and looked at me with half of her head minced into a paste, her voice still echoing, asking *Am I okay? Am I okay? Am I okay?*

Every second I spent in sleep was worse than the ones I spent awake. Even in the day, everywhere I went in the house, I found oddities: photo frames knocked over, doors creaking open and shut when there was no wind, second shadows behind vases and chairs. I was so tired my eyes were drooping in class, but my mind commanded otherwise, in fear of the images I would see behind closed eyelids. Mariah asked if I was okay, to which I answered with an absentminded nod, after she had asked several times, she told me. I kept shivering in the warm autumn sun. Every tiny sound or movement was driving me to an extreme point of exhaustion. Eventually, I had to confess to Mum about the ghosts in our house, and I told her about Mid-Autumn Festival.

"Those kids," Mum sighed. "Honey, it's all in your head."

I insisted it was not.

"All right, even if...those things... exist, they won't hurt you because you haven't done anything wrong. They only punish naughty children."

"But I am naughty. You told me I shouldn't wish to see ghosts. You said it would bring bad luck. But I still went around to find them, and I brought them into our house."

"Silly girl, you just have too much free time on your hand."

"But..."

"If you don't want those things to scare you anymore, find something to do. Read a book. Study. Help your grandmother with housework. You won't see them anymore when you are busy."

Then she turned back to the computer screen and started ruffling through the papers in front of her. Sometimes I felt that she just did not want to talk to me.

From that day on, I spend more of my time helping Gwai around the house. Off from school, I would head straight home and go to the market with Gwai, carrying the groceries

for her. On weekends, I stayed at home sweeping the floor and wiping the furniture, Gwai and I taking up half of the house each. I noticed how Gwai's back was starting to take the shape of a stilted parabola, the pain of which never showed on Gwai's face when she was in front of us. I think she never intended to let me see her pain either.

But one night, Mum was on the phone with a friend in the living room, I passed by Gwai's room and saw her holding her back. She saw me too, thought for a second, and beckoned me in. Gwai shoved a bottle of medicinal oil into my hand—the glass was slippery; the harsh sour smell of herbs attacked my nose even when the cap was screwed tight. Gwai pulled up the back of the burgundy shirt she was wearing, and circled a spot on her back with a finger, silently ordering me to rub the oil around it. It had never been my job to take care of another person's sickness, and the oil was pungently discouraging. I looked back and forth between the bottle and Gwai's back. I saw the protruding bones along Gwai's spine, the surrounding skin spotted and sagging. Gwai softly tapped at me and pointed to her back again; Mum's voice was rising and falling outside the room. I knew I was the only one to do this job, so I held my breath and unscrewed the cap. I poured some of the oil into my palm, the copper-coloured liquid was dark enough to reflect the lights overhead.

"Warm it between your hands first," Gwai said, and I did. Then I placed my palm on the designated area on her back and started pushing around, the skin feeling squishy and rotten, almost resistant, against the pads of my palm. The medicinal smell was not so bad up close.

Every night after that, I would sit on Gwai's bed and treat her daily exhaustion with a massage. Sometimes, Gwai would hiss all of a sudden and I would stop. But she would just ask me to continue without correcting me.

I witnessed the curve of Gwai's back grow steeper, the ridges along the spine tall and sharp. I told Mum about it.

"There's nothing I can do about it," Mum said with a blank face.

"Grandma shouldn't be doing all the housework on her own."

"Well, you're helping her out now, aren't you?"

I looked at Mum, baffled. How could she be so cold and heartless toward her own mother?

As if she could read my expressions, she said, "I've asked if she needed to see a doctor about it. I've also asked if we should hire another helper to take care of the house instead. But she just keeps saying no. She needs to save face. She needs to do everything on her own."

Mum turned back to her desk and I walked away, wordless. I am not sure why I did not keep arguing, but I went into the shower instead.

"You should've taken Grandma to the doctor anyway," I said in the shower. "How could you care so little?"

Because she is selfish.

"Sally?" The jacket hung on the back of the bathroom wavered in the steam.

I heard everything.

"She is just busy."

What kind of a mother doesn't care about her family?

"She is working hard to support the family. She gave up her dream for us."

Stop making excuses for her! I was frightened by the suddenly raised voice. *She is a bad daughter and a worse mother. A woman should dream of nothing but to care for her family.*

"Why shouldn't a woman dream?" I asked, puzzled.

A woman's dream is dangerous to themselves and to their family. Who is going to keep things tidy if the mother is away? Oh my babies...my Christine...

I heard a baby wailing among the showering water, so loud and demanding, a cacophony of blame, a damning reminder of a mother's neglect, even just for a second.

I thought I would be back in no time. She was just taking a nap. I could still hear her little snores when I locked the door.

Sally's voice turned into a chain of choking and gasping, giggling and sobbing all at the same time. Suddenly it popped into my mind—an infant girl on the floor next to her crib, her eyes closed, lips pale, neck snapped in an almost horizontal angle.

Do you see that? My little Christine? Why...why did I leave her?

Sally broke into more painful laughs and unintelligible murmurs, and behind her, the baby, little Daisy, was crying louder and louder, almost shrieking now. They went on in my head, The running water like static noise from a faulty television broadcast. Sick in my stomach, I quickly washed off the remaining bubbles on my back. As I turned off the tap. The hysterical shrieks came to an abrupt halt.

Do you know what a selfish mother deserves?

Even the peachy steams in the bathroom held themselves stiff, looking down at me with invisible pairs of glaring eyes. I reached out for my towel and clothes, but realised my hand was shaking violently.

A dead child!

Sally burst into maniacal laughter, and little Daisy was screaming again. The floating steams were scraping and scratching my skin with their claws and fingers. The lights in the bathroom were spinning, like propellers waiting to drop on me at any second. I grabbed the pile of clothes and dashed out the bathroom door.

I stood outside the bathroom, panting, sharking, dripping, confused. Mum was still at the desk with her back against me. It took a minute before I felt the October air prickling at my damp chest and limbs. I dropped onto the floor, and Mum finally turned around.

"What on earth are you doing out here naked?"

"In the bathroom..." I was still gasping for air as I spoke. "Sally was going to kill me."

"Who's Sally?"

"She was going to kill me. She said you were a selfish mother..."

"A selfish mother? Is that how you see me?" Mum said, eyes widened. "You've stepped out of line. Put on your clothes and go into your room. You are not going to Mariah's birthday party this Saturday."

"No! I didn't do anything wrong! It was Sally! She's a ghost living in our bathroom."

"I have told you time and time again to stop spewing nonsense. You are just trying to provoke me, aren't you?"

"But it's real. She said she lived in the old building here..." Before I could finish defending myself, Mum had grabbed my arm and pulled me into my bedroom. Gwai peeked out from her room.

"*Aai ya, ah mui*, why aren't you dressed after showering? You're going to catch a cold." Gwai came out and stood behind Mum, both of them under my bedroom door frame. She said to Mum, "What did I tell you? It was that doll."

Mum ignored Gwai. "Put on your clothes. I'm not taking care of you if you get a cold," Mum said, bending down and pulling the pyjama shirt over my head. "You're scaring yourself. Stop thinking about those things and you'll be fine."

When I was dressed, Mum said, "Come now, find something else to do. Read a book and relax." And she went out into the living room. I sat down by my desk and opened a textbook nearby, trying and failing to concentrate on any of the words. I thought about what Sally said. Why did I have to suffer because of my mother's fault?

Right then, Gwai came in with the hairdryer. She plugged it in and switched it on. "You're not a child anymore. Whatever happens, you have to take care of yourself first. Don't run around with no clothes on now that the weather's getting cold."

I looked down, embarrassed by the commotion I had caused.

"What's wrong? I have never seen you panic like this."

I told Gwai about Sally, and her children, and what Sally had said about Mum.

"You know your mother loves you, don't you?" Gwai said, gently tousling my wet hair under the hot wind from the blow-dryer. "She is not selfish."

"Does she love me? Or does she blame me for stopping her from getting her dream job?"

"She doesn't blame you. There is more to it that you don't understand."

"I must be a bad child. Mum said ghosts only punish bad children. That's why Sally wanted to kill me."

"It's not your fault. Those *things* are just unkind. They don't belong in our world."

"But weren't they once people too?"

"Those who linger around are still burdened by their desires. When one is so obstinate, they become blinded by evil."

"Maybe they just want to stay behind to watch over their loved ones."

Gwai chuckled. "It's best that life ends cleanly. You die and you leave, that's the rule. The mess afterwards is for the living to deal with."

The two of us fell silent after that. Under the hot wind, Gwai combed my hair with her fingers. I wondered if Gwai would want to come back as a ghost and watch over us after she passed, but I knew better than to bring up death in front of any superstitious old lady.

Gwai turned off the hairdryer when my hair was dry. "Your mother may not be very good at being a mother, but she loves you more than anything. So listen to her."

Since then, I never looked for stories anymore. The nightmares came less frequently, but every now and then, I would still be kept awake for hours by a quiet creaking or a slight shuffle in the dark.

#5 Jonathan

It was my seventeenth birthday. I sat down next to Gwai's bed in the hospital. It had been a few weeks since she had had a stroke and fallen into a coma. Her mouth was ajar under an oxygen mask, her limbs entangled in plastic tubes pumping colourless liquids throughout, and her eyes never closed all the way. The rasp in her breaths sounded painful, so I started chattering, like I did whenever we were doing chores side by side, like I did every day when I came to visit Gwai,

"Grandma, remember Jonathan? He fell behind the sofa again and got torn apart. We tried to patch him up but he was too worn out to repair, so we have finally decided to let him go."

Jonathan was a doll with brown hair and a blue baseball cap, designed to resemble a boy. Height of a small toddler, one of his limbs would always dangle off the edge of the sofa. Gwai always had an aversion for Jonathan—never touching him or looking at him unless she was cleaning the sofa. Even then, she would move him with both her hands, saying and repeating "excuse me" as she did so.

Mum told me she got Jonathan from one of my uncles. Jonathan was a gift for my cousin, a celebration prepared for the birth of a baby boy. But one day, my aunt slipped on the street and had a miscarriage. She lost the baby and nearly her life as well. The sight of Jonathan was an aching reminder of their son, so my uncle tried to get rid of the doll. Mum, carrying me inside her womb, asked for the doll—she said it wasn't insensitive, she just did not want to see a perfectly good toy go to waste. My uncle gave her the doll and never spoke to her again, even his decision of not taking in Gwai when she got evicted from the elderly home was passed on by my other uncle. I never knew the real reason why he avoided her. But as I thought about it later, there was no reason why he would not be mad at Mum. When you experience a tragedy, the one thing you would expect from your family was comfort, not for them to ask with an open hand for the only thing left behind by your lost child. I had thought of giving Jonathan back when I got older, but I never met my uncle and aunt.

Jonathan had been an inseparable friend since I was born. I snuggled against his tummy as I suckled from the milk bottle. I held his hand while watching cartoon adventures

on television. I could not sleep until my parents had tucked Jonathan in beside me. Even after I had grown out of having to sleep with a doll, Jonathan was still important enough to me that my parents could use him as leverage to make me sit still or stop crying. Mum told me that when I was three, I caught a massive cold. But I refused to take any of the medicine, holding my palms against my mouth and kicking Lolo and my parents away when they came close. Mum took Jonathan and held him by the neck over the trash bin, threatening to throw him away. I gulped down all the syrupy medicine, glaring at Mum through tears, making sure Jonathan was put back onto the sofa safe and sound.

A few years later, when Gwai moved in and first saw Jonathan, she immediately became guarded. "Why would anyone make a doll this realistic?" She grumbled. After knowing he was once a gift for my stillborn cousin, she said to Mum, "It's like his eyes are following me. You know the spirit of an unborn child is the most vicious, right?"

"Don't be ridiculous. There is no dirty spirit here. *Ah mui* has been sleeping with it for years."

"I'm just saying, it's bad luck."

Since then, every time I threw a tantrum or did something mischievous, Gwai would throw a side-eye at Jonathan, as if he was the puppet master behind any evil I harboured.

When I was about eleven, Mum did not come for the Parents' Day meeting. Instead, Dad and Gwai showed up. It was not the first time she had missed the annual meeting, but she had promised me she would come to this one, since it was my last one in primary school. I had studied incredibly hard in the past year to finally get the "Best Improvement Award," to see proud smiles on my parents' faces, perhaps even Gwai's. My heart sank when we were about to enter the classroom and Mum was still not there. After a short meeting with the teacher, Dad hurried back to work and stayed out all night, but before that, he patted me on my head which implied how proud he was of my achievement. I replied with a weak smile, still unable to believe Mum would forget about me like that. Gwai and I walked to the market on our way home.

"Your mother had an emergency meeting at her school," Gwai said, unprompted. I guess my expressions were too explicable. "She didn't want to miss this either." I hummed in response.

When Mum got back home, she flopped right onto the sofa and lay there for hours before dinner. Throughout dinner, I kept glancing at Mum, waiting for her to apologise for not being at the Parents' Day meeting. Even a simple "sorry" would have sufficed. But nothing. The three of us ate in utter silence.

After doing the dishes, I walked out of the kitchen with a glass of water. Mum was lounging on the sofa, browsing channels on the television, not even acknowledging my hard work or my school achievements. She just said, "*Ah mui*, if you're not showering now, I'm going. I've had a long day." then got up with a grunt that irked my ears. I threw the glass onto the floor; it shattered, and splattered, water spread on the varnished wood. Mum stopped on her way.

"What is wrong with you?" she asked.

"Why do you never care about me?" I said, with a calmness that surprised me.

Mum gave an exasperated roll of her eyes. "If you are talking about this morning, the school called me in at the last minute. There was some urgent problem with a student I needed to deal with first."

"Am I not as important as one of your many students?"

"They are my responsibility."

"So am I."

"I'm sorry, but you had your father and grandmother with you." Mum rubbed her eyes with an annoyed grimace.

"Do you even know how hard I've been working to make you happy?"

"Your father called me about your award immediately." She held her hands, clasped, under her chin, acting elaborately sincere. "We are so proud of you—is that good enough?"

"No, it's not good enough." I found her reaction amusing, almost, as her eyes were bulging out in irritation.

I did not know Gwai had been watching until she walked out and pulled Mum aside. Gwai nodded at Jonathan and whispered to Mum, "It's the spirit. It's jealous of your daughter for taking its place on earth, so it put her in a bad temper."

Mum shoved Gwai away. "Enough with your spirit bullshit. She has only herself to blame for her bad attitude."

"Even if there is a ghost in Jonathan," I said, and both of them turned to me. "He wouldn't be jealous of me for being born in this family."

"You are ungrateful." Mum bore her eyes into me. "The kid I had to talk to today lives in a children's home. At least you still have a family that provides for you."

"What's the point of having a family if Dad is never home and you don't care about me?"

Mum's eyes grew even wider as she huffed, her lashes extended like fangs, ready to devour me back into her belly. Gwai squinted and shook her head at me, signalling me to stop talking.

"How dare you say I don't care about you?" Mum raised her voice. "Who takes you to the school bus station every morning? Who brings you to the doctor when you are sick? Who buys you your favourite bread for breakfast every day? I went through hours of labour to give birth to you. How could you say that about your own mother?"

"Thank you so much for your hard work," I said, "but how come I have fonder memories with Lolo than with the mother who birthed me?"

Mum fell silent, and I continued, "It was Lolo who was by my side all night when I had a fever. She was always there when I had nightmares. She was the one who bathed me when I was a baby. She cooked all my birthday meals, and she was always the first person to wish me a Happy Birthday."

"That's because she was paid to take care of you—"

"Then should I pay you to spend a bit more time with me too?"

Those words got out unthinkingly and my childishness startled me. I wanted to laugh but Mum was staring at me with a severe woundedness in her eyes. I felt bad that she got hurt by my words, but now that they were out, there was no taking back. I turned my face to the side. Jonathan was sitting on the sofa like a child trying to imitate an adult, his hands on crossed knees, feet dangling over the sofa's edge. There was a glimmer in his eyes.

"*Ah mui*, go to your room first," Gwai said, trying to make peace between Mum and me. Without another glance at Mum, I walked into my room and locked my door.

Sitting on my bed, I thought of the glimmer in Jonathan's eyes. It was as if he was peering out from his hiding place, entertained by the drama before him. He was watching us, listening to intrigue. A spectator from another dimension trying to get a glimpse of a life he never got. I wondered if he had pitied us—the family of an ungrateful child and uncaring parents. Perhaps dying before you were born was not so bad after all—at least your family would treasure you for as long as they were alive; at least you could live in their imagination, never having to get into a fight with them, never having to be disappointed by one another.

Outside my room, I heard faint exchanges between Mum and Gwai.

"I look pathetic to you, don't I?"

"No."

"I thought I was a good-enough mother." Mum's voice sounded more muffled. I pictured her with a hand over her face.

"You are a mother, and you are a teacher. But you cannot be both at the same time."

"I can be, I am."

"Then you are not doing well in either. I told you to choose one only."

"Don't intervene with my life."

"Look at the decisions you have made," Gwai sighed, "how can I not?"

After a few seconds, Gwai went on saying, "I told you not to have children, didn't I? I know you love her, but now you understand how much a child can hurt her mother."

"Have you been holding a grudge against me all this time?" Mum asked with a dried chuckle, taking it with no offence. "You made your own mistakes."

"I know, and I am not blaming you. But your daughter is not being unreasonable. You have your faults too."

"Don't act like you know how we feel."

I did not understand much of the conversation. The following day, Mum and I acted like the fight never happened, and the two of us set off together before parting ways in the lobby with a smile, the same way we did every morning.

I did, however, become conscious of the pair of glimmering eyes on the sofa. It did not bring discomfort. In fact, I felt a sense of affection well up in me, as if Jonathan did really carry the soul of my stillborn cousin. I took him and climbed into the dark alley next to my bed. I asked if he was my cousin, and if he wanted to go back to his parents. I was greeted with the same glimmer in his eyes and silence, though his presence still soothed me in the dark. But somehow, after that night, I began to find Jonathan behind the sofa with tears on his

body. I would take him to Mum and ask her to sew him back up. Over time, he became matted with dirt and covered in stitches. I wondered how he had got himself caught and torn like this. I wondered if he could feel pain. So I sat in the dark alley with him again. I whispered my question, "Where were you trying to go?" I waited; a voice rang in my head, "We would have been such good friends, don't you think?" I smiled at that.

The night before my seventeenth birthday, we found Jonathan torn in half, laying behind the sofa. Mum frowned while examining the doll. Finally, she insisted she was not going to fix him anymore, we should just give him up. Dad, as expected, did not oppose to getting rid of the raggedy doll that had been taking up space on the sofa. I did not object either—it would have been a futile fight. I promised Mum I would take him to the trash chute the next morning and took the two halves of Jonathan into bed with me. I said to him, "I'm sorry. This is as far as I could take you. Happy seventeenth birthday to us!"

As I sat next to Gwai's bed, I watched her still eyelids, yellowed whites visible through the crevices. I wondered if she could see us, even though she showed no sign of life, even though the doctor told us it was only a matter of time before she actually passed.

I said in Gwai's ears, "Jonathan had been by my side for seventeen years. I will keep him in my mind from now on. I know you said you wanted to leave the world neatly. Would it be selfish if I want to hold on to you in my mind too, just for a little while longer?"

#6 The dress

"She must hate how she looks now," Mum said, as we stood looking through the mortuary glass pane at Gwai. Gwai's face was powdered into an unnatural white, the blush and lipstick were creeping along the creases and wrinkles like blood seeping through snow, but still, unable to give it life. "She would've chewed the ears off of the makeup artist if she could," Mum continued. I had never seen Gwai wear makeup. I had never thought of Gwai as someone who cared about her appearance. Knowing she used to work at factories, I had always assumed she was a modest and plain woman.

"When I was young, I would watch her put on makeup. Every other day, she would stand in front of a small plastic mirror perched on top of a drawer cabinet and hum along to

whatever was on the radio. When she swayed from left to right as she sang, I would know she was in a good mood," Mum reminisced, "I hated it. Because that meant she was leaving us with the old lady next door all night again. I kicked and cried and screamed, but she still left every time. Your uncles used to have to drag me back into the house from the corridor."

I remembered sitting on my parents' bed, watching Mum put on her makeup. Her motions were so swift and fluent like a magic trick. Within minutes, Mum would transfigure into her teacher doppelgänger—the dread I had in those minutes; every child wants to keep their mother to themselves. As Mum was telling her story with Gwai, I imagined her sitting on the floor, Gwai with her back to Mum. But instead of Gwai's doppelgänger in the mirror, I could only see the face with the eyes closed and creases and white foundation and red blush too vibrant for her skin.

"When I got old enough to want to go out with my friends, I snuck into her room to put some colours on my face. I had no idea what I was going. I just imitated what I saw *Ma* did. The blush was so strong I looked like a monkey's behind. She walked right in and saw my face. I was scared. I didn't know if, in the next second, she was going to yell at me or start laughing—I didn't know which reaction I was more afraid of. But she just walked over and began rubbing her palm against my cheeks. 'This isn't the right shade for you,' she said, 'you're so much paler than I am.'

"The next day at breakfast, when my brothers weren't looking, she stuffed into my hand a brand-new blush. Makeup was a luxury back then, and it was the only luxury she allowed me. 'You *have to* look prettier than me,' she whispered to me." Mum took a breath.

In Cantonese, "*have to*" is more than a demand: When your parents demand something from you, it bears expectation and hope spawn out of love: they demand because they care.

She continued, "I was so happy I didn't even think about how she could afford a brand new gift just for me. I didn't think it was a gross peace offering..."

She swallowed the rest of her words. I looked at us in the glass reflection. Mum's dark hair and eyes stood out from her sunken cheeks and white tweed shirt, and my everything

was a more vibrant replica of hers. She concluded, "Let's not talk about this now." And we went on with the funeral, but I remembered something about Gwai.

Gwai wore the same four shirts and two pairs of pants when she lived with us, all of dull grey, brown, navy, and mahogany colours. Only once, when I was fourteen, did I see her take out a dress from the wardrobe. A short-sleeved, plum-coloured, spotted cheongsam. I was going to help Gwai with the nightly massage. I could tell, when she saw me, that she was deciding whether to put the dress away, but in the end, she let me in. I closed the door and stood by Gwai. The two of us looked up and down at the dress, admiring the seam-work and the display of colours. The dress was broken, torn apart then pieced back together in the guise of handmade embroidery, held in place by yellow petals blooming stark against the sultry purple. The fabric was visibly aged, but it still had the gleam of a new dress, its collar standing dignified. Either the dress was rarely worn or the owner treasured the dress so very dearly. Gwai gently dusted the silky garment with her palm, and then, with both hands, laid it down onto the ironing board like setting a baby down after cradling, and turned on the iron. As the iron was heating up, I asked, "Did you buy this recently?"

Gwai answered, "No. Got it a long time ago."

"Did you wear it on a date?"

"Something like that."

"With Grandpa?"

She gave a chuckle weighed down with bitterness. "He didn't even know I had this dress. I bought it with my own money."

"Then who was this special boy?" I asked, thinking it must be a childhood sweetheart. The heating light on the iron blinked off, and Gwai retreated into silence. She covered the dress with a white cloth, sprayed it with water, and started ironing.

"Are you going to wear that? Is that why you're taking it out?"

Gwai did not answer. I later found out that she did this every few weeks, a sort of customary maintenance for a dress she cherished but could never wear again.

"I wore it for the first time when your mother was about your age." This quiet remark escaped from her lips as soft as a sigh. Was Gwai having an affair? But the grim tone in her voice fended off any further questions I had in my head; the secretiveness warned me against asking more.

Whenever I found her ironing the plum dress in her room again, I would just sit quietly by her side. I tried to imagine Gwai in this dress, with her back bent, spine protruding, and skin sagging around her midriff, while the dress stood starched and wound into tight curves—it was impossible. I pictured Gwai walking down the street in the dress, but only the dress appeared. The curves of the silk, like muscles striated with yellow threads, shifted up and down as the dress ambled along stalls in the market, bargaining with every vendor along her way; or the purple sat at a table in a restaurant, leaning forward to hear the whispers of a lover, her bust rising and falling to a constant pace. Watching Gwai iron the dress that walked through her past, somehow, was enough to curb my appetite.

"Do you know what these flowers are?" Her hands uncovered the cloth, her fingers lingering on the yellow swirls.

I shook my head.

"These are *gwai fa*"—osmanthus—"Gwai sounds prosperous; it's good luck. It's my name. This dress is mine."

"Did you sew the flowers on?"

"Yes," Gwai said. A hesitant light flashed by her eyes. "After your mother cut it up."

"Why would she do that?"

"I betrayed her."

I looked at Gwai, her face inscrutable. Eventually, she set down the iron and lowered herself onto her bed. She looked at her fingers, the way one does when trying to confront and evade themselves at the same time.

"I needed money *ah ma*. I never liked working at the factory. Glueing those tiny and sewing sequin patterns every day hurt my finders," Gwai said, spreading, closing, and turning her fingers as she did. "I wanted to run my own business. But *that old thing* never sent enough money back home."

I waited, but Gwai kept her head down in silence. I asked, then, with caution. "So what did you do?"

"What else? How else could a girl earn money? We went down to the docks every night. That was where the *ghost* sailors hung out." *Ghost* in Cantonese also denotes foreignness, but with disdain.

I looked at Gwai, finding it unbelievable. She read my expression, and answered my unspoken questions, "We drank with those men, laughed with them. I didn't sell my body, of course, but it wasn't any different, was it?"

Gwai reached out and rubbed the dress between her fingers. "I didn't have any pretty clothes, and they never came to me. So I bought this dress and some makeup with all my savings." Gwai's voice never wavered, the emotion, if there were any to begin with, never changed. It was as if she was recounting a day at the wet market when I was not there with her, as if she had relived this story over and over again.

"When they came to me,—they needed something to call me, something simple, something unique—I told them my name was *Gwai*, I told them it meant a flower in Cantonese. The way they looked at me for the rest of the night was so gentle." Gwai huffed before continuing. "I think they could sniff out the new girls."

Unsure of how I felt yet, I blurted out a practical question instead. "How much did you earn at the docks?"

"More than I could imagine. Nearly double my salary at the factory, in just one night. Lonely men in a foreign land, they would pay for anything."

Money was power for lonely people; but who was executing the power on those lonely nights: the lonely men who could pay for anything without repercussion or the lonely women who made the lonely men pay for what they wanted? Seemed to me they were both powerless and at the mercy of each other. But I knew. when the day came, Gwai was the one who ultimately paid the price.

"How did your dress get torn up?"

Gwai looked back down at her fingers and was quiet for a moment. I thought she was never going to tell me. I stayed next to her, on one hand because I did not know what else to say, and on the other I wanted to see if she would eventually let up. The two of us remained still, each tugging our end of the silence.

Moments later, she finally said, dragging out every pause she could, "Nothing, just got into a fight one night, with a man who tried to steal my money. I was arrested. *That old thing* came and yanked me home. I fell asleep drunk. Woke up and found the dress in pieces next to my pillow. I asked the children who did it, and your mother just confessed." Gwai's lips opened into a wide crack among the other dark creases. "She was always straightforward, headstrong. She can never understand why I did what I did."

"Did you want the money to open a laundry shop?"

"Yes."

"Why a laundry shop?"

"I don't know. I wanted something of my own. There was one I would pass by on the way to the factory. It smelled warm in winter. In summer, the children would just sit on the floor, eat popsicles and watch the clothes tumble."

"Have you ever told Mum about it?"

"She didn't understand. She thought I ought to either go for something bigger, since I had ruined the family anyway, or I stayed and be a better mother. A laundry shop was in-between, it was nothing."

It was a compromise, I thought later as I sat during the funeral. It was the closest thing to fulfilling Gwai's wish of owning a life under her name, and keeping her family.

"Do you regret going down to the docks?"

"I regret not having a bigger ambition."

Gwai pushed herself up from the bed, a bit more strenuous than usual. "Go back to your room. I don't want to smell the medicinal oil tonight."

#7 The last ghost in the house

We went home after Gwai's funeral. Mum took out every can of beer we had stocked in the fridge and piled them all on the dining table.

"We agreed to not drink in front of our daughter," Dad said. Mum glanced at him.

"I'm celebrating." But her voice said something else. She pulled open a can by the tab and poured the alcohol down, her throat throbbing at each gulp, only stopping to cough when she choked on the liquid. Dad sat down, patted her on the back as she recovered, and opened a can for himself. He raised the can in front of Mum.

"To the origin of our family's chaos," Mum said, and the two of them cheered with the cans. Mum sobbed after the sip, head drooped to her knees, her shoulders trembling. When her head rose again, her face was all red, but her lips were pulled into a wide smile, laughing while tears ran down her cheeks. "She's finally gone!"

Mum sat at the table for hours, drinking, though more restrained after the first few cans. We never mentioned dinner, none of us had the appetite anyway. Dad went to shower.

"It's finally over," Mum said to me, "for her. It's a shame. I don't even remember who got the last word in our last fight."

I went into Gwai's room and took the purple dress out into the living room, draping it over Mum's knees.

"She patched it up?"

"And she ironed it often. It's like when you saved up all the drawings I made for you when I was in kindergarten." It was then I saw a few small creases on the skirt, those straight and soft folds made from a heated iron and shaking hands. "I never noticed these the last time she was ironing it."

"It's not your fault."

Before Gwai passed, Mum and I had stayed by her side. We wiped her body with damp towels and dressed her up. Mum combed Gwai's hair, the silver strands, glossy from both oiliness and aged dryness, nested on her head. We waited for any sign—waking or flatlining—for a whole day and a night. Nothing came. We went to get breakfast at a restaurant nearby. And there, we got the call from the hospital, saying Gwai had passed away. Mum just nodded. "She doesn't want us to watch her die." We went back to the hospital after finishing breakfast, unhurried.

"I should've let her rest a long time ago. But she insisted on doing all the homework."

"Grandma really loved you."

"I know."

"You should keep this dress, even though you can't wear it anymore," Mum said, as she looked at the embroidery.

"She said these were osmanthus." Our hands ran over the round petals along the yellow vines. "This dress belongs to her."

Pomelo leaves are still simmering in the water, to exorcise death in the air. Mum says as we stared at the bubbling pot, "*Ah mui*, you *have to* live happier than us."

I thought the steam would ward off Gwai too. But Gwai is with me now, more vividly than ever in my mind—her scoliosis, white hair, and wrinkles, but also the girl in the colours of the dress with the osmanthus, swaying left and right to music heard only by her. She doesn't have to worry about anything. I will take her to see the osmanthus trees in the park. I will savour the osmanthus tea for her in the afternoon. I will find out my ambition later, but for now, I am, I want to be a vessel, and Gwai can finally live as herself now, as a ghost in our house.

**Ludic decisions on screen and paper: anti-agency in
If on a winter's night a traveler and *The Stanley Parable***

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1. Introduction: postmodern agency in the ludic realm

Not far into the first incipit of Italo Calvino's postmodern classic *If on a winter's night a traveler*, a narrator, through "you", the reader, as a narratorial proxy, begins to question the legitimacy of the writer's authorial stipulations. The narrator, whose own identity is in constant flux throughout the novel, vacillating between an authorial voice and an unnamed character, thinks and speaks for the reader, as if to defer narrative authority, directing them to "feel a bit lost" when "you try to make the features you are seeing tally with those you had in mind, and it won't work." But following these disorienting first few pages, the narrator suggests taking the path of least resistance:

But then you go on and you realize that the book is readable nevertheless, independently of what you expected of the author, it's the book in itself that arouses your curiosity; in fact, on sober reflection, you prefer it this way, confronting something and not quite knowing yet what it is (9).

Perhaps it would be prudent to accept the narrator's suggestion, however unreliable he may seem. And yet, Calvino's novel, in postmodern, metafictional fashion, is all about understanding the novel-form.

Similarly, Davey Wreden's *The Stanley Parable* also draws attention to its form: the video game — a narrative medium that, in recent years, has become notorious for "not quite knowing yet what it is." The video game form, being made up of a vast range of disciplines including visual art, sound design, music, architecture, and literature, inevitably falls back on its constituent parts. AAA game development studios rely on the aesthetics of Hollywood action films through pre-rendered full-motion video cutscenes, defer to tediously long lore books in lieu of worldbuilding, and erroneously implement game mechanics that aim, but fail, to involve player agency. Given the robust foundation that each of the video game form's constituents provides, this is to be expected, and it goes without saying that not every game needs to be a self-reflexive meditation on medium and form. Yet, misunderstanding of the medium has given rise to complications on a more fundamental level, such as *BioShock*'s misalignment of incentives and directives, or "ludonarrative dissonance" (Hocking). As such, the satirical, self-referential games released over the last two decades becomes the logical next step in the short yet ever-growing canon of game development.

Visual and linguistic mimesis are, of course, present, even prevalent, in video games. But Ian Bogost argues that the video game form should be characterised (if not to provide a definition that inevitably falls back on convergent forms of audiovisual multimedia) by their “process rather than language” (Bogost 9) — a view analogous to Alexander R. Galloway's that “the video game, like the computer, [is] an action-based medium” (Galloway 3). This is why, having more or less achieved the goal of photorealism after decades of technological advancements, developers are looking towards virtual reality games such as *Half-Life: Alyx* that aim to simulate the mechanistic systems of reality. But the “ludic impulse” (168), in John Kuehl's words, transcends both the form and temporality of *The Stanley Parable*, which is to say that ludic systems and mechanics are found in the literary as well as the gamic (here, the word “gamic” refers exclusively to the video game medium, which is distinct from the idea of “ludic” play which occurs in both gamic and literary systems).

To invoke Raymond Williams' idea of residual and emergent forms (123), perhaps one would not be amiss in conducting an autopsy of 20th Century postmodern literature, the most developed form of novelistic self-reflexivity, as a way to better understand self-reflexivity in the art form (if I may be so generous in my characterisation) that is the video game. As such, instead of adopting Fest's (2016) approach, in which self-reflexivity in games, an emergent form, is compared to similarly emergent forms of the self-reflexive novel, I will attempt to draw comparisons between *The Stanley Parable* and *If on a winter's night a traveler*. Thus, given that the ludic impulse exists in both literary and gamic forms, it is clear that when a text demonstrates its ludic capacity to comment on its own form, it also inevitably comments on its respective ludic counterparts. Gamic metacommentary is a framework for understanding the postmodern novel just as much as the postmodern novel gleans insight into the systems and mechanics of video games. Consider Vladimir Nabokov's analogy of chess problems:

It should be understood that competition in chess problems is not really between White and Black but between the composer and hypothetical solver (just as in a first-rate work of fiction the real clash is not between the characters but between the author and the world), so that a great part of a problem's value is due to the number of “tries” — delusive opening moves, false scents, specious lines of play, astutely and lovingly prepared to lead the would-be solver astray (215).

Nabokov lays bare the ludic impulse of the postmodern novel, allowing us to draw a historically linear, materially circular genealogical line through the ludic postmodern from games, to literature, and back to games. Following Nabokov's theory, we can infer that to

understand ludic modes of storytelling is to understand the relationship between the author and the reader; and to understand that relationship is to think about how self-reflexive manifestations (and interrogations) of agency occur within the contexts of different author-reader dynamics.

The video game medium comes, essentially, with the promise of active decision-making, and by contrast, participation in conventional literary narratives “is circumscribed in a way that generally limits our sense of agency” (Murray 123). However, despite the game medium’s capacity for procedural decision-making, the game’s scripting takes precedence over the player’s ability to enact their gameric free will to affect and be affected. The player’s role as a participatory element in the game-space falls back on the material constraints of the novel-form; that is, any decisions made in the game-space should be considered anti-agential. Likewise, literary experiments such as Calvino’s only confirms that “the joy of our reading is based on a certain mode of discourse” (Fink 103). As such, this paper will argue, with reference to the depiction of agency and implementation of agential systems in *If on a winter’s night a traveler* and *The Stanley Parable*, that attempts to advance, develop, or break free from traditional narrative mediums can only result in the reification of the conventions of the traditional novel-form.

2. Anti-agency in the ludic playground

2.1. “You”, the agential second person

One might draw an analogous relationship between Nabokov’s equation of the postmodern novel to a game of chess and Galloway’s theory of gameric action. While Nabokov speaks of clashes between the composers and solvers, the author and the world, Galloway identifies distinctions between machine and operator, diegetic and non-diegetic acts. While not fully analogous to one another, both frameworks take notice of the role of the player/reader, as well as the world outside the text — Nabokov’s “solver” and Galloway’s diegetic operator are otherwise better known as “you”, the second-person pronoun.

Perhaps it would be productive to analyse forms of media that encompass both literary and gameric worlds to understand the role of the audience in different mediums. Describing his experience reading Jamaica Kincaid’s *Girl*, Jamil Jan Kochai notes that the novel’s second-person perspective narration “disrupts the very nature of the subject-object relationship” (Treisman). As if to draw influence from Kincaid’s novel, Kochai, in his creative nonfiction piece *Playing Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain*, uses the second-person pronoun “you” not to address the reader, per se, but the player — himself.

Playing Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain is a personal essay, perhaps written for Kochai himself moreso than for an external audience, commenting on the effect that the Kojima title had on himself as an Afghan man. What results is a paradoxical sense of “intimate alienation.” Literary convention dictates that the first-person pronoun “I” situates the reader as an extension of the protagonist such that greater immersion can be achieved, which is basically to say that the reader functions as an operator. Characters go on their adventures within the diegesis, while the reader follows along. The first-person pronoun “I” refers to the protagonist, and the reader is situated as an extension of this narrative “I” through self-identification.

But if one wishes to problematise this, perhaps this referential act can be interpreted as neither explicit nor direct. That is, the use of “I” as the principal pronoun of protagonistic self-reference rids the reader of any significant narratological agency in relation to the protagonist. Whereas when the focus shifts to “you”, the identity of the player is directly invoked, therefore bestowing some form of decision-making power upon them. The second-person pronoun “you”, disrupts the medium's agential dynamics. By making such a distinction between the player and the avatar, the protagonist and the reader, the subject-object relationship inverts itself: Stanley, from *The Stanley Parable*, and the Reader, from *If on a winter's night a traveler*, instead become extensions of the reader's agential capabilities. Be that as it may, however, the existence of an external voice that acknowledges the existence of an extradiegetic agent implies the existence of an extradiegetic “composer” (Nabokov 215), which therefore generates a newfound sense of alienation entangled with the reader's agential capacity, raising questions regarding the extent to which the agent is able to exert their own influence over the narrative.

2.2. *The illusion of narrative agency*

In 1967, Roland Barthes published the essay “The Death of the Author,” arguing that the author, as an authoritative source of meaning, has “died,” and instead has been replaced by the “Birth of the Reader” (6). In more traditional books and games, the narratological identity of the audience (in the case of the novel, the reader; in the case of the game, the player) is never the main event. Despite the need for games to have a player to push the right buttons and click the right icons to progress to the next objective and ultimately beat the game, Bissell notes that, more often than not, “the gamer [is] an invisible, purposefully compromised presence in the game world” (19). And yet, mainstream titles praised for both their story and gameplay such as *Metal Gear Solid* (1998), *BioShock* (2007), and *Nier*:

Automata (2017) have directly, albeit offhandedly addressed the player-avatar-auteur relationship. Likewise, slivers of literary self-reflexivity such as Jane Eyre's acknowledgement of the reader's narratological function when she breaks the news that she has married Mr. Rochester designate the consideration of the reader as a ubiquitous facet not only of postmodern literature, but of the literary form as a whole. As such, like the literary, filmic, and artistic predecessors before it, the video game also views the player as an integral narratological force.

Many critics have identified the post-structuralist adage within Calvino's deferral of narratological authority and the subsequent celebration of the reader's role in making the novel possible. Instead of beginning the novel with diegetic narrative separate from the world of the reader, Calvino begins with a self-reflexive quip that acknowledges the reader's decision to purchase and read *If on a winter's night a traveler*. Tapping into the consciousness of the reader with the aid of the second-person pronoun "you" (a technique extensively analysed by scholars including Gesuato, Rankin, and Zima), Calvino references scenes involved in trying to read a book that the reader has become so familiar with as a dedicated purveyor of the literary arts:

You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, *If on a winter's night a traveler*. Relax. Concentrate. Dispel every other thought. Let the world around you fade. Best to close the door; the TV is always on in the next room. Tell the others right away, "No, I don't want to watch TV!" Raise your voice — they won't hear you otherwise — "I'm reading! I don't want to be disturbed!" (1).

But upon closer reading, the reader soon realises, as Calvino himself confirms in an interview conducted by Francine du Plessix Gray, "that it is always [myself], Calvino, who is in total control of the situation" (23). The author's sentences move in "vagueness, grayness" that inhibits the reader's ability to derive meaning, and as if to mock the reader's apparent incompetence, he warns that "it is surely a method of involving you gradually, capturing you in the story before you realize it — a trap." But after conveying the graveness of this warning, the narrator introduces a concession: "perhaps the author still has not made up his mind." Perhaps this statement is written in earnest; after all, *If on a winter's night* is a book about the conventions of literature, and the debasing of the author's voice is as significant a subversion as any. But the next statement cancels out the narrator's doubts regarding the author's confidence: "just as you, reader, for that matter, are not sure what you would most like to read" (12). The reader then understands that it does not matter whether or not the previous concession is factual, because it serves merely as a conduit leading into an

interrogation of the reader's supposed narratological agency. Calvino, in a self-reflexive flourish, simultaneously questions the voices of the author, the narrator, and the reader, but ultimately reifies the reader-author power dynamics associated with the traditional novel form.

In *Outside the town of Malbork*, the narrator-character, whom we know to be a boy who lives in the town of Kudgiwa, expresses his worries about the “vertigo of dissolution” as he leaves to learn a different trade. Calvino, through the voice of the narrator, addresses the reader:

you realize that you perceived this, too, alert Reader that you are, from the first page, when, though pleased with the precision of this writing, you sensed that, to tell the truth, everything was slipping through your fingers; perhaps it was also the fault of the translation, you told yourself, which may very well be faithful but certainly doesn't render the solid substance those terms must have in the original language, whatever it may be (37).

There exists a sardonic undercurrent of wit within the narrator's ruminations, as if to undercut the reader's “alertness,” as it were. The narrator-character decontextualises his anxieties about having to leave behind Kudgiwa, and imbues it within the reader, exploiting their anxieties regarding their inability to produce meaning with the words of *If on a winter's night*. While it may very well be true that elements outside of the reader's control such as the language or translation are at fault, the narrator subtly makes it clear that it is the reader's intellectual faculties that are lacking by using phrases such as “to tell the truth” which contrasts with the arguably less assertive “perhaps” in the concession that follows. In fact, the word “perhaps” appears in the novel a total of 123 times; that is, almost once every other page. The concessions that follow the ubiquitous “perhaps”, whether to (seemingly) shift the balance between reader or author, creates an atmosphere of uncertainty that functions on a more holistic level: unsure as to who is in control of the narrative, the reader, ironically at Calvino's mercy, reads on, desperate to work their way through this confusion.

The narrator's endeavour, then, graduates from narration to dictation. Many of Calvino's self-reflexive meditations follow a similar structure: he begins by highlighting the reader's place in the narrative, emphasising their ability to make meaningful decisions within the postmodern narrative landscape, only to re-establish the author-reader power dynamics commonly associated with the novel-form. In a condescending, paternalistic tone not dissimilar to that of *The Stanley Parable's* narrator, Calvino reminds the reader that it is the author who is at work behind the scenes of the novel. Having established the reader's place in

the novel, the author, still acting as if the reader's initiative has an impact on the narrative, orchestrates the events of the novel by guiding the reader in every step that they take. When the author calls upon the reader to speak to Ludmilla in the first incipit, he suggests ways to approach her: "Go on, don't let the conversation die. Say something; just keep talking" (30). The reader gives in to the author's stipulations, only to be derided for his idleness:

How long are you going to let yourself be dragged passively by the plot? You had flung yourself into the action, filled with adventurous impulses: and then? Your function was quickly reduced to that of one who records situations decided by others, who submits to whims, finds himself involved in events that elude his control. Then what use is your role as protagonist to you?

More ironically yet, when the reader decides to have sex with Ludmilla's sister Lotaria, the author expresses disapproval of his immorality. "Aren't you going to resist? Aren't you going to escape?" he asks. "It's natural for you to want to get even, after you have followed events of pages and pages with passive resignation, but does this seem the right way to you?" (219). There seems to be no right way for the reader to break out or stay within the author's narrative mould. Calvino's refusal to grant the reader real power to unveil the mystery of *If on a winter's night* only reifies his own authority as well as the reader's own position "at the mercy of the text" (Malmgren 113). As Calvino himself confirms, "there is always something sadistic in the relationship between writer and reader" (Du Plessix Gray 23). Instead of realising the reader's initial impression that *If on a winter's night* aims to grant them agency, Calvino revels in his authorial power, happy that the novel has sated the reader's intellectual masochism. Fink takes this even further, interpreting Calvino's retention of authority as a reification of "the traditional hierarchies of literary discourse" (94) — proof that the traditional novel-form "will eventually survive the deconstructivist onslaught" (103).

2.3. *The intimate alienation of procedural agency*

I must delineate here how "agency" takes form differently in novels and games. Of course, the procedural activity in games simply cannot be implemented within the physical pages of a book. The experience of reading a book, regardless of the structure or framing of the novel, is always linear. The reader progresses from the first page to the second, following the narration, dialogue, and description written by the author. The author can choose to highlight the importance of the reader, as Calvino does (not), but nevertheless, to read a novel is to heed the beck and call of the author. As such, definitions of agency in the two contexts may also differ: whereas agency in the literary sense may be defined as the reader's ability to

freely interpret the text, gamic agency is perhaps more concrete, referring to the player's ability to make decisions that directly affect the narrative.

Granted, in both the literary and gamic contexts, the reader and the player are indispensable, simply because of the uncontroversial fact that books and games are to be read and played. But games, by virtue of their procedurality, allow the player to make decisions, to exercise their agential capabilities within the game-space. Roger Callois posits that, as one moves up the spectrum from *paidia*, the unstructured manifestation of play, towards *ludus*, games become increasingly bound by rules and structure (27). Biting commentary on late capitalism, freedom, and happiness aside, Stanley's workplace, a humorous parody of corporate offices, also functions as an analogy for rules within the game-space: the structures that restrict Stanley's agency also restrict that of the player. As such, the office becomes the setting within which rebellion becomes significant. Broadly speaking, it is through the very process of constraining player agency that rules provide meaning, context, and stakes to the player's decisions in the game-space. At the beginning of the game, the player pilots Stanley around from a first-person camera perspective reminiscent of the classic first-person shooter formula, but instead of holding a rifle, the player finds that Stanley, empty-handed and seemingly without a body, is only given the ability to perform contextual actions such as pressing buttons that open doors and picking up ringing office telephones that reveal more about his missing colleagues. Perhaps the fact that Stanley is a generally unremarkable individual with a soul-sucking office job places even more emphasis on the impact that the player, supposedly as an agent of free will, can have on Stanley's story. Exercising player agency is only meaningful insofar as it is done within the parameters of the game's script, narrative, and procedures. By narrowing the decisions that the player is allowed to make down to dichotomies, rather than an infinite range of possibilities in an abstract virtual space malleable to the player's touch, Wreden allows the player to focus on "plot-consequential decision-making" (Zhu 121), imbuing Stanley's decisions with narratological and agential significance. Put simply: it is within the agential constraints of gameplay that the player's decisions are given meaning.

However, there is a point to be made that, despite the player's ability to exercise agency in games, the game's scripting takes precedence over the player's ability to enact free will within the virtual game-space. In the opening monologue of the game, Stanley is described by the omniscient, patronising narrator:

Orders came to him through a monitor on his desk, telling him what buttons to push, how long to push them, and in what order. This is what Employee 427 did every day

of the month of every year, and although others might have considered it soul was happy (Introduction).

Stanley is depicted as the epitome, a caricature, even, of the disillusioned, replaceable office worker of the modern-day, and by extension, Wreden also comments on the player's affinity for pushing buttons, perhaps in contexts both within and without the game-space. The player must also perform Stanley's tasks when the words "GOOD MORNING EMPLOYEE 427. PRESS 'G' ON YOUR KEYBOARD" (Introduction) appear on screen. Thus, the relationship between the player and Stanley can be understood in terms of Klevjer's characterisation of a "vehicle through which the player is given some kind of embodied agency and presence within the gameworld" (17). But one must take care not to overestimate the parameters of the player's "embodied agency". Soon after the narrator lays out the premise of *The Stanley Parable*, Stanley is given the choice to revolt. To illustrate how the implementation of rules within video games constrict player agency, consider the first decision that the player is tasked with making in *The Stanley Parable*. After Stanley, controlled by the player, leaves his office, and traverses the empty office past cubicles and corridors, he is met with a choice between two doors — a decision between alternatives that yield different narrative pathways, or in the Borgesian sense, forking paths. When Stanley arrives at the two doors, the narrator declares, in the past tense, as if to narrate something that had already happened, that Stanley "went through the door on the left" (Two Doors section). Should the player choose to oblige, Stanley discovers a panopticon of screens revealing that he and his colleagues had been under the control of a machine that had reduced them to docile, compliant office workers devoid of any will to be free. He then proceeds to turn it off and exits the facility into the real world (Freedom ending).

Of course, the player has the choice to go against the implicit programming of the game, to take on a more subversive role as a player and defy the narrator's expectations such that the game designer's vision of the game is left unrealised. But even though the player is indeed granted the gift of free choice, it turns out that the player's open defiance of the narrator's orders only results in the alienation of the player. That is, subversive gameplay decisions themselves are part and parcel of the game's scripting, and as such, there is no real way for the player to exert their agency to the extent that the game's direction itself is subverted. Choosing to defy the narrator, the player can turn right at the game's first junction, opening up a breadth of decisions that the player can chain together. This eventually results in one of the eighteen decisions known as the "bomb" ending. The narrator, displeased with

Stanley's insubordination when he refuses to turn off the mind control machine, arbitrarily manipulates the plot by initiating a countdown to nuclear detonation:

You were supposed to let it go, turn the controls off, and leave. If you want to throw my story off track, you're going to have to do much better than that. I'm afraid you don't have nearly the power you think you do; for example, and I believe you'll find this pertinent: Stanley suddenly realized that he had just initiated the network's emergency detonation system.

The brightly lit buttons around the room beckon Stanley's attention, and prompts the player, who, having extrapolated a conclusion from their experience with other games involving puzzle elements, to interpret this telegraphed change in the game environment as a marker of a gamic objective: Stanley must press buttons in the correct sequence to stop the countdown. But once the player exhausts all the button combinations to no avail, it becomes clear that this objective is, in Aerseth's words, an aporia with no epiphany (90). The narrator sarcastically celebrates the player's delusions of agency, exclaiming that "It's your time to shine! You are the star! It's your story now; shape it to your heart's desires" (Bomb ending). Wreden, as the narrator, finds solace in the player's anti-agential frustration, akin to how Calvino affirms his own position as the sole bearer of authorial power. The vacillation between narrative freedom and constriction then generates a sense of intimate alienation that causes the complete reversal of the protagonist's status as an agent of change, the ultimate subversion of the awestruck hero-worship of convention.

The above discussion has analysed agency in the game and novel-forms with reference to two distinct definitions of agency. This is not to say that the difference between the two mediums is an irreconcilable one. Wreden acknowledges in a talk at Aalto University in Finland how the feeling, or rather, illusion of agency can have just as significant an impact as agential gamic decisions. In an earlier stage of *The Stanley Parable's* development, there was a section of the game where the player throws himself off a platform again and again at the behest of the narrator. Players sent in feedback, complaining that they were being coerced into committing an action that they could not avoid. In response, the developers simply changed the narrator's dialogue. Instead of encouraging Stanley to fall to his death, the narrator expresses genuine concern, pleading the player to stop piloting Stanley up the stairs leading to the platform: "No! No, no! What are you doing?! Stanley, please I'm asking you not to take this away from me. I can't go back to what I was before! If you die, we'll both go back! Why are you doing this?!" As Wreden explains:

It wasn't the specific action that they were doing was important, it was what they were told about why that action was important in the first place. Purely by framing the action as rebellious, the action itself became enjoyable. It was as simple as changing the tone of the voiceover” (Games Now!, 11:21-11:35).

3. Playing for keeps: against teleological play on screen and paper

3.1. Literary games as a means to an end

Despite the importance of the novel's ten incipits as anchors for self-referential commentary, there seems to be some degree of misalignment between plot and function in *If on a winter's night*. To follow the narrative of *If on a winter's night* with the objective of reaching the conclusion of the storyline is in large part impossible, because each of the “books” that Calvino writes ends after a single chapter, and the only resolved narrative is the frame story about Ludmilla and the reader. The composer's “delusive opening moves, false scents,” and “specious lines of play” in Nabokov's analogy of chess can be located most notably in *If on a winter's night's* refusal to cede to the reader any semblance of closure. Reading Calvino's novel with the purpose of achieving the sense of finality and “blissful relief” (Fink 103) associated with finishing a novel would be to contravene the intention of the author, to break the rules of the game, even if the novel is finished. That is, if one assumes that the search for a satisfactory denouement is impossible, then perhaps it is not the *telos* of the ludic postmodern novel that readers should be pursuing after all; instead, one might argue that the core of the ludic novel is located in the act of play itself, as opposed to the pursuit of a metaphorical checkmate.

The Reader begins his journey by trying to uncover the mystery of the first incipit's railway station but is met with yet another unfinished novel in the form of *Outside the town of Malbork*. The more the reader (as well as the Reader-character) goes through the novel the more they understand, probably by the second or third incipit, that all of them break off abruptly and none of them bear any semblance of a resolution — the structure of the novel itself actively denies any semblance of closure. On the other hand, the frame narrative persists, ending with the Reader marrying Ludmilla. The finality of this ending, superficially, is a relief. However, as Varsava remarks, “This 'happy ending' effects a closure of plot, a closure destabilised by the novel's irony and metafictional commentary” (17). As the reader attempts to read this compensatory ending that stands in contrast with the ten frustrating incipits, they soon realise that the ending, much like the incipits that came before the consummation of the Lettore-Lettrice relationship, is meaningless, not by virtue of

discontinuity, but of its banality in contrast with the carnivalesque events of the novel and Calvino's self-reflexive metacommentary. *If on a winter's night* prolongs the reader's desire for novelistic satisfaction by multiplying the number of beginnings (Mazzoni 57), only to dash the ever-ubiquitous expectation of a good ending. It is clear, then, that the author's satisfaction of knowing his novel has been read through is not rooted in the reader's completion of the novel, the act of reading the novel from its first page to the last. Rather, it is imbricated in Calvino's knowledge that the reader has followed his scripted ludic movements in a "penultimate rehearsal [of] the composer's dream" — the knowledge that the reader has, in Nabokov's words, actively engaged in the "smooth motion of a well-oiled and polished machine that runs sweetly at the touch of two forked fingers lightly lifting and lightly lowering a piece" (224). To read *If on a winter's night*, the reader must allow the illusion of agency to run its course such that they might engage in the immediate phenomenology of play itself.

Similarly, video games, broadly speaking, have come to be defined by their gameplay, and thus, lest the player be pulled out of their escapist flow-state (Csikszentmihalyi 15) by needlessly cerebral questions about the medium, self-reflexivity has not been a "natural" accompaniment to games. To illustrate, the idea of the thirty-second gameplay loop, popularised by *Halo's* game designer Jaime Griesemer, is that designers only need to figure out how to engineer "thirty seconds of fun" that can be played across different environments, using different tools, within different narrative contexts, to create good gameplay. The 30-second constraint basically means that the focus is on the immediate act of play itself, rather than the use of gameplay elements simply as a tool to reach an objective or narrative checkpoint. But in Wreden's parody of the video game form, the player is not faced with the "challenge of deciding which gamic actions to chain together given the exigencies of a situation" (Zhu). That is, the game is devoid of the intricate, interrelated mechanisms that characterise mainstream, "flow"-inducing titles. Resultantly, the player's limited gameplay and procedural agency prompts a telic or "completionist" approach typically employed by the most dedicated of gamers. Those versed well in video game parlance may be reminded of "achievements," arbitrary trophies awarded to the player after certain gameplay milestones have been completed. These trophies, which encourage the player to play the game using certain tools, under certain constraints, or within an allotted amount of time, rooted in experiencing the game differently — the maximisation of the game's utility. Further, the fact that the game includes eighteen different endings encourages the player to exhaust all of *The Stanley Parable's* narrative choices in order to experience all that the game has to offer.

However, underpinning these eighteen endings is an absurd circularity that arguably strips these endings of their significance, and therefore questions the extent of the player's agency.

3.2. *Reread, replay, respawn*

The intrinsic value of the ubiquitous gameplay mechanic known as “respawning”, defined as the recreation of an entity, typically the player-avatar, after its death or destruction, is rooted in the player's tendency to make mistakes as well as the game developer's understanding that mistakes can be made in the game-space with the capacity to start over. In a virtual world, mistakes are simply a precursor to perfection. The player can thoroughly learn the intricacies of a level, playing faster, better, more creatively the next time around. In other words, the procedurality of games brings the promise of an opportunity to deliberate agential control differently and more effectively with each respawn. Those familiar with FromSoftware's *Dark Souls* series are no stranger to its cyclicity. Notorious for their difficulty, the Souls games feature oppressive boss fights that ingrain within the player's mind a cycle of dying, respawning, and trying again, and thus, the endless repetition becomes a mode of storytelling, mirroring the cyclicity of the story itself. By *Dark Souls III*, the world, with characters and landmarks from previous games reprising their roles as tired, shadowy husks of their former selves, is “bringing itself to an end, crashing in on itself” (Geller, 16:25-16:32), as if to say that the authors have exhausted the series of its potential. As Szegedy-Maszá points out in his discussion of postmodernism, “there is no progress, only repetition. Accordingly, narration is not teleological but circular” (47). The ending of *Dark Souls III* does not yield the telic satisfaction that has eluded the player over the course of three Souls games. Despite being given the choice to kindle, extinguish, or usurp the fire that keeps the darkness at bay, the player's ability to effect change in the universe through each of these choices has been constricted by the narrative cycles that have stretched the *Souls* universe paper-thin. To play *Dark Souls* is to live the same life just a little smarter, faster, better than the last, futile as it may be, for the series ends by suffocating itself under its own weight.

The Stanley Parable's eighteen distinct narrative arcs, which can be mapped out in a concise flowchart, are achieved through a combination of paths taken, buttons pushed, doors opened, and other dichotomous decisions. He is given the freedom to turn right or left at the game's very first junction, unlocking endings accordingly, but each of these arcs begin and end, and begin again in the same location: Stanley's office. After each ending, as if in a time loop, the day starts over, and the player can piece together permutations of paths untaken, buttons unpushed, and doors unopened to eventually arrive at all eighteen endings.

On one hand, the number of endings that come as a direct result of the player's decisions seems to be a celebration of the player's ability to learn and adapt with every return to Stanley's office. Each decision that the player makes is a testament to the game's allowance of player autonomy — as previously discussed, it is within the structural constraints of rules that player agency is given significance. But on the other, the expectation for the player to explore all the endings dampens the significance of the player's gametic decisions. Firstly, most of the decisions that the player makes at each junction (save for some of the final decisions before the endings) have no bearing on the outcome that they yield: turning right or left at the first junction does not have any intrinsic meaning other than the direction in which the player is headed, and in fact, different combinations of decisions can result in the same ending. Choosing to go through the door on the left opens up a range of decisions that can lead the player to the “insanity”, “escape pod”, “museum”, and “life” endings, but going through a certain path after taking the right door can also yield the same endings. Further, the player's ludic actions cannot be assumed to be agential, in that their decisions are simply constructed around the logical complement of the previously exhausted choice. If the left door has been chosen, the logical thing to do after Stanley respawns in his office after reaching his first ending would be to choose the door on the right. If the power was turned off in the last playthrough, yielding the “life” ending, the player will choose to turn the power on to achieve the “bomb” ending. The meaninglessness of the player's decisions intensifies further as the player exhausts more and more decisions, until Stanley eventually arrives at the final ending, whichever it may be. In fact, one might even interpret the game's “Mariella” ending, in which Stanley gets stuck in a never-ending paradoxical loop of rooms and is later found dead by a woman named Mariella, as an act of self-referentiality that calls attention to the absurd circularity of the game's structure and subsequently, the player's delusions of control. Instead, *The Stanley Parable*, “like the novel, represents the interiority or subjectivity of its creator” (Zhu 123). As such, the player's decisions can hardly be considered to be significant deliberations of agency, in that the decision-making process revolves not around the player's own motivations aligned with gametic objectives, but around learning and manipulating the *The Stanley Parable's* gametic systems of choice in order to achieve endings that yield the same satisfaction that finishing a well-written novel might.

In *The Stanley Parable*, the player is unable to deliberate meaningful change regardless of their ability to learn and adapt through repetitive play. Calvino's novel is different in that its narrative is not constructed around a time loop, but rather, a series of ten distinct narratives, but all the same, the narrative structure communicates to the reader the

same nihilistic sense of circularity. When the Reader goes to the library to find the “ten novels that evaporated” in his hands, he realises that, even though the authors and titles of the novels appear in the catalogue, they are all unavailable. Towards the end of the novel, the Reader meets seven other readers who express their thoughts on the act of reading, one of whom speaks of “a story that for me comes before all other stories and of which all the stories I read seem to carry an echo” (256). The fifth reader's retelling of what he remembers from the story, which is revealed to be from *Arabian Nights*, ends in the phrase “he asks, anxious to hear the story” (258). Adding the fifth reader's final utterance to the list of titles he has been seeking, the Reader discovers that piecing together the titles of the ten incipits and the last line of the fifth reader's retelling forms a grammatical sentence:

If on a winter's night a traveler, outside the town of Malbork, leaning from the steep slope without fear of wind or vertigo, looks down in the gathering shadow in a network of lines that enlace, in a network of lines that intersect, on the carpet of leaves illuminated by the moon around an empty grave — What story down there awaits its end? — he asks, anxious to hear the story (258).

If on a winter's night's cyclicity and circularity is representative of postmodernist literature. The Reader himself understands this after realising the futility of the seven readers' debate about whether or not stories must have a beginning and an end, and promptly decides to marry Ludmilla. The conclusion that the reader gleans from the novel's ending, then, is arguably paradoxical in nature: the repeated attempts to interpret the novel's non-endings can only end in the non-conclusion that nothing at all can be gleaned from the cyclical structure of unfinished incipits.

4. Plug in, turn on, and cop out

Fink, understanding *If on a winter's night a traveler* in terms of Elizabeth Bruss's definition of a game as “the encounter between equally matched and equally creative participants” (154), explains that parity “can only be achieved if the partners are playing at an even risk” (97). In the context of Calvino's notoriously subversive, unfamiliar novel, the reader risks frustration. Unknowingly wandering through the pages of the novel, “you,” the reader, are constantly met with obfuscatory statements and unfamiliar metacommentary that seems to threaten alienation. Calvino, conversely, risks “oblivion”: if the novel manages to fully escape the reader's understanding, it would probably be left to collect dust on a bookshelf, unfinished. Avedon and Sutton-Smith define games as “an exercise of voluntary control systems in which there is an opposition between forces, confined by a procedure and

rules in order to produce a disequilibrium outcome” (1). Perhaps such a definition that centres “disequilibrium” lacks relevance in the context of this paper, given that Calvino's and Wreden's games are played not between readers or players, but between composers and solvers. It is therefore important to extract from this definition that the alternative is to reach a mutually beneficial agreement. The common objective between composer and solver, then, is to engage in a pseudo-power struggle that simultaneously fully engrosses the reader's delusions of agency and masochistic desires, and leaves the author satisfied — a paradoxical amalgamation of equal risk and unequal narrative agency. To keep the reader persistently enthralled, the author must consider the extent to which he is allowed to break away from traditional narratorial conventions. That is, he must vacillate between metadiscourse and conventional storyline to secure the reader's interest while still enabling the novel's ability to make self-reflexive metacommentary.

If one considers the decisions that the player makes in *The Stanley Parable* to be acts of anti-agency, then perhaps there is one way to exert player control: inaction. Inaction is distinct from the other decisions that the player might take throughout the game in that such decisions are procedural, and by contrast, the significance of inaction lies in the fact that to abstain from action in games is to defy the procedural core of the medium. But Scully-Blaker argues, with reference to games spanning different genres including *Until Dawn*, *Mario Party 2*, *Animal Crossing: New Leaf*, and *World of Warcraft*, that moments of inaction or “stasis” in games can be “designed features of a game that produce a variety of affective experiences” (1), which is to say that inaction itself is a feature of the game itself. One of *The Stanley Parable*'s endings known as the “Not Stanley ending” involves a self-reflexive commentary on the paradox of inaction as subversive play. In this ending, the player appears as an disembodied entity inside the ceiling of the previously discussed Two Doors Room, looking over Stanley who has been rendered motionless and unable to think for himself. Here, the player's agency has no narrative element to latch on to. The buttons of the player's keyboard previously consigned to Stanley's movement now enables three-dimensional movement throughout the room, yet the player is never given any indication as to whose perspective they are viewing the game from. On the other hand, Stanley, previously established as the player-avatar, is unable to move. In response to this pseudo-inaction, the narrator becomes genuinely worried, begging Stanley to make a decision: “Stanley, please, I-I need you to make a choice. I need you to walk through the door. Are you listening to me? Can you hear me? Is everything alright?”. Finally, having reached the limit of his frustration, the narrator

concedes and submits to the player's scripted non-decision to have Stanley remain motionless and choose neither door.

In the not Stanley ending, Wreden introduces a twofold breakdown of gameric inaction: first, the game demonstrates what happens when the player abstains from gameric choice. The narrator even reminds Stanley that “The story needs you, it needs you to make a decision. It cannot exist without you”, highlighting the dissolution of the player's role as an agent of choice, and consequently, of the game's direction. By isolating the player's agency from the avatar, an element of irony that further intensifies the player's lack of control is introduced: the player experiences, from an alternative third-person perspective, the consequences of inaction, yet they are fully capable of hovering around the room as an incorporeal extradiegetic entity. However, the not Stanley ending is itself a scripted procedure that was coded and modelled by developers. This is not to discount the player's faculties nor is it simply to calcify the author's authority — Wreden understands that inaction is perhaps one of the most significant narrative decisions that a player can make, so by acknowledging this and having it be a scripted ending, it is to the credit of the player rather than a mere anticipation of player action. As such, Bruss's definition of games as an encounter of equal parity comes into play. By engaging in the pseudo-subversion of the not Stanley ending, the player realises Wreden's vision of *The Stanley Parable* while simultaneously casting it into oblivion.

Conclusion

To Wreden, *The Stanley Parable* is not a power struggle between the creator and the player, nor is it a power struggle between Stanley and the narrator; it is a game about understanding these author-player dynamics and identifying the degree of agency and control one might be able to exercise within these narratological constraints. The same is arguably true for Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveler*. The novel is an opportunity for the reader to read into second-person pronouns and the author's affirmations, for the two to work together despite these oppositional, at times even antagonistic narrative dynamics. But regardless of how much power the author decides to defer to the audience, be it in the literary or gameric realms of *ludos*, the authorial position, by definition, is one of certainty. Of course, this is not to undermine the faculties of the reader/player, nor is it to cede complete authority to the creator. Agency is simultaneously concrete and illusory: *The Stanley Parable*'s doors are at the same time a celebration of agential procedurality and a myriad of fully scripted plot points, *If on a winter's night*'s narrator simultaneously a bastion of authorial power and the Reader's confidant. It is a mutually beneficial relationship that is paradoxically

complemented with mutually assured destruction. Yet, the player/author still *needs* an authorial voice to validate and legitimise their ability to deliberate control within the narrative. As such, what remains constant across both gamic and literary mediums is the author's narrative voice: the harbinger of the traditional novel-form.

An epilogue, of sorts: I included in this paper's introduction an excerpt from the first chapter of *If on a winter's night a traveler* about the strange comfort of "confronting something and not quite knowing yet what it is" (9). For a good three weeks after I had completed a first rough draft of this project, I struggled to understand the significance of what I had been writing. I had originally considered writing about Hong Kong literature, Polish poetry, the African novel and a range of other topics, but instead I ended up writing about a video game and a novel so painfully experimental and removed from the political and historical writing that I had become so accustomed to in my four years of university studies that I felt at a loss, and that the six thousand words I had written were better off in my computer's recycle bin. I initially chose this project to attempt to draw some boundaries of agency in literary and gamic mediums, as such, it functions more a prologue than as a self-sustaining source of knowledge. This is to say that there is a lot more to be understood regarding how, within these boundaries, agency is depicted in literature and how systems that make use of the player's decision-making capabilities are implemented in games to tell stories, ask questions, and speak truth to power. Agency is symptomatic of power, and the depiction of power is central to a range of literary debates. Take for instance Coetzee's *Foe*, which comments on the agency of female writers who struggle to give voice to the voiceless African subject within the hegemony of the masculine literary tradition. Consider *BioShock*, which delivers a critique of Ayn Rand's philosophy of Objectivism through agential gamic decisions. *The Stanley Parable* itself is subject to a Marxist reading with its treatment of choice, freedom, and happiness in a corporate office. To analyse the limitations of agency in the game-form is to gain a better understanding of how games can sensitively and intelligently contend with the depiction of the experiences of the oppressed, to understand "the perennial anxieties over authenticity, freedom and alienation" (Zhu 117). Raoul Vaneigem wrote that "the desire to play has returned to abolish the hierarchical society which banished it" (111), and that, I think, is the significance, perhaps not of this paper, but of analyses of procedural agency in games going forward.

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Absolute Justice in Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Fyodor Dostoyevsky's (1821-81) *Crime and Punishment* is one of, if not the most, famous work in the Russian literature canon. Situated in the surge of judiciary reform that began in 1864, the novel attempts to confront complex philosophical questions, crime and legal reform, social justice, poverty, education, urban problems, the shape and promise of the future, that soared from unease and anxiety at the time (Stanton and Hardy xi). While Russia's legal system gradually transitioned from the reign of an emperor to a more institutionalised one that put an emphasis on reason and individual conscience, people were bombarded by questions of authority of the state, autonomy of the self, and the future of Russia. Under this mortified circumstance, Dostoyevsky's novel was born in midst of the escalating angst and uncertainties that demonstrate the bits and pieces of the social environment and atmosphere at the time. Authors like him witnessed the angst within the society and its longing of resolution for these ordeals.

The very title of the book highlights an antithetical relationship between crime, punishment, and justice. As *Signet* writes, 'crime and punishment, the novel reminds us, grow from the same seed' (*Crime and Punishment*). While 'crime' represents transgression, 'punishment' represents the corrective countermeasure of that very transgression. Crimes are unacceptable, representing a state of absolute freedom where an individual could do whatever she wants without subjecting to the confines of authorities. To permit crimes would mean chaos and threatens the power of authorities who govern the state. Hence, when Raskolnikov murders Aliona Ivanovna and Lizaveta, there is an urge for him to be punished to restore the balance, i.e. justice. Granted, the discussion of justice in *Crime and Punishment* is crucial

because it is something *expected*, as much as closure is expected when one reads a book. In fact, the whole plot of the novel revolves around the notion of justice.

But the ethical dilemmas we experience as readers put us at odds with the expected sense of justice. Like reading any crime stories, we long for crimes to be solved and justice to be reinstated. But we also ‘hold our breath, exert our will upon [Raskolnikov] not to give up and confess’, truly believing that his crimes are justifiable (Belknap 136). To its extreme, upon approaching the end of the novel we cannot seem to shake the feeling of unease that the story is *forced* into closure when Raskolnikov gives in and confesses for his crimes, as he converts into a Christian. Upon finishing the book, the concepts of justice represented, as well as *our* perceptions of justice, seem to be out of place, if not distorted and jeopardised.

Literary critics, from Mikhail Bakhtin to Edward Wasiolek, all emphasise the polyphony and antithetical parallelism observed in Dostoyevsky’s work, praising the structure of his novel. However, when it comes to the topic of justice, scholars seem to mainly focus on Ivan Karamazov in *The Karamazov Brothers*, which is understandable, given he is Dostoyevsky’s most famous character in relation to justice. In *Crime and Punishment*, the unsettling feeling after finishing the novel does not seem to go well with the parallel structure suggested by scholars. Rather, it seems to indicate an imbalanced sensation hidden behind the façade of the seemingly justified ending. This extreme distress urges this dissertation on retribution, in an attempt to find a sense of closure as a reader and figure out Dostoyevsky’s cryptograph on justice.

Owing to the sophistication of Dostoyevsky’s antithetical parallelisms that often bring up certain philosophical concepts, the novel might be examined in a much clearer way under the framework of philosophical dialectics, which involve the ‘contradictory process between opposing sides’ (Maybee). The dialectical nature of the philosophical dialectics stresses the duality of the subject matter, i.e. the process where the thesis of a proposed notion challenges

but without refuting the existing thesis. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's dialectics, in particular, concerns not only the dialectics between people but also relations between people and objects, people and ideas, as well as ideas and ideas (Maybee). In *Crime and Punishment*, for instance, the contradictory sides could be different notions of justice, such as legal justice as well as vigilante justice. Hegel proposes that once an antithesis is proposed, it would expose the one-sidedness of the original thesis, challenging and disrupting the stability of the originally proposed thesis. They would then combine and go through a process called 'aufheben', preserving some while cancelling out other parts of themselves and each other. This would form a synthesis that allows us to get closer to a higher and more comprehensive reality or 'truth', i.e. the 'absolute', containing all the previous and present determinations as well as contexts and conditions within the absolute (Maybee).

In *Crime and Punishment*, 'in every door, every bridge and waterway, every street and dusty square, and every window staring back toward the eyes of the beholder—we feel a struggle of spirit with matter, of faith with reason, of good with evil' (Stanton and Hardy xiv). Therefore, to grapple Dostoyevsky's idea on justice, the capacity of Hegel's dialectics could contain even the smallest elements encrypted with meaning and fully demonstrates how these oppositions react to one another and illustrate their developments from beginning to end. Granted, examining the antithetical parallels in *Crime and Punishment* through Hegel's dialectical framework inches us closer to the self-defeating nature of justice, exposing that absolute justice is unattainable.

Chapter 2 Plot Analysis

Crime and Punishment consists of six parts and an epilogue, which could mainly be divided into three segments: the story of the crime, the psychological punishment, and the denouement. The novel mainly follows a whodunnit structure of a crime fiction novel with a certain level of variance. While a whodunnit structure usually has a narrow focus on the story of the crime and its investigation, *Crime and Punishment* focuses on the psychological punishment of the culprit. Dostoyevsky does not focus on unfolding the mystery presented, but introduces the culprit, crime, and his motive all at once in the first segment of the novel. In part 1, the story of the crime begins by introducing Raskolnikov, the culprit of the crime and his contemplation of doing 'that' (Dostoyevsky 2). This 'mystery' is eventually unfolded in a few chapters' time, where readers witness the murder and robbery of Aliona Ivanovna. The story is more about the curiosity of the whydunit, as Dostoyevsky spends two chapters (pt. 1, chap. 3, 6) on the full disclosure of Pulcheria's letter and the students conversation that illustrate the vileness of Aliona. He also stresses Raskolnikov's kindness and indecisiveness by spending four chapters to portray his internal wrestle and instances of his impulsive kindness towards strangers (pt. 1, chap. 1, 2, 4, 5). The unproportionate distribution of the chapters is part of Dostoyevsky's authorial stratagem to put the novel's focus on the culprit's profile and reasons for his crimes instead of the actual occurrence of the murder. This disharmony caused by crime is reinstated in part 6, the antithetical parallel of part 1, where Raskolnikov has to pay for his crimes.

The narrative in a classic crime story often invites its readers to collect clues with the detective in order to figure out the whodunit, whydunit, and howdunit of the case. But by letting readers witness the murder, we are made confederates and stand antithetically parallel to our sense of justice. As mentioned, the story of the crime in part 1 provides a perfect justification and detailed illustration of the crime and the culprit. With all the information at

hand, we, the readers, know more than the detectives in the novel. Dostoyevsky's use of dramatic irony swap readers' usual detective role with the culprit's. Rather than inviting us to pin down the culprit and deduce what actually happened, readers' antithetical role creates a new form of mystery: whether what *we* have done would be successfully figured out by Porfiry and the court, training us to look for a different kind of justice now that we are the culprits.

Instead of a narrow focus on the investigation of Raskolnikov's crimes, from part 2 to 6, the novel emphasises the story of Raskolnikov's psychological punishment, chronicling mainly his psychological tribulation as well as the storylines involving Dunia, Luzhin, Sonia, and Svidrigailov. This segment of the plot mainly consists of dialectics and antinomies between characters, which aids characters' development through constant confrontations with their antithetical halves, especially that of Raskolnikov's. In part 1, Raskolnikov struggles with whether he should actualise his plan. His deliriums and exchange with Razumikhin and Zosimov in part 2 indicate that he is struggling against his guilt and speculating whether or not he is considered a suspect. His point of internal struggle has again changed to whether he has the right to kill after meeting his archnemesis, Porfiry, in part 3. Reaching part 4 to 6, Raskolnikov fights with his inner self as well as other characters, such as Sonia, Dunia, and Porfiry, who do not agree with his theory on confessing his crimes. His exchanges with other characters propose antitheses that reject his Great Man Theory and his justification for his crimes. These antithetical dialogues delineate the progressiveness and the non-stagnant nature of Raskolnikov as a multidimensional figure who is self-conscious and self-reflective, building up readers' expectations for the upcoming struggles between these two opposing sides of his.

Approaching the end of the novel, Raskolnikov's sentence to Siberia acts as a denouement of the novel. However, the story has yet to come to an end. After some miserable

time in jail, he converts to Christianity owing to an unexplainable and sudden epiphany. Within a whodunnit structure, the story usually ends by putting the culprit behind bars. *Crime and Punishment*, however, goes beyond a typical ending when it details Raskolnikov's conversion. One of the most legendary rules in crime fiction is that 'detectives [in the story] shall well and truly detect the crimes presented to them using those wits [... bestowed] upon them [by the author] and not [place] reliance on nor [make] use of Divine Revelation, Feminine Intuition, Mumbo Jumbo, Jiggery-Pokery, Coincidence, or Act of God' (quoted Sayers in Davis 30). If not for Sonia, who is a faithful believer of God, Raskolnikov might not have been convinced to confess for his crimes. By ending the story with Raskolnikov's conversion and his reconnection with Sonia—a Christ-like figure—the story is seemingly hinting the 'Act of God' as the real detective that solves the crime. This segment also parallels to a 'wisdom tale' (Holquist 81). In a conversion story, there is an emphasis on 'hermeneutics: the distance between the two worlds is affirmed in a structure of conflicting interpretations [that is] the final, "correct" interpretation' superior of the other (Holquist 81). The wisdom tale 'seeks not to demonstrate a gradual progress unfolding in horizontal time, but to remind men again of the cut-off between vertical levels of temporality, man's change and the Gods' stasis' (Holquist 81-2). After Raskolnikov's conversion, he feels himself 'completely renewed in his very being' (Dostoyevsky 521), and that he can truly see and live his life as compared to his previously 'strange and superficial' torments (Dostoyevsky 522). His conversion allows him to transcend to the divine perspective and allows him to hold the 'correct' view in life. Instead of ending the novel like a crime story, by breaking the rules of an ordinary crime story structure, the expected duality of Raskolnikov throughout the novel has persisted even till the end.

Chapter 3 A Delusion of Justice

3.1 *A Moth to a Candle Flame*

The plot exposes Dostoyevsky's intricate authorial stratagem in the novel. From the structure to the dialogues between characters, he trains readers what to expect from start to finish, which aids him in presenting a delusion of justice. The four main elements, including following a crime fiction plot, the use of narrative, characters, as well as a conversion story at the end seemingly deliver justice on four distinct levels, namely the legal, ethical (vigilante), individual, and theological. Under Hegel's framework, each of these planes, is itself, a synthesis that seemingly attains a sense of retribution.

Among the four, legal justice is the most discernible through following a paradigm of a crime fiction novel. By solving the murder mystery and arresting the single source of evil, i.e. Raskolnikov, the novel heals the wound inflicted by the unsolved crime. Raskolnikov's unsolved case introduces an unsolved murder, a lock-room mystery, and a murderer that has absconded, exposing the police and the state's impotence and inflicting horror in the community. After Aliona and Lizaveta's demises, Pestriakov and Koch, come to Aliona's apartment to look for her but no one answers the door (Dostoyevsky pt. 1, chap. 7). Realising the door latch is on when they try to open it, Pestriakov runs to the janitor, later followed by Koch (pt. 1, chap. 7). Since they are both gone, Raskolnikov darts in a renovating apartment on the second floor and escapes (pt. 1, chap. 7). The police are clueless in their investigation, as Ilia Petrovich exclaims, 'the case is anything but clear' (100). By successfully committing the murder and escaped while not making himself a suspect, Raskolnikov not only harms the murder victims, but he also delineates the powerlessness of the legal force in fighting crimes.

Raskolnikov also introduces the horror of living with a cold-blooded killer walking among the innocent, as everyone is made a suspect. Upon being reminded of Lizaveta's murder and the fugitive, Sonia 'tremble[s] all over from fear' and 'spen[ds] the whole night

in fever and delirium' (Dostoyevsky 315). An open case is an unhealed wound, like Sonia, as everyone lives in fear, knowing that the vile monster lives among them. This horror also puts everyone under suspicion. Investigations aim to prove someone committed the crime, but suspects, such as Nikolay, are proving their innocence to the police instead. Zosimov and his colleagues are 'trying to get [Nikolay] off' the case (129) while Koch and Pestriakov are kept in custody under suspicion (130). To its extreme, the feeling of guilt and the pressure of being under suspicion push Nikolay to confess to the murders even though he is innocent (pt. 4, chap. 6). Having a fugitive at large creates conjectures that put the innocent on public trial and disrupt social order.

With Raskolnikov's arrest, legal justice is attained as the crime is solved. A classic crime fiction plot seeks *answers*, and by giving the culprit his according punishment after learning the reason behind his crimes, the novel achieves closure. As Dorothy Sayers puts it, crime fiction is nothing more than a 'literature of escape'¹⁷ (109), providing readers with escapism from the real world where crimes sometimes do pay¹⁸. As the novel progresses, Porfiry's monologue reveals his deduction of the case (Dostoyevsky pt. 4, chap. 5) and Raskolnikov's confession at the police station (Dostoyevsky pt. 4, chap. 8) and in court (Dostoyevsky epilogue, chap. 1) satisfy the novel's eagerness in uncovering the truth. Like other crime fiction novels, once the crime is presented, complex sources of evil has been reduced to one single source, the culprit. Raskolnikov's sentencing antithetically cancels out the threat poses by the crime. The innocent are no longer under suspicion, citizens are no

¹⁷ In the introduction to her book, *The Omnibus of Crime*, Sayers wrote: 'the detective-story is part of the literature of escape, and not of expression. We read tales of domestic unhappiness because that is the kind of thing which happens to us; but when these things gall too close to the sore, we fly to mystery and adventure because they do not, as a rule, happen to us' (109).

¹⁸ This solemnity of the genre to attain legal justice is so important that the writers of the Detection Club, founded in 1930, needed to take an oath to promise the 'detectives [in their novels] shall well and truly detect the crimes presented to them' (Davis 30).

longer mortified, and the criminal that once threatened the credibility of the legal system is removed. The wound is thus closed with the aid of legal justice.

In following a plot of a crime fiction novel, legal justice ‘has no place to get away to’ (Dostoyevsky 315), as if a moth is destined to circle a candle and eventually ‘fl[ies] straight into [the] mouth [of the flame]’ (325).

3.2 ‘Accept my fate as it is, once and for all’ (Dostoyevsky 44)

Other than the plot, the narrative also plays an important role in projecting the ideals and messages Dostoyevsky tries to highlight. A narrative is a voice that tells the story and at the same time, training readers what to feel, think, and expect. Lizaveta ‘worked for her sister day and night’, served her as a cook and a laundress (Dostoyevsky 62). She even gave all her salary to her sister, Aliona (62). But instead of being appreciated or given any financial support, she was looked down by her own sister, suffered from physical abuse, and was left nothing in Aliona’s will except for a few chairs. In a utilitarian perspective, the death of Aliona could have saved Lizaveta and prevented Aliona from ‘eat[ing] up other people’s lives’ (63), saving ‘a hundred lives’ (63). In committing the crime, Raskolnikov appoints himself as the doer of ‘justice’ (64), seeing it as his ‘duty’ (64) to bring a greater good and punishes Aliona who could not have gotten what she deserves otherwise since indecent character is in no violation of the law. The killing thus achieves vigilante justice that seemingly justify the murder. However, it could only be justified if we, the spectators, also agree the crime has been committed on the grounds of vigilantism. Otherwise, Raskolnikov would just be another murderer with insubstantial excuses.

To justify the crime, Dostoyevsky manipulates his readers with his narrative. From the very beginning, the narrative makes readers a part of Raskolnikov. Readers know of ‘that’ (Dostoyevsky 2) at the very beginning. Not only are we there before, during, and after

he brutally bludgeons Aliona and Lizaveta at the crime scene, but we are also there when he is about to get caught by the two students. Readers are put in close proximity to Raskolnikov through the aid of a 3rd person narrative. Raskolnikov's monologue after reading Pulcheria's letter almost sounds like our thoughts:

‘Dedicate your life, your future to them—*after you get your degree and find a job?*

We've heard all that; just dandy; but what about now? Because something has to be done *now*, understand? And what *are* you doing now? You are robbing them, that is what you are doing.’ (43)

Being exposed to his thoughts, readers resonate with his powerlessness and hopelessness. We feel his desperation, the urge for him to do ‘something right away, immediately, as soon as possible’ (44) to rescue his family yet knowing nothing could be done. Along with a full disclosure of Pulcheria's letter (pt. 2, chap. 3), Pulcheria has become *our* mother, addressing us directly along with Raskolnikov—‘you are all we have left, Dunia and I, you are our everything, all our wishes and hope’ (28). The narrative entangles us with Raskolnikov, luring us into sympathy, justifying his motive for his crime as righteous as we see the need for him to be the hero and the booty would have allowed him to alleviate their financial burden at least temporarily.

The narrative emphasis on urban space in St. Petersburg further justifies Raskolnikov's motive by depicting him as the saviour. The narrative portrays St. Petersburg as Raskolnikov sees it: a cramped, unhygienic place of injustice. The ‘intolerable stench of the saloons’ (Dostoyevsky 2), the drunks on working days that swear and bump into pedestrians, houses crammed with small apartments, and even Raskolnikov's ‘cubicle’ gives ‘a most sorry appearance’ that disgusts himself (25-6). The packed and deteriorated spatial descriptions reflect the poverty and desperation that plague St. Petersburg—the city is a wasteland full of injustice. In midst of this condemnation, Raskolnikov's impulsive kindness

to financially assist Marmeladov¹⁹ (pt. 1, chap. 2) and the police to ensure the seduced girl gets home safe (pt. 1, chap. 4) depicts him as magnanimous and genuine, the only good person in this city of doom. Along with the students' conversation that paints the killing of Aliona as a 'duty' in doing 'justice' (64), Raskolnikov becomes a saviour in committing the crime, giving an illusion that the murder could have saved humanity in St. Petersburg. To its extreme, he is *destined* and *fated* to be an executer of 'justice' (64):

'Or else renounce life altogether!' he cried out in a frenzy, 'humbly accept *my fate* as it is, once and for all, strangle everything I have within me, and give up every right I have to act, to live, and to love!' (44 emphasis added)

He entered his room *like a man condemned to death*. He had not chosen and was *not capable of choosing*, yet suddenly with all his being he felt that he *no longer had any freedom of choice*—that he *had no alternative* and that suddenly *everything had been conclusively decided*. (60 emphases added)

The narrative transforms Raskolnikov from a ferocious murderer to an ill-fated hero destined to save his family, if not the world.

Dostoyevsky even goes as far as to conceal the death of Lizaveta, making readers, the characters, even Raskolnikov himself, forget about the death of an innocent. Raskolnikov kills Lizaveta 'accidentally' (Dostoyevsky 391) because he has no choice but to kill the witness to his crime. Lizaveta has the face of Sonia, a helpless '*childlike*' (391) figure. The murder of Aliona might be justified, but certainly not that of Lizaveta. While the actual murder count is two, whenever a character brings up the case, it is almost always in singular form, as if Lizaveta did not die. Whenever Zosimov is talking about the case, he only

¹⁹ In Mark 12:41-44, Jesus sat opposite the place of offerings and saw the crowd came in and put their money into the temple treasury. The rich threw in a large amount of money but there was a poor widow who only offered a few cents. But Jesus praised the poor widow for putting more into the treasury than the others because even in her deprivation, she gave her everything. Even Raskolnikov does not have much to offer, he is still willing to give away the little that he has, just like the widow who is the role model of the story.

mentions ‘that murder [,] the old pawnbroker woman’ (129). When Nastasia reminds them of Lizaveta, Raskolnikov reacts though it is his first-time hearing of it, murmuring in a scarcely audible voice (129). Nonetheless, Nastasia is ignored, and the conversation moves on without anyone mentioning Lizaveta again. In Raskolnikov’s confession to Sonia, Dunia, or his justifications for his crime, he only ever defends himself for the death of Aliona:

‘What do you mean, *killed*? Is killing done like that? The way I did it? sometimes I’ll tell you what it was like.... Did I kill the old hag? No, not the old hag—’ (400)

Raskolnikov’s killing of Aliona alone would have been perfectly justified in his utilitarian logic if Lizaveta had not died. Therefore, by concealing the murder count, the narrative leads us to overlook the death of Lizaveta, emphasising Raskolnikov as a vigilante.

While Raskolnikov might be a hero, he still cruelly murders two people. To sympathise with him seems right and wrong at the same time. The narrative thus reassures us with Sonia’s extreme yet peculiar sympathy towards Raskolnikov. Apart from the readers, Sonia is the first to learn Raskolnikov’s murder but instead of being mortified, in despair, she rises from her knees and embraces Raskolnikov tightly, thinking that he has tormented himself (Dostoyevsky pt. 4, chap. 4). Sonia has yet to learn the reason of Raskolnikov’s murder but she already forgives him the moment he confesses. Even Raskolnikov is taken aback by Sonia’s reaction: ‘How strange you are, Sonia. Embracing me and kissing me after I’ve told you *about that*. You don’t know what you’re doing’ (392). The narrative normalises the sympathy we have for Raskolnikov, directing us to focus on his motive and character instead of his crimes.

The narrative projects Raskolnikov as a righteous hero that seeks retribution at the cost of transgressing the law, making him the seemingly honourable vigilante in a crooked world.

3.3 *The Valour to Dare*

The novel is constantly going through the process of *aufheben*, which is most apparent between and within characters in dialogues. Characters confront each other and themselves, progressing and learning who they are and who they are not. Dunia intended to marry Luzhin as a sacrifice for Raskolnikov and Pulcheria so that they could live off the Luzhin's wealth (Dostoyevsky pt. 1, chap. 3). However, in doing so, she debases her soul, moral sense, peace of mind, and conscience (pt. 1, chap. 3). She is only aware of that by confronting Luzhin, recognising him as a vile man who takes pride in rescuing wives from poverty and does not deserve her respect (pt. 1, chap. 3). Dialogues introduce characters with antitheses that oppose their views, forcing them to confront their own consciousness.

This flux of confrontations with others and themselves allow characters to attain individual retribution through self-reconciliation that requires the willpower 'to dare' (Dostoyevsky 458)—the audacity to live as one's true self. Svidrigailov is a 'depraved, lowdown voluptuary' (458). Yet, there is something about him that 'at least endowed him with a certain originality if not mysteriousness' (463). Fully acknowledging that his sensual desires are not moral, he is not bothered:

'Well, I'm not particularly interested in anybody's opinion,' [...] 'Why not be vile?—it's a suit that goes well with our climate... especially if you have a natural bent for it[.]' (272)

His 'originality' (463) sets him at odds with the mass, condemning him as amoral. But his consistency in personality perseveres even in his suicide. Learning that Dunia can never love him (pt. 6, chap. 5), Svidrigailov realises the one thing he would 'do anything' (470) for could never be obtained. Being the vile egoist that he is, his arrogance and self-assurance would not permit him to live by the rules of others. Even if he is afraid of death (448), his

valour to be himself overcomes his angst. Although on a dark note, Svidrigailov's way to conclude his life still delineates his valour of being true to himself and nobody else.

Raskolnikov, even in his struggles, manages to be 'strong and self-confident in mind and spirit' (Dostoyevsky 398) to be at odds with the mass and live his nature. In his mind, he has never stopped being a Napoleon even after his conviction:

'Why does what I committed seem so hideous to them? [...] Because it was a crime? What does that word mean—"crime"? My conscience is at rest. Of course, I overstepped, illegally; of course, the letter of the law was violated; blood was spilled. Very well, satisfy the letter of the law—take my head, why not?—and let it go at that!' (516)

Although Raskolnikov seemingly claims that he might not have 'the right to permit [him]self that first step' (516), the narrator emphasises 'the only sense in which he acknowledge[s] his transgression: simply that he hadn't followed it through, and had gone and confessed' (516). He is the black sheep that is not understood by anyone. In fact, in all his exchanges with Porfiry (pt. 3, chap. 5), Sonia (pt. 5, chap. 4), and Dunia (pt. 6, chap. 7), they all point out the absurdity and insanity of his theory in fantasising one can murder and not call it a crime. Despite being misunderstood, 'a light seem[s] to flash in his dulled eye [...] as though he liked the idea that he was still proud' when he defends his innocence (493). Without valour, Raskolnikov would have lost himself and his will to live. Sonia says he would have nothing but 'weakness of spirit and fear of death alone' (496) after giving up his pride, alluding that his passion is part of what makes him alive. Although he confesses his crimes, he only does that to 'go do some suffering' (433) and do 'what justice demands' (438). Moral and legal permission aside, the dialectical exchanges of other characters introduce the antitheses of Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov. Yet, their valour allows them to be persistent with their ideal selves, attaining individual justice.

With valour, characters are able to bear strengths to withstand temptations and materialise one's actual self. Raskolnikov's internal wrestle between his moral conscience with his arithmetic logic is the most prominent conflict since the beginning of the novel, a never-ending flux that longs for closure. On one hand, his moral conscience resembles Sonia's character, that the goodness in him makes him took sick from the feeling of nausea because of the 'horror and disgust for what he [does]' (Dostoyevsky 77). Even Raskolnikov does not understand this part of himself, just as he is unknowingly drawn to Sonia and feels the strong urge to 'torment' her by confessing (Dostoyevsky 390). But in the other, the arithmetic logic that permits him to murder makes him and Svidrigailov the 'berries from the same field' (Dostoyevsky 277). Svidrigailov is an evil impulsive sensualist that only lives by his own rules. Nonetheless, Svidrigailov has 'a kind of mysterious power over him' and 'within himself, [Raskolnikov] could not stop realising that he really [needs] Svidrigailov for some reason' (Dostoyevsky 441). His 'conflicting impulses' are objectified and embodied by Sonia and Svidrigailov (Wasiolak 133). Hence, when deciding between embracing his moral and sinister self, Raskolnikov himself knows 'Sonia represented an implacable verdict, an irreversible decision. It was either her way or Svidrigailov's' (Dostoyevsky 441). After one last exchange with Svidrigailov, Raskolnikov decides once and for all that 'the evil they had done could not have been the same', and the man is 'unpleasant', 'depraved, undoubtedly sly and treacherous, perhaps quite evil' (Dostoyevsky 441). Raskolnikov could not stoop as low as Svidrigailov and refuses him when he offers him money to 'take off to America' (Dostoyevsky 462), which was his proposal to Sonia earlier in part 4. Raskolnikov's confrontation of his sinister ego let him realise he has been delusional and his 'moral weariness' (Dostoyevsky 440) has proven him anything but vile. By withstanding Svidrigailov's temptation to take the easy way out, he reaches a new personal level of lucidity that allows him to see his actual self.

Individual justice refers to one's valour of pursuing individual rights and freedom, a form of reconciliation within the self. Through dialectical exchanges between and within characters themselves, this form of justice is achieved by letting characters' true selves materialise.

3.4 *The Final Word*

In just one and a half pages, Raskolnikov's future has been renewed, resurrected by love, and filled with infinite happiness. In fact, his conversion is so abrupt that Raskolnikov himself does not know how it happens. As illustrated in previous chapters, Dostoyevsky's narrative has been training his readers what to expect. By insisting on rushing Raskolnikov's conversion and writing his last dream in the epilogue, the novel does not only attain theological justice but also manages to give God the last word that alleviates the superiority of divine justice.

Raskolnikov's last dream stages the two axiomatic premises of theological justice. In the Christianity thought system, God is an absolute form of justice that exists in a suprasensible world that humans have no access to (Cassedy 526). In order to access justice, one has to step over (*perestupick*²⁰) 'man's law into the realm of God's law' (Wasiolek 136). In Raskolnikov's last dream, it highlights God as the ultimate form of justice in an *Inferno*-like world²¹ and only those who are chosen, i.e. converted, are sacred. Those plagued are infected by 'trichinae' (Dostoyevsky 518) that lodge men's bodies physically and spiritually. The infected indulge in extreme arrogance, consider themselves 'clever' (Dostoyevsky 518),

²⁰ In the English translation, the title of the novel is often translated to 'Crime and Punishment'. However, Wasiolek suggests that 'crime' is not an accurate translation of the original Russian word *presluplenie*, which literally means 'stepping over' both legalistically and religiously (136). The most accurate word should be 'transgression', which would help in understanding the context of the novel in a better light. He suggests that the main characters like Raskolnikov, Svidrigailov, and Sonia are constantly stepping over from the legal plane and human plane to the illegal plane and godly plane respectively (Wasiolek 136).

²¹ Raskolnikov's last dream shares some interesting similarities with Dante's *Inferno*, including soldiers that eat each other in Raskolnikov's last dream echoes the theme of cannibalism in Canto 33; sinners' arrogance in their own truths throughout inferno; the trichinae resemble the serpents in the seventh Bolgia (Canto 24); and the overall haunting and blood-soaked turmoil.

‘right’ (Dostoyevsky 518), and that their ‘scientific deductions, [...] moral convictions and their beliefs’ (Dostoyevsky 518-9) are all ‘firmly based’ (Dostoyevsky 519). One holds his own truth and believe that ‘the truth [is] with him alone’ (Dostoyevsky 519). Although the infected seem to have science, rationality, and wisdom on their side, the so-called ‘truths’ do not guarantee anything. On the contrary, nobody knows how to utilise these truths to decide ‘whom to bring on trial or how to try him; they could not agree on what is consider as evil or what is good. They did not know whom to condemn or whom to acquit. People kill each other in a senseless rage’ (Dostoyevsky 519). Rational thinking and science represent human civilisation, tools that reveal the truth and mechanics of the world and its judicial system. Yet, these human wisdoms have no value in justice. Even when justice is in their hands, they are clueless about its execution. Those who are ‘the pure and the chosen’, however, are ‘predestined to begin a new race of men and a new life, to renew and purify the earth’ (Dostoyevsky 519). They are the ones that truly hold the truth to the universe, a metaphorical representation of the converted in Revelation, who ‘have come out of great tribulation’ (*New International Version*, Rev. 5.10) and wear ‘white robes’ that made white ‘in the blood of the Lamb’ (*New International Version*, Rev. 5.15). They are the ones that step into the realm of God. Even if the infected seemingly hold all the truth in the universe, those facts are baseless in the presence of God’s justice that is destined to triumph the blood-soaked earth.

The chosen also represent divine retribution as the only stagnant force and only through conversion could people be saved. The feverish gather and reach some agreement, swearing not to separate (Dostoyevsky 519). ‘No sooner [is] this accomplished, however, [...] they started accusing each other, fighting each other, and stabbing away. [...] Everything and everybody went to wrack and ruin’ (519). The temporary bliss the infected find within their realm is in flux—even truths and reasons do not hold. Nevertheless, divine justice represented by the pure and chosen has not been at all affected. They will save themselves

and get ready to ‘begin a new race of men and a new life, to renew and purify the earth’ (519). Unlike the everchanging and relatively subjective moral codes and truths among mortals, divine retribution is permanent and persistent. The last dream portrays the pure as an allegory of divine justice, the highest form of justice that is the only steadfast truth in midst of turmoil. To reach divine justice, one must undergo conversion.

The *Inferno*-like world also accentuates the notions that transgression is needed in divine justice, and sufferings are signs of a forthcoming salvation. The dream depicts a condemned world suffering from a ‘terrible, unprecedented, and unparalleled plague’ (Dostoyevsky 518). People are mad and violent, unable to distinguish good from evil, abandon their moral principles, and lose sight of the truth. They long for a resolution to put their sufferings to an end. However, their efforts in coming up with trading treaties, fighting the opposite side, or reaching agreements only ends in more chaos and violence. Salvation is needed to counteract the transgression in order to revamp the earth and starts lives anew, making it a precondition for the imminent divine retribution.

Sufferings are also signs of redemption that precedes the final salvation. For the chosen, they are uninfluenced by the plague. Although destined to be saved, they are in the same wracked world as the infected, watching as chaos and damnation unfold. The victors wearing white robes on the Final Judgment Day are those who endure great tribulation and only after calamities could they start life anew (*New International Version*, Rev. 5). In fact, this motif of suffering persists the novel: Dunia suggests ‘by going to suffer, surely [Raskolnikov could] wash away half of [his] crime’ (Dostoyevsky 493); the dominant reason Nikolai confesses is because ‘suffering is a great thing’ (Dostoyevsky 439). Suffering represents one’s realisation of his mistake as well as his punishment (Dostoyevsky 254). Therefore, one must first transgress and suffer so as to be saved.

Raskolnikov's conversion fulfils the two premises anticipated in his last dream. According to the 'Ten Commandments', one shall not have other gods except for god (*New International Version*, Ex. 20.3). Murder and theft are also condemned (*New International Version*, Ex. 20.13, 15). Raskolnikov's violation of the Ten Commandments condemns him as a sinner that needs salvation. He transgresses by committing robbery, murder, and making himself his own God. When explaining himself to Dunia, Raskolnikov uses arithmetic to calculate and legitimise his killing:

'Crime? What crime? [...]—why, *for killing her I'll be forgiven forty sins!*'

(Dostoyevsky 493 emphasis added)

However, in his dream, any form of human wisdom, including rationality, science, or decrees are ultimately pointless as only the ones that are converted can be saved. Regardless of how arithmetically right the murder is, God's justice is not dependent on the result of the murder. Hence, in attempting to use his arithmetic logic in measuring salvation, he has become a slave to his theory, crowning himself his own god. By holding his own truth, he sins against God and thereby, suffers from psychological torment. His transgression allows him to satisfy the fundamental condition in receiving salvation in addition to his conversion that allows him to step into the realm of God's law.

The abandonment of all his stubbornness in figuring out the value of his torments and theory after his conversion gives divine retribution the final word. As preceded in his last dream, his conversion emphasises the divine position of theological justice. In chapter 3.3, we discussed the importance of Raskolnikov's ambition in his ideals and theory. But after his conversion, he has a sudden epiphany about his obsession:

What did they amount to, *all* those torments! Everything—even his crime, even sentence and exile—seemed to him now, in his first outburst of feeling, strange and superficial, as though it had not actually happened to him. (Dostoyevsky 522)

He does not necessarily abandon his thoughts on insisting that he is right, but he abandons the urge to dwell on the matter any further. Before his conversion, his theory is his utmost pride, he had nothing to live for except for his passion. However, his conversion has replaced his obsession with God and love, affirming the two premises that constitute theological justice. And by placing Raskolnikov's conversion at the very end, Dostoyevsky gives theological justice the last word—the superior status that surpasses any other planes of justice, epitomising its divine and final nature.

Chapter 4 *The Aufheben*

4.1 *Murder in Hindsight: Putting the Law on Trial*

Different planes of justice are achieved individually through Dostoyevsky's authorial stratagem. His careful structuring of the novel, narrative, selective dialogues, and arrangement of events lead us right into his 'trap', giving us a delusion that the novel is about nothing but justice. From the genre and the arrangement of the novel, he seemingly highlights two prominent justices that humans often find consolation in in midst of turmoil—legal and divine retribution. Living in a world where God is silent, legal justice is mankind's best effort in attaining justice, a surrogate of God. Nonetheless, even though the novel—like any other detective story—achieves a degree of legal justice, its delivery ultimately compromises itself and others in an *aufheben*. Looking under the façade of closure, in achieving legal justice, individual and vigilante justice is nonetheless compromised, epitomising mankind's impotence in attaining justice.

The gap between justice and the law delineates the legal system in St. Petersburg as a misrepresentation of justice. The system is flawed. Even if the state manages to catch the criminal, there is a fair chance they cannot be convicted. Russia at the time only had two ways to convict a criminal: either (a) the criminal makes a judicial confession in open court in front of a magistrate, or (b) two witnesses give non-contradictory testimonies against the culprit (Burnham 1233-4). Any evidence would serve only to establish suspicion, 'a kind of purgatory between conviction and acquittal' (Burnham 1235). The system, therefore, had a low conviction rate, where most of the time crimes do pay (Burnham 1235). This failure in the legal system is evident in *Crime and Punishment*. Despite the evidence Porfiry claims to have, his extravagant insistence in making Raskolnikov confess is in fact a 'legal necessity' (Burnham 1235). Even Raskolnikov himself knows what the police have is insufficient to convict him:

‘They won’t be able to do anything. They don’t have any real evidence. [...] All their evidence is double-edged. I mean, I can turn their accusations to my advantage—understand? [...] I will go to jail... then they’ll have to let me out. Because they don’t have a shred of real evidence, and won’t have, I give my word. They can’t convict anybody with what they have.’ (Dostoyevsky 401)

As long as Raskolnikov does not confess, Porfiry’s psychological profiling or evidence would fail to convict him.

Expanding on Burnham’s point, Porfiry’s rant and Raskolnikov’s mockery of the legal system and the police force also demonstrate the distance between the law and justice:

‘You really were right when you mocked our little police formalities with such wit, he-he! You know, these (some of them, certainly) profound psychological devices of ours—well, they’re quite absurd. Yes, if you like, they’re quite useless, really, if they’re terribly cramped by the regulations.’ (Dostoyevsky 323)

‘Maybe the new courts will have some effect here—I hope to God they do!’
(Dostoyevsky 433)

As an investigator, Porfiry acknowledges that police regulations and judicial system involve rigid formalities and rules that do not guarantee justice. The best he can do is ‘hope to God’ (Dostoyevsky 433) that their system could still punish those who deserve it. As Burnham suggested, a confession is vital in conviction. Granted, investigators might just do anything just to convict a criminal:

‘Well, here’s this wretched Mikolka you’ve been grilling—the way you do—you must have been at him day and night, rehearsing him: “You’re the murderer, you did it, you’re the murderer....” And now he’s confessed you’re starting to pick him part again. “You’re lying,” you tell him, “you’re not the murderer! You couldn’t be!

You're not using your own words!" So how can you stand there and say your profession isn't comical?' (Dostoyevsky 338)

Raskolnikov's mockery suggests that the police might as well incriminate innocence just to attain legal justice. To exert justice with an unjust system does not guarantee retribution but instead jeopardises the idea of justice itself, exposing the self-defeating nature of legal enforcements.

In addition to its flaws, the legal system fails to guarantee justice in a sense that it fails to deter people from crimes:

'[...] among the lower classes the *crime rate has been on the increase* these last five years. I do not refer to the cases of *burglary and arson that take place everywhere all the time*. What strikes me as most strange is that the *crime rate has been increasing in the upper classes*, too, in exactly the same way, in a parallel manner, so to speak. [...] how is one to explain this *deterioration of moral standards* in the civilised part of our society?' (Dostoyevsky 146 emphases added)

Apart from the low conviction rate, the 'deterioration of moral standards' (Dostoyevsky 146) in St. Petersburg is concerning, revealing the law's impotence in prohibiting crimes. The skyrocketing crime rate, as Razumikhin suggests, in 'the socialist point of view, [...] is a protest against the abnormality of the social order', 'if society were constructed normally, [...] all crimes would disappear at once because there would be nothing to protest against and we'd all become righteous in a flash' (Dostoyevsky 246). His comment discloses one of the dangers of a legal justice system that does not represent justice: 'When the justice system is deemed deeply flawed, people are apt to take the law into their own hands' (Churchland 1). This is especially true when Luzhin who incriminates Sonia (Dostoyevsky pt. 5, chap. 1, 3) and Svidrigailov the rapist (Dostoyevsky pt. 6, chap. 5) are not punished. The presence of

increasing crimes unveils the gap between the law and justice, proving that even legal justice itself is impotent.

To its extreme, the judicial process forces obedience and conformity to uphold power, not justice. Upon thinking about his punishment, Raskolnikov outlines the ordeals in jail is to make use of ‘hard labour’ (Dostoyevsky 495) to crush him ‘by suffering and idiocy’ (495) until there is nothing ‘left to live for’ (495):

‘I wonder whether my spirit will humble itself sufficiently in the next fifteen or twenty years so I’ll snivel meekly when confronted, and call myself a criminal? I will, yes, I really will! That’s why I’m being sent off to hard labour; that’s what they’re after....’ (495)

For Raskolnikov, the punishment of his crimes involves subduing his pride and making him recognise himself as a criminal. As Porfiry himself commented, people ‘find the mere word “trial” terrifying’ (433). Legal justice is no longer aiming for a reinstatement of harmony or justice, but fear—to legitimise the state’s power over individuals by running water down stone, even at the cost of their individuality. They do not have to understand what the law is reinstating, as long as they are meek enough to understand their powerlessness against the state.

As illustrated in chapter 3.3, an individual’s confession aids the achievement of criminal justice and restoration of the disrupted social order. However, it also compromises individuality by erasing one’s ambition and ideals. In his trial, Raskolnikov is ‘sincerely repentant’ (Dostoyevsky 508), and claims to have acted on his crimes because of ‘his weak and irresponsible character, exasperated, moreover, by privations and failures’ (508). Yet, his monologue in prison reveals his ‘conscience is at rest’ (516), and does not understand his crimes as ‘hideous’ (516) as others see it. Psychologically, Raskolnikov achieves individual justice by insisting to be a Napoleon. Yet, in reality, he is condemned, encountering the

‘juridical problem’ (251) like any other ‘extraordinary’ that are punished and hung by the mass for transgressing the law (251). Though legal justice does not necessarily eradicate individual justice, it compromises individual retribution for criminal conviction.

While vigilante justice makes Raskolnikov a hero, the delivery of legal justice makes him a criminal, creating a moral injury in readership and compromises our sense of retribution. In establishing vigilante justice, we are invited to focus on a utilitarian perspective on justice other than a Kantian one, seeing Raskolnikov as a benevolent hero. However, no one understands him except for Svidrigailov. He is portrayed as a misunderstood, miserable figure in jail—‘perpetually gloomy, taciturn, and scarcely even interested [in any] news’ (Dostoyevsky 513), ‘indifferent to food’ (513) as he loses his will to live and all ‘frivolous hopes’ (513) for the future, and ‘estrang[e] himself from everybody’ (514). He even describes himself as nothing but a ‘mere existence’ (515). By portraying him as a soulless man, it further lures readers’ pity towards him and see him as an unappreciated hero of his time. Although the culprit is legally obliged to pay for his crimes, we still have a hard time taking the ending as justified.

The novel does everything a crime fiction novel conventionally does—unfold the mystery and put the culprit in his place. However, Dostoyevsky has the valour ‘to dare’ (Dostoyevsky 458) in challenging one of the most important premises in the genre, to question the law and exposes its flawed nature that does nothing but condemn a ‘hero’. The clues he leaves in the novel also expose the distance between the law and the notion of justice itself. As Raskolnikov says,

‘I know now, Sonia, that whoever is strong and self-confident in the mind and spirit has power over them! Whoever is bold and dares has right on his side. Whoever can spit on the most people becomes their legislator, and whoever dares most has the most

right! So it has been in the past, and so it will always be! Only a blind man can't see it!' (398)

The law is but a game of thrones. It is ultimately about exerting the power of the state over individuals with its spurious nature, jeopardising the very idea of justice.

4.2 After a Leap into Faith: Putting God on Trial

When human effort in obtaining justice is proven to be nothing but impotent, divine retribution becomes the highest—if not the only—form of justice. Like a lot of religious testimonies, the novel ends with a conversion tale that seemingly saves the life of Raskolnikov. However, Dostoyevsky—though a believer himself that often defends religion—is critical of Christianity and is unafraid to confront some of the questions that theodicies struggled to answer or even accept. Through attaining divine retribution, he seemingly raises the question of divine justice as a possible ‘apotheosis of cruelty’ (Shestov 498).

In attaining the unconceivable theological retribution, the necessity to embrace our maddening inaction in mankind's dimension jeopardises earthly justice. As established in chapter 3.4, divine justice is unconceivable to humans, at least not here and now. Raskolnikov's belief in ‘the New Jerusalem’ (Dostoyevsky 251) depicts the gap between divine justice and the present. ‘New Jerusalem’ refers to the prophet Ezekiel's vision of a city for the followers of God to live in, presumably a just society established after the second coming of Christ. ‘But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father’ (*New International Version*, Matt. 24.36). Divine justice is, therefore, distanced in time and space, and humans do not know what and how it is delivered. Before confessing to Sonia, Raskolnikov asks Sonia if she had to choose one to live, would she choose Luzhin or Katherine Ivanovna (her mother) (Dostoyevsky pt. 5, chap. 4). Luzhin

incriminates Sonia just to seek revenge on Raskolnikov (Dostoyevsky pt. 5, chap. 3), and letting Luzhin live would mean he could ‘commit abominations’ (Dostoyevsky 389), which supposedly makes Katherine the obvious answer. Nonetheless, Sonia refuses to answer:

‘Why do you ask the impossible?’ [...]

‘But how can I know God’s will...and why do you ask what shouldn’t be asked? Why these empty questions? How could it ever depend on my decision? And who ever made me judge of who was to live and who not live?’ (Dostoyevsky 389)

To Sonia, Raskolnikov’s hypothetical question weighs more than he thinks from a Christian perspective. Even the mere thought of grasping the arithmetic of divine justice is ‘impossible’ and wrong (Dostoyevsky 389). Her answer illustrates God as the only judge in determining the worth and value of an individual’s life and the suprasensible nature of theological justice. Divine retribution is, therefore, secretive, and only available far into the future.

Yet, taking a big leap into faith is at variance with earthly justice. Earthly justice includes the planes of justice demonstrated in chapter 3, namely legal, vigilante, and individual justice. Distinct though they are, they share a sense of immediacy, a form of justice that can be seen here and now. The urge and desire for retribution in St. Petersburg are immediate. Besides the pressing need for help from deprivation like Raskolnikov, the frequent occurrence of crimes and the murder of Aliona and Lizaveta demands legal justice. Porfiry acknowledges the divine’s plan in Raskolnikov’s life yet, for him, the pursuit of justice is at present:

‘And you know, maybe God is saving you for something. So buck up, and be a little less afraid. Are you frightened at the great task that stands before you? No, it would be shameful to be afraid of that. Since *you’ve taken the step you’ve taken*, brace yourself. That’s justice. *Do what justice demands*. I know you don’t believe it—but, by God, life *will* sustain you.’ (Dostoyevsky 438 emphases added)

For Porfiry, to put Raskolnikov behind bars has an urgency and immediacy that is contrary to theological justice in the unforeseen future, and the punishment in legal justice concerns the present. These injustices on earth demand justice to be delivered, to be seen here and now. Yet, theological retribution is so distant that it contradicts our understanding of justice. Even the crime fiction genre demands justice—the need for harmony to be restored and culprits to be caught. Blind chance of justice in a remote place and time puts people in an unease state and makes almost zero sense in midst of turmoil.

Hence, taking a leap of faith amounts to the need to embrace the maddening inaction and passiveness despite the presence of sufferings. In Raskolnikov's last dream, the pure and the chosen plays no role in the plague. They are 'not seen anywhere by anybody, and nobody heard their voices or their words' (Dostoyevsky 519), almost as if they were hidden by God. Their inaction forms a stark contrast with the infected who, though in futility, try to take the matter of justice into their own hands. Their futile attempts resemble that of Porfiry's and Raskolnikov's effort in delivering justice on their own, only to compromise justice one way or another. In achieving divine retribution, the human tendency to be active needs to be suspended. Rather, there is a need to embrace the necessary passiveness to wait for God and believe that the Divine will one day develop into a perfectly justified world. As Raskolnikov's response to Sonia's refusal to choose, 'once God's will gets mixed up in it, nothing will be done' (389). Regardless of the hollowness of humans' continuous struggle for justice, like the infected, it is part of human nature to take matters into their hands and divine justice contradicts just that.

Adding on, by embracing theological justice, humans also have to bury part of their rationality and teleologically suspend judgment on the ethical. The rampant sufferings in St. Petersburg prompt the problem of evil, alluding that in believing in the theological, one must inevitably abandon part of her rationality. Lizaveta was gentle and meek, a faithful believer

of God. But she was a victim of domestic abuse and brutal murder. Even after her death, no one seems to remember her, even Porfiry the investigator only accuses Raskolnikov of ‘only kill[ing] an old woman’, i.e. Aliona (Dostoyevsky 438). Not to mention the victim of sexual assault is tailed by a pervert (pt.1, chap. 4), Sonia is forced to become a prostitute to make a living for her family (pt. 1, chap. 2), and Haymarket Square is crowded with peddlers and ragpickers (pt. 1, chap. 5). Even little children such as Sonia’s sister, Polia, might have to become a prostitute out of poverty (pt. 4, chap. 4). To humans, these agonies are not compatible with the omnipotent, omnibenevolent, and all-powerful ‘God [as He] will not permit such a horror’ (306). However, as unbelievable as it is, ‘[God] permits others’ (307). While suffering is essential in attaining theological justice, the presence of suffering and evil is not understandable within human logic. One must, therefore, abandon part of his rationality in the presence of suffering and suspend their judgment on God’s plan.

Likewise, some form of obedience is needed for an individual to submit and devote herself to God, sublating individual justice by becoming a ‘holy fool’ (Dostoyevsky 309). Raskolnikov’s conversion happens when he is unconscious:

He could not think very long or steadily about anything that evening or focus his mind on anything; nor did he come to any conscious decision; he had merely become aware. Life replaced logic, and in his consciousness something quite different now had to elaborate and articulate itself. (522)

His religious ecstasy is unprecedented, sudden, and illogical. To a certain extent, he is seized by divine power that gives him no choice but to conform. Similarly, Sonia’s faith is also instinctive, almost as if a reflex. When asked if she prays a lot to God, she ‘swiftly and energetically’ asks ‘what would I be without God’ (309). Although she demonstrates her grounded faith with an instinctive response, she could not answer Raskolnikov when he asks ‘what does God give [her] in return’ (309), and angrily dismisses his question and replies that

God ‘does everything’ (309). Her blind and instinctive faith make her a ‘holy fool’ (309). In a sense, the answer seems to cover everything (God rules over everything and therefore, does everything) at the same time nothing (unable to pin down specific good God does for her). This irrational obedience of the Christian doctrine accentuates the ugly truth in attaining theological justice: it must, at least to some degree, compromises one’s individuality in embracing the unexplainable faith.

Ivan Karamazov in *The Brothers Karamazov* perfectly captures the dilemma between theological justice and the human longing for justice:

‘I must have retribution, otherwise I’ll do away with myself. And that retribution must not be at some unspecified place and some unspecified time, but here and now on earth, where I myself can witness it.’ (306)

The process of attaining divine retribution does not necessarily entail an apt ending that guarantees the impeccable happiness of mankind. Rather, it exposes the cruelty of divine justice—a power that supposedly bestows upon the earth in a faraway timeline that more or less fails to answer the prompt of evil, demanding at least a certain amount of mindless conformity. If divine justice is the final and ultimate plane of justice, it might as well be the apotheosis of cruelty because of its imperfection.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

Situated in a world full of injustices—privation, sufferings, a failing legal system, our ill-fated hero, Raskolnikov, takes justice into his own hands, in an attempt to bring his idealised version of justice to life. By killing Aliona, he actualises this ideal but simultaneously kills the ideal itself, not to mention bringing forth injustices, hence urging the state to restore the disharmony created. But once that legal harmony is restored, the *aufheben* exposes the one-sidedness of another plane of retribution. One by one, the novel tries to restore different aspects of justice, as if a child tries to use her fingers to stop the leaking water from a pipe full of holes, only to realise it would never work.

This perpetual discrepancy parallels Sisyphus' attempts in pushing the boulder—to reach the top of the hill only for it to fall back down again. Just as Ivan Karamazov's conversation with the devil, a sinner walks a quadrillion kilometre just for the heavenly gates to be opened for two seconds (qtd. *The Brother Karamazov* in Shestov). But the 'nonsense endured for the sake of two seconds of heavenly bliss' is but an 'expression of the thirst for life' (Shestov 496). This particular thirst, the idea of 'unfinalisability' ('The Hero' 59) is Dostoyevsky's dominating interest. To its extreme, even the supposedly finalised and ultimate divine retribution is imperfect. Nonetheless, the unfinalised quality in justice does not indicate absolute justice as hallucinatory. On the contrary, its true form is but this perpetual contradicting force trapped in an endless *aufheben*. Hence, the attainment of 'absolute justice' is, in fact, impossible.

Does that give us a nihilist reading of the novel, that everything we do is futile? Not necessarily. For Dostoyevsky, mankind's futile attempts in struggling epitomises its unfinalisability and divine quality to struggle. At the end of the novel, Dostoyevsky writes:

At the time [Raskolnikov] did not know that a new life had not been given him for nothing, [...]

That is the beginning of a new story, though; the story of a man's gradual renewal and rebirth, of his gradual transition from one world to another, of his acquaintance with a new reality of which he had previously been completely ignorant. That would make the subject of a new story; our present story is ended. (522)

The story after Raskolnikov's conversion is a story for another time, probably because what Dostoyevsky is interested in is the unfinished qualities of Raskolnikov in his struggles. Once his internal wrestle comes to an end, Dostoyevsky's interest also comes to an end. His prominent interest in human struggle is correlated to the discrepancy shown on the notion of justice, it is, after all, an extravagant effort in vain, just as the infected's attempts at retribution in Raskolnikov's last dream. Despite the result of the struggle, the divine 'originality' (Dostoyevsky 463) in struggling is what makes Raskolnikov the hero. Porfiry the investigator might have restored legal justice and Sonia the saint might have proven her unshaken faith. But they barely struggle, if at all, as compared to Raskolnikov. He understands the prominent essence of humanity: its unfinishability. This quality is epitomised by his duality, that he could never be defined as purely good or evil. His character is vile yet kind, cunning yet genuine, impulsive yet meticulous. Even a murderer could take his time to make sure a seduced girl gets home safe; or give the little he has to help a widow and her children; or go out of his way to make sure his sister and mother no longer have to suffer because of his love for them. Raskolnikov's complex, illogical, and conflicting quality is what makes him human.

Perhaps the human effort in attaining justice is ultimately futile. However, Dostoyevsky invites us to continue our futile attempts in search for justice instead of abandoning all hope, just as he decided not to let Raskolnikov shoot himself at the end. Saving Raskolnikov might be Dostoyevsky's attempt to let Raskolnikov be 'right' at least about one thing: 'for broad understanding and deep feeling, you need pain and suffering. I

believe really great men must experience great sadness in the world' (Dostoyevsky 254)—the human 'strength to bear what time cannot abate, / And feed of bitter fruits without accusing Fate' (Byron line 62-3).

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**Construction through Rejection – The Influence of Dante’s *Divine Comedy* on Blake’s
“A Memorable Fancy” from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell***

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Introduction

The notion of good and bad, Hell and Heaven have long been in discourse in various domains. The dichotomised morality has been ingrained in the human mind, predominantly due to the church. In fact, the ideology of good people having a good afterlife, the evil going to hell is shared by different religions. In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante architects a thorough and systematic threefold afterlife, namely *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso* (Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise). He puts sinners into different circles of Hell, depending on the nature and the degree of their sins. Those punishments reflect their transgression. The more sinful the person is, the greater the suffering is inflicted upon them. This is a conventional and universal understanding of Heaven and Hell. However, William Blake repudiates the conventional dichotomised notion of heaven and hell. Known for his detestation for institutionalised church and indoctrinated values, Blake wrote *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, in furious response to Swedenborg’s book, *Heaven and Hell*, which advocates the orthodox theology of the afterlife in his own terms. As the title suggests, Blake’s Heaven and Hell are intertwined. They substantially subvert the widely received afterlife vision. In the fourth “A Memorable Fancy” (Plate 17-20), Blake describes three scenes in his journey, the ‘Hell’ that the Angel shows him; one that appears before Blake after the Angel leaves; and the third scene, to which Blake takes the Angel. Those imageries they encounter are absurd and border on nonsensical. Nonetheless, they have certain similarities and share some fundamental ideologies with previous works about Heaven and Hell. This essay will discuss

the imageries and allegories used in William Blake's "A Memorable Fancy" (number four) that are influenced by Dante. By preserving and subverting Dantean elements, Blake rejects but simultaneously embraces Dante's system, and reconstructs his own idea of Heaven and Hell.

As many critics agree, the entire book of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* discusses the contrastive forces of 'reason' and 'energy' (Roberts, 40), both of which are necessary and interdependent. The forces themselves are neutral, but the institutionalised churches labelled them as "good" and "evil" respectively (Roberts, 40). They denunciate 'energy' for it is "evil" and upsets the authority's stability. William Blake believed his era was an era of 'reason'. Therefore, he aims to balance the two forces by favouring 'energy' in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (Roberts, 42).

Owing to the sheer magnitude of *the Divine Comedy*, multiple Romantic poets took their inspirations from Dante. But Dante's popularity in the English Romantic era, or the 18th century and the early 19th century, was restricted mostly to the Francesca and Paolo and the Ugolino episodes among all the scenes in *The Divine Comedy* (Santis). Through recounting Ugolino's episode, Dante and Blake both employ allegory, which demonstrates Blake's affirmation and rejection of Dante (Tambling, 34). The use of allegory liberates readers' interpretation. Allegory also points to dissimilarity, and that the object is marked by something beyond its literal meaning (Tambling, 44). It creates a reversibility of texts and interpretations (Tambling, 45), which transcends literary periods.

Given the limited space of this project, this essay will only take into consideration imageries in the fourth "A Memorable Fancy" from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, as this particular section is the longest and contains the most fantastical, absurd elements and symbolisms. The essay will first examine the Leviathan and the black tempest. It is encountered by the two as the Angel takes the poet into his "eternal lot" (Plate 17). This is

reminiscent of the tempest in the second circle of Dante's *Inferno*, where Paolo and Francesca, and the Lustful, are punished by the perpetual wind. The next part of the paper will then be dedicated to the chained primates in the scene where the poet takes the Angel to see his lot. The cannibalistic, fettered, and grotesque primates mirror the scene of Ugolino in the ninth circle of Dante's *Inferno*. Ugolino is imprisoned in ice for he has committed treachery and eaten his own children. He is punished by having to endlessly eat Archbishop Ruggieri's brain – an act of cannibalism. This section of the essay shows how Blake draws from Dante and rejects him. The next section will examine the preserved elements of Dante in Blake. Blake and the Angel go through a mill to enter Hell, whereas Dante's Satan is described as a mill as well. The similarity in the mechanical grinding process highlights Blake's view of repression as sin and his rejection of Dante's retributive system. Lastly, the paper will discuss what Blake inherits the most from Dante – allegory and imagery as a medium to construct a system.

On the Tempest and the Leviathan

The tempest in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* has clear correspondence with the tempest in the second circle of Dante's *Inferno*. When Blake is guided by the Angel to see his "eternal lot" (Plate 17), they arrive at an "infinite abyss", and behold "vast spiders" of black and white (Plate 18). A Leviathan in a tempest then emerges, and charges towards the two. The "black" tempest is compared to "a cataract of blood mixed with fire" (Plate 18), evoking the sense of physicality and passion²². The Leviathan is described to be "not many stones' throw" (Plate 18) away from them. This unusual measurement of distance is reminiscent of stoning people to death in Biblical allusions, a form of execution for people who committed

²² The word "cataract" draws attention to the visual, foreshadowing the different views of Blake and the Angel.

crimes pertaining to sex or idolatry²³. Then, the Leviathan's "mouth and red gills" "[tinge] the black deeps with beams of blood" (Plate 18). This phrase, combined with the implication of physical passion and danger, corresponds to the scene in *The Inferno*, where Francesca and Paolo are in "black airs" and Francesca says she has "stained the world blood-red" (Durling, 91). This direct quote from Dante ties the Leviathan and lust together. The Leviathan – a long, rod-like serpent that emerges from two spherical spiders – then becomes an explicit phallic symbol.

This invocation invites a revisit to Dante's *Inferno*. The second circle of Hell contains the Lustful. The Lustful, including Francesca and Paolo, are buffeted by a perpetual black tempest. This *contrapasso* (suffer the opposite) reflects them submitting to and being driven by their lustful desires in their lifetimes. They spend their eternity surrendering to and being propelled by a strong wind, a physicalisation of their unrestrained, tempestuous, and licentious desires. Among the sinners, Francesca and Paolo descend from the tempest like "doves" (Durling, 82), with birds being a representation of sexuality in the Middle Ages²⁴. The pair are put to Hell by Dante as their lustful deeds led to their secular demise. Francesca was married to Paolo's brother, but the two committed adultery that lasted more than a decade. The two were eventually killed by her husband who found the two in bed. Francesca in *The Inferno* is not entirely reliable and guiltless as she appears to be. She does not name herself when she first meets Dante the pilgrim, and she descends from the storm, "guided by will" (Musa, 112). She willingly goes to Dante the Pilgrim to make an appearance and to elicit pity. Her famous speech consisting of three "love's" (*Inferno* Canto 5: line 100-108) describes how her love has brought her to her lamentable end. By disguising lust as love, she is misleading the pilgrim in exchange for sympathy amidst the suffering, as one would not

²³ Idolatry is also heavily linked to sexual infidelity in ancient times.

²⁴ See, for instance, *The Parlement of Foules*, by Chaucer.

blame a person for 'loving' another. She is therefore attempting to unload her sins by misguiding people and undermining divine judgement, which is successful of her, because upon hearing her plead, Dante the Pilgrim "faint[s]" "as a body falls" from extreme sympathy (Durling, 93). A distinction needs to be made: Dante the Pilgrim deeply sympathises with Francesca and Paolo's predicament, for he is vastly affected, or deceived, by Francesca's words. His pity is physicalised to the extent that he faints. Dante the Poet, on the other hand, does not bestow pity on her, as he virtually puts her in Hell in his composition. He considers Francesca lustful since she was unable to rein her desires, therefore a sinner who deserves eternal punishment.

The divided persona is also present in Blake's work. I shall call the two Blake the Poet and Blake the Pilgrim as well. However, the two show almost identical views and stances, as opposed to Dante's personas. Blake the Pilgrim's actions reflect the views and values of Blake the Poet. In the Leviathan scene, Blake the Pilgrim is unaffected by the black monstrous tempest and the Leviathan, whereas the Angel is terrified of this scene and retreats to his mill. The Leviathan, being a phallic symbol that represents sexuality, is clearly rejected by the conventional church. The Angel fleeing demonstrates the conventional religious's hypocritical fear and demonisation of sexuality, whereas Blake the Poet embraces it, as shown by Blake the Pilgrim's unaffectedness by the Leviathan.

Blake is strongly opposed to Dante's, and most conventional people's, belief that lustfulness is a sin, and celebrates the expression of sexuality and bodily desires. The monstrous Leviathan vanishes immediately after the Angel departs. The phallic symbol is not a threat anymore; it transmutes into a peaceful realm. These two completely different sceneries in the supposedly same location exhibit the variance in human perceptions. It vividly shows two perspectives towards sexuality: the Angel, or the institutionalised church, rejects it, while Blake embraces it. On one hand, the Angel "climb[s] up from his station into

the mill” (Plate 19) to flee from the Leviathan. Both “station” and “mill” highlight the complacency of the religion that restricts human passions and represent the ‘reason’ that Blake opposes in *The Marriage* (to be discussed in further details in the later section). Ironically, the only progress the Angel makes here is the movement from one station to another. On the other hand, Blake celebrates, or embraces, this sexuality by accepting the Leviathan and allowing it to express its energy. Besides, Blake implies such energy is godly. The Leviathan’s forehead is “divided into streaks of green and purple” (Plate 18), akin to “those on a Tyger’s forehead”. The “Tyger” makes its appearance in Blake’s arguably most famous poem in *The Songs of Innocence and of Experience* with its counterpart “The Lamb”. These two poems show the spectrum and the diversity of God’s creations, since the two are both embodiments of God. The poems illustrate that God can be “meek” and “mild” (line 15, “The Lamb”), but also “fearful” (line 24, “The Tyger”). The assimilation between the Leviathan and the Tyger stresses that the Leviathan is God’s creation and embodies God’s quality, thus a holy being. The Leviathan charges towards the two with “all the fury” (Plate 19), underscoring the ‘energy’ that it contains. The Leviathan being a “spiritual existence” (Plate 19) reiterates its holiness and spirituality. Therefore, the Leviathan’s ‘energy’ is a godly quality, and so is human energy, such as sexuality. Blake the poet intentionally depicts the creature that is deemed ‘evil’, a phallic symbol, to be a being of sacredness. Furthermore, in “the Proverbs of Hell”, Blake states “exuberance is beauty” (Plate 10), showing his endorsement of sexual liberty. Blake subverts the conventional understanding of sexuality by reinstating sexual desires are of God’s creations, thus should be embraced and unrestrained.

In addition, the contrastive forces of ‘energy’ and ‘reason’ in Dante are illustrated and picked up by Blake. In *The Inferno*, the Lustful are said to have succumbed their “reason” to their lust (Durling, 89). Dante uses the word “ragion” (Tuscan for *reason*) deliberately to criticise the lack of restraint of human desire. Blake strongly rejects this idea, since he

believes that 'reason' and 'energy' should be in co-existence. The entirety of *The Marriage* aims to illustrate this balance, to subvert the denunciation of 'energy', and to halt 'reason's' restriction of 'energy'. Therefore, Francesca and Paolo and the Lustful in circle 2 should not be tormented in Blake's view, as they are merely embracing their sexuality, their 'energy', and embracing God's creation. It is the institutionalised church that perceives this as 'evil', attaches immorality to sexuality, thus creating a split image between the Angel and Blake the Pilgrim when confronting with the same scene. The scene that the pilgrim beholds is simple, peaceful, and pastoral. The Leviathan and the seemingly terrible sight are "no more" (Plate 19) right after the Angel's departure. The place is left with "a bank beside a river by moonlight" and a harper singing (Plate 19). This description borders on being anti-climactic, as the whole scene is granted with 7 words only²⁵. The strong juxtaposition between the two scenes, both in terms of the image and Blake the poet's description of them, underlines the unreasonable fear of sexuality and liberty in the Angel's eyes. The unembellished description of the second scene conveys a sense of pastoral simplicity and Edenic innocence that humans should embrace. The simple and Edenic scene is "pleasant" and peaceful, with music. Strikingly, there is a harper singing in this scene – the only human in the whole piece other than Blake and the Angel, putting emphasis on the human aspect of sexuality, contrary to the church's demonisation of sexuality as an evil creature. The harper singing "The man who never alters his opinion is like standing water, & breeds reptiles of the mind" (Plate 19), mocks the church for creating imaginary dangerous scenarios – the Leviathan – that only exists in its mind. Moreover, the harper, like Blake, is an artist, as they both exert creative 'energy'. Their poetic, musical creation and imagination are an antithesis to the church's restrictive 'reason'.

²⁵ One might argue that the number 7 has the religious connotation of being complete and divinely perfect, as the recount of the pilgrim also consists of 7 words: "a bank by moonlight, hearing a harper".

Given that this is the same location, same setting, viewed from two different perspectives, it is reasonable to deduce that the two beings described – the Leviathan and the harper – are the same figure. Both of them exude ‘energy’: the Leviathan is charged with energy of “all the fury”; the harper exerts creative energy by playing music. For reasons elucidated above, these two are the different perspectives towards sexuality. The church fears and demonises it into an evil creature, while Blake embraces and appreciates sexuality as a form of energy that is human and godly. Blake the pilgrim sees the ‘human’ in the harper, energy in the Leviathan’s sexuality, while the church considers sexuality evil, animalistic²⁶ and so should be restrained and tabooed. The harper is incorporated and assimilated into nature, as the expression of sexuality is both natural and naturalistic. The Edenic and pleasant setting is often seen in Blake’s *Songs of Innocence* to denote innocence, purity, and joy. By connecting innocence with sexuality, he is celebrating sexuality and reckoning it innocent, innate, and fundamentally holy. Dante chastises the Lustful for subjecting their “*ragion*” (reason) to their licentious desires, and punishes those who let lust, or ‘energy’, overcome their reason. Blake challenges this entirely by advocating the balance of ‘reason’ and ‘energy’ – one should not restrain sexuality for it is ‘energy’ that is natural, innocent, and divine.

On Cannibalism

The scene of cannibalism is situated between two planets, which is derived from Dante. Blake seizes the Angel “in [his] arms”, to forcefully take him to the “body of the sun” (Plate 19). The reversal of the guiding role is representative of Blake the Poet’s attempt of dethroning and subverting the institutionalised church. Blake the Pilgrim’s superior strength

²⁶ Blake depicts the church’s dehumanisation and demonisation of sexuality in a literal way, by seeing a man as a monstrous, evil creature.

undermines, and overthrows, the Angel's authoritative role in the narrative. Passing many planets, they leap into "the void between Saturn and the Fixed Stars" (Plate 19). Sphere Seven of Dante's *Paradiso* is Saturn, where it contains the Contemplatives, the people who demonstrate temperance and abstinence in their lives. Besides, the Fixed Stars in the *Paradiso*, are where Virgin Mary resides. She is glorified for her chastity before and after giving birth to Jesus Christ. The complete abstinence and the celebration of chastity are what Blake detests and attempts to subvert in *The Marriage*. Incidentally, Saturn is the ancient Roman God²⁷, the father of Zeus, who devoured five of his children in order not to be overthrown by them. The act of cannibalism, specifically eating of one's own offspring, is indubitably hinted at and satirized in *The Marriage*. By linking Virgin Mary together with ancient Greek Gods as well as animalistic cannibalism, Blake restrains none of his satire to condemn the church's excessive sanctification of abstinence, or its attempt to restrict 'energy' in humans.

This primate scene bears resemblance to the Ugolino episode in Dante's *Inferno* in terms of cannibalism and incarceration. In *The Marriage*, monkeys are "chained" in a brick house, eating and mating with each other, but their body is "withheld by the shortness of their chains" (Plate 20). Count Ugolino in *The Inferno* is punished in circle 9 of Hell for his sin of treachery, as a traitor to the country, to be precise. Ugolino, an Italian politician just before Dante's time, was accused of treason by Archbishop Ruggieri during their political conflict. Ruggieri subsequently imprisoned Ugolino in a tower with his children and grandchildren to starve them to death. During their incarceration, Ugolino "bite[s] [his] hands in anguish" (Musa, 372) and later eats his children out of hunger, according to Dante's *Inferno*. In Hell, Ugolino and Ruggieri are lodged in the frozen lake of Antenora, and Ugolino ceaselessly gnaws at the latter's brain. Their eternal punishment involves a constant reminder and

²⁷ The Greek counterpart is Cronus.

repetition of the cannibalism that Ugolino underwent and Ruggieri put him through. The gnawing grants Ugolino an outlet for his grief and hatred of Ruggieri, while Ruggieri is deprived of any form of outlet. His brain is filled with Ugolino's hatred, literally. His continual cannibalism is alluded to in *The Marriage*, where Ruggieri and the church are symbolically castigated for torturing Ugolino. Blake the Poet dehumanises Ugolino's imprisonment and cannibalism to illustrate the characters as shackled monkeys and baboons devouring and copulating with one another to sympathise with Ugolino as well as to chastise the church.

Blake had shown his sympathy for Count Ugolino through other works before the composition of *The Marriage*. Blake was inspired by Dante's episode of Ugolino to produce illustrations of Count Ugolino and the children in the tower of imprisonment. In the coloured painting, two Angels hover on his head, bestowing pity on him (Blake, *Inferno* Canto 33). Another pencil sketch of a similar incarcerated Ugolino includes a line below, "Does thy God, O priest, take such vengeance as this?" (Blake, *The Gates of Paradise*). This line serves as a censure to Archbishop Ruggieri that imprisoned Ugolino to starve him and his children to death. Through this quote, not only does Blake rebuke this specific Archbishop, but also all the church members, and more broadly, Dante's Hell as a system of divine retribution. In addition, the cannibalistic primates that prey on the weak in "A Memorable Fancy" allude to the Dantean divine retribution, which is believed by many conventional believers of Christianity. The acts of eating and being eaten are an alteration of vengeance, as it highlights that the strong have the ultimate hold over the weak. Blake writes a line below one of his sketches of the circular and staged system of *The Inferno*, "Whatever Book is for Vengeance for Sin, & whatever Book is Against the Forgiveness of Sins is... of Satan the Accuser & Father of Hell" (*Sketches of Dante's Inferno*). He completely rejects this retributive system devised by Dante, including the punishment for Ugolino, but believes God is all-forgiving.

Blake, through the primates' scene, explicates the distorted energy in human beings after restraint. This is the Angel's "eternal lot". From Dante's *Inferno*, and from the previous episodes in Blake, the 'lot', or 'punishment', reflects the person's sin. For instance, the Lustful, who were driven by their storms of desire in their lifetimes, are propelled by a storm in *The Inferno*. Blake the Pilgrim arrives at the scene of Leviathan due to his carnal sins, according to the Angel. In this lot for the Angel, Blake the poet is accusing the Angel of the sin of restraining 'energy', 'energy' of self and of others. The primates symbolises the ramification of the Angel's celebration of abstinence and suppression of energy – distorted energy. Blake the Pilgrim and the Angel proceed into the brick house, into the human faculty, to inspect the inside of 'the Contemplatives' to find restriction of energy. The celebrated Contemplatives do not have less 'energy' the churches deem evil, but are instead chained like prisoners such that their energy cannot be discharged. The restraint has distorted their energy and transformed it into something frightening and repulsive, as the Angel and Blake both are "terribly annoyed" at the "stench" of the scene (Plate 20). The primates cannibalise and take satisfaction from the weak ones in their proximity, who are also chained. Some derive satisfaction from themselves, as one "savourily" picks "the flesh of his tail" (Plate 20), the tail being a phallic symbol²⁸. It may suggest that the ability to satiate through themselves is the reason for their ability to stay within the constraints. Blake puts this beautifully in "The Voices of the Devil" in *The Marriage*, which states, "Those who restrain desire, do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained; and the restrainer of reason usurps its place & governs the unwilling" (Plate 5). This argument exemplifies Blake's belief that everyone possesses energy and exuberance, so, even the Leviathan embodying energy has godly qualities of green and purple streaks. The expression of such energy is holy as well. On the

²⁸ The tail as a phallic symbol is also present in *The Inferno*. Minos in Canto 5 wraps his tail around the sinners to indicate their degree of sins, which is followed by the circle of the Lustful.

contrary, the restraint of energy is blasphemous. This is the very transgression committed by the Angel and the church, as they disregard the humanness within humans. The ramification of such restraint is the distortion of energy, which is disturbing and disgusting, as shown in the cannibalistic scene.

Ugolino's cannibalism is an extreme perversion of the holy communion, and is dramatized in Blake's narrative. In the course of recounting his tale of imprisonment, Ugolino says he hears "nails" "driving" into the doors (Musa, 372), and he looks at his "flesh and blood" in silence (Musa, 372). The nails driving on wood evokes Christ being crucified. His "flesh and blood", whom he later eats, is redolent of the communion. The association of Christ, father and son, and the sacrifice of the son, reinforce the Eucharist reading. Ugolino hopes to elicit pity, akin to Francesca, by twisting the truth. He wishes to present himself as a holy figure to obtain sympathy from Dante the pilgrim. Blake dramatizes this episode by replacing the human characters with primates "devouring" one another, to suggest how the churches deny and dehumanise humans. This disturbing scene is a censure to the church's distortion of the Bible and sacred words, since they descend to this lot from a Bible (Plate 19). It serves as a criticism to the church for it spreads erroneous messages and imposes false teachings on believers. The cannibalism may also be interpreted as the priests' oppression of believers and the hindrance of 'energy'²⁹. The setting of this scene is significant, for the two descend from a Bible on an altar (Plate 19). The altar draws our attention to priests, or specifically Archbishop Ruggieri. Blake criticises his personal vengeance that has led Ugolino to his miserable and gruesome decease. This censure is extended to the entire institutionalised church, that it has twisted words and teachings of the Bible to manipulate and constrict its believers. The religious setting of the primates' scene satirises Dante's

²⁹ A more unsettling interpretation of the stronger primates devouring the weaker would be that the primates are the clergymen taking sexual advantages of the weak, such as children, to satisfy themselves, but they are able to flee from the responsibility since they are "strong" in power and status.

system of Hell. Blake believes that the church has distorted and undermined God's all-forgiving absolution into disturbing cannibalistic vengeance. By reconstructing the act of retribution as cannibalism, Blake rejects, in its entirety, Dante's and the church's notion of divine retribution.

A recurring symbol that is present throughout Blake and Dante's work is the association with the mouth. Curiously, both Blake's and the Angel's 'lot' are related to the mouth. Sexuality evokes the mouth (kissing); Cannibalism is committed with the mouth. Coupled with the animalistic symbolism, Blake vividly illustrates distorted human energy and the church's repression that leads to it. The mouth underlines the physicality of human desires and the twisted 'energy' after repression. The harper episode encompasses him singing, another use of the mouth, to express, artistically, the outward flowing creative or sexual 'energy'. In *The Inferno*, Francesca and Paolo embodied sexuality and lust, evoking the mouth for kissing. In addition, the episode has a significant allusion to the mouth, because Francesca is the first sinner in *The Inferno* to speak, and potentially uses fraudulent words to elicit sympathy. In the later episode, Ugolino and Ruggieri are stuck in a "buca" (Canto 33, line 125), playing on "bocca", the Italian word for mouth, which is also the sinner's name in the previous canto, and is the first word of Canto 33. The evocation of the mouth not only puns on Ugolino gnawing at Ruggieri, but also underscores the sense of physicality and innermost human emotions. The mouth brings back the story of Ugolino eating his children, "renewing [his] grief" (Musa, 370), highlighting the extreme hunger, human necessity, and desire. Moreover, Ugolino is brimmed with animosity towards the Archbishop and his hatred is expressed through his mouth, gnawing at the base of his neck, an outlet of his emotions. The mouth is in all sense a channel of physical and psychological discharge, hence the pivotal outlet of 'energy'. Dante uses the mouth as a negative symbol that connotes lustfulness and cannibalism, or bodily desire. By inheriting the use of mouth, Blake is

reinforcing the negative sense by alluding to it as a symbol of cannibalism and distorted energy. However, Blake subverts the mouth as well by associating it with both physical and artistic expression of energy. Blake believes such energy is natural and holy, so it should remain unrestrained.

On the Mill

One less explicit yet significant symbol in *The Marriage* is the mill, which echoes with Dante's Satan. The mill has appeared several times. The Angel and Blake first arrive at Blake's "lot" through a church, a mill, then a cavern leading to the Leviathan scene; the petrified Angel retreats to the mill, and Blake seeks for the Angel at the mill; they enter the Angel's lot through the mill again; and they return to the mill, terrified at what they have beheld. The mill, as mentioned briefly before, signifies a place of comfort for the Angel. He "climbs up from his station into the mill" (Plate 19), frightened at the Leviathan. He does so again when he confronts the cannibalistic scene. In *The Inferno*, Satan is a "windmill turning its huge sail" (Musa, 379) when seen from afar. The encounter with Satan is a climactic moment, as Dante the Pilgrim finally beholds the ultimate sinner in the heart of Hell. However, far from being a comfort zone, Satan is a sinner who not only receives punishment himself, but also inflicts pain and punishment on other people, namely Judas Iscariot, Marcus Junius Brutus, and Gaius Cassius Longinus, the two assassins who killed Julius Caesar. By using the mill that is associated with Satan as a key symbol for the Angel, Blake subverts the conventional angel and undermines the authority of the church.

On the other hand, Blake uses a mill's mechanical and repetitive action to illustrate the church's complacency and 'reason', which is exhibited in Dante's Satan as well. A mill works by revolving continuously. It is the Angel's place of comfort as it is predictable,

repetitive, and does not go off-track. It resonates with the “reason” and stubbornness³⁰ that Blake reprimands the church for, with its unproductive (as in lack of creative output) and repetitive movement. Blake sees irony in the revolving movement of the mill per se – it rotates but returns to the same position. This action hints at the lack of progression of the church and its stagnant values. By ‘objectifying’ the church as a mill, Blake is accentuating the church’s lack of humanness and deprivation of human energy. Besides, the mill symbolises meaninglessness, so are Satan and the circles in *The Inferno*. By the same token as the mill, circles in *The Inferno* are progression-less. Some punishments consist of sinners running in circles. The circles convey the lack of progression and a sense of meaninglessness, since they cannot produce anything by running in circles. They embody “reason” because they produce no creative output. Drawing from Satan’s association with the mill and the circular shape of hell, Blake chastises the institutionalised church for its stagnation and its confinement of human energy.

Dante’s Satan is mechanical and dehumanised as well. He is colossal in size, yet he is impotent and utterly useless. His eternal punishment is to be embedded in the frozen lake, while grinding on three sinners with his teeth. The juxtaposition of his size and his lack of agency – paralysed in a frozen lake – shows his futility and sheer absence of humanness. This objectification of Satan is dehumanising³¹. Appearance-wise, Satan’s head wears three faces (Musa, 380), a mimicry of the Holy Trinity. The futile replication is mercilessly ridiculed as he is simply a wind-propelling device. Satan’s wings are also reduced and objectified. Wings in Canto 5 represent sexuality³², and connote freedom. However, the wings of Satan do not bring him aloft or gain him freedom; instead, the flapping of Satan’s wings further fixates him in the lake, as the ice lake is created and “frozen” “by them” (Durling, 537). Its mere

³⁰ “The man who never alters his opinion is like standing water, and breeds reptiles of the mind.” (Plate 19)

³¹ The dehumanisation is even extended to Dante the Pilgrim, who is simultaneously “deprived of life and death” (Musa, 380) upon meeting Satan.

³² The birds (Flamingo, Doves, and so on) are a symbol of lustfulness and sexuality.

enormity, coupled with the fact that his tears and wings create the nether world, suggests that Satan is a part of the structure of Hell. As Virgil points out, “This is *Dis*” (Musa, 380). Satan’s loss of humanness and godliness is furthered since he becomes an architectural structure of Hell – he is Hell itself. By being at the Earth’s core, Satan is the gravitational force that drags people down with sinfulness. The linkage of him with gravity strips his humanness and ‘energy’, in Blakean terms. Satan is merely a force that has no agency or ‘energy’. By comparing Satan to the institutionalised church, Blake is hitting it with the most powerful satirical blow, criticising its lack of humanness and its complacency.

The function of a mill is an allegory of the church’s indoctrination of erroneous messages and practices upon its believers. A mill grinds something into uniform-sized grains or powders. This process is symbolic of the church’s action of moulding children and believers into their desired forms, with the process of restraining energy – as illustrated in the cannibalistic episode. It demonises sexuality and other bodily liberty and instils this idea into believers, so that all of them become alike after being processed and ground in the mill. The act of grinding is also a form of physical destruction, as grinding involves breaking and disintegrating. It is Blake’s way to depict the church’s obliteration of humanness and energy from its believers. In addition, being a ‘resident’ of the mill, the Angel, like Satan, part of the mill, plays a part in the grinding activities and destroying ‘energy’. The grinding process is also present in Dante. Judas Iscariot and two assassins who murdered Julius Caesar are ceaselessly ground by Satan. The punishment of the three comprises spending their eternity between Satan’s teeth³³ and being ground by them while being helpless, painful, and utterly disgraced. Satan mechanically transfers pain and inflicts punishment unto other sinners. By

³³ This allusion to cannibalism and the emphasis on mouth is also a perversion of the holy communion, by reasons stated in the paragraphs above.

alluding to Satan's grinding process, Blake suggests the church is inflicting pain and punishment to its believers, on top of imparting false teachings.

On Allegory and Comedy

The most prominent element Blake inherited from Dante is the use of allegory. The gradual descent to the Angel's lot in *The Marriage* contains a series of allegories. The two go from the stable to the church, church vault, mill, cave, and lastly to the nether sky (Plate 17), where they behold the Leviathan. The stable can signify the manger where Jesus was born, which the Angel and "I" walk away from; or a place where they keep the "horses of instructions" from "The Proverbs of Hell" (Plate 9) (Keynes). Next, the chastisement of the church is apparent, as the entrance of Hell is a church, whereas the mention of the church vault directs the denunciation towards the institutionalised church and the clergymen. In terms of vertical distance, it evokes a spatial structure, as if they are descending into the core of darkness of the church³⁴. They then enter the mill, where they are ground to a certain perspective to view the Leviathan in the sky. The cave refers to the caveman previously mentioned in the second "Memorable Fancy" (Plate 14). This gradual descent to each layer of allegorical meaning; to each level of Hell, is inherited from Dante. Dante descends to different circles of hell, with sinners residing in each circle. The sinners receive punishments that represent something more than the literal level, for instance, Francesca and Paolo being propelled in the wind is an allegory of their lust. There is an additional underlying meaning (lust) to the actual object (the tempest), and this is inherited by Blake. The attachment of the allegorical meaning to the literal meaning of objects has passed on from Dante to Blake and to current readers.

³⁴ The descent also denotes the *fall* of humanity from innocence to sinfulness, or *experience*, in Blakean terms.

From a macro perspective, both Dante and Blake use allegory to convey and construct a system. Dante puts people into different groups of sinners who are then placed into different parts of hell. This act itself does not convey a system, but with allegory and the attachment of meanings to the punishments and circles of hell, Dante constructs his system of *The Inferno*, expresses his opinion on the sins and the sinners, and ultimately, creates his system of divine retribution. Blake employs the same technique, that is the use of allegory, only to establish a different system. By implying the allegorical meaning of the Leviathan, for instance, he rejects the church's restriction of sexuality. Blake, using the same language, rejects the system of divine retribution and of 'reason', but creates a system that allows the expression of human 'energy'. However, Blake explicitly mentions Dante's name near the end of this section, and harshly criticises Swedenborg's book for being uncreative, thereby suggesting that he cannot be compared with 'prolific' literary giants like Shakespeare and Dante. This tribute to Dante is significant: although he does not concur with his system entirely, he celebrates Dante's prolific and creative 'energy', and acknowledges his literary legacy and his use of allegories and symbols.

One of the most baffling and exceptional elements of the two works is that – they are both comedies. *The Divine Comedy* tells its genre in its title, but the scenes of utter disgust and revulsion are not of whimsical entertainment. It invites the reader's pondering on the scenes, and more broadly, on the afterlife, which no one can give a definite answer to. The extremely disturbing scenes in Blake, for instance, the cannibalistic scene, lead to unpleasant reactions (as the Angel and Blake are "terribly annoyed" (Plate 20) at it), but simultaneously, they are humorous for their mere absurdity. In the two Dante's episodes discussed in this paper, Francesca and Ugolino's words evoke different reactions, i.e., readers do not know for sure what and how to feel. On one hand, Francesca's words prompt pity, but on the other hand, the over-embellished mannerisms are humorous, as they are sinners that are being

punished in Hell, and their attempt in eliciting pity is pointless. Ugolino, before recounting his tale of woe, wipes his mouth on Archbishop Ruggieri's hair, whom he has been chewing on. This grotesque action yet again provokes different reactions. The mere visual abhorrence is striking, but the notion of having to remain one's manners in Hell, by wiping your mouth on the other's hair, is amusing as well. All of these create a blurred line between comedy and seriousness. This obscurity is skilfully relayed in Blake's works by subversion. The Leviathan and the cannibalistic scenes are revolting in description, but the Angel's fear and the church's demonisation of sexuality provoke humour. Readers ought to ask whether to take it seriously or to laugh about it. This destabilising element and indeterminacy are wonderfully achieved by the two writers. The reader's responses of pondering and wondering are precisely an important aim of literary works, especially Blake's poems and proses. *The Marriage* does not present itself as a didactic piece, as the churches' instructions do, but expresses itself in veils of allegory to stimulate further thinking. As one thinks about what to make of a scene, one ruminates and carefully digests what the texts offer. This, I believe, is one key response evoked by Blake's texts.

Conclusion

In his composition of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake takes his inspiration from Dante, most apparently in his depiction of the Leviathan and the cannibalistic primates. His Leviathan, although not obvious at first sight, bears resemblance with the Francesca episode, in terms of its allusion to sexuality and human passion. By using Dante's words and depicting the disappearance of the Leviathan, Blake rejects the conservative Christian practice of sexual abstention. It is noteworthy that, Blake, being a meticulous writer, does not only link the Leviathan to sexuality, but also to the French Revolution. The creature itself may be inspired by Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*, where he articulates his thoughts about

revolution and politics in general. The imminent approach of the Leviathan can point to the encroaching French Revolution, during which the conservatives demonised the revolutionary, whereas liberals like Blake saw it as a liberating force, therefore creating the two different perspectives of the same scene.

The later primates' episode has a more explicit reference to Dante, in the allusions of chains and cannibalism. Blake has dehumanised Dante's Ugolino into animalistic and grotesque monkeys, in order to unveil the ramification of restricting energy, which is what the church is doing. He criticises the church on the literal level since the Archbishop imprisoned Ugolino to starve him to death and drove him to eat his children. On a deeper level, his criticism of the church lies in the overall restriction of energy and sexuality. He vividly, and disturbingly, displays the terrifying aftermath after energy and sexuality are restricted, which repels both him and the Angel.

The mill in the piece has insinuations of Dante's Satan. Dante's Satan is described as a mill for its mechanical movement and deprivation of humanness, and so is the mill in Blake. It is a place of comfort for the Angel, and it represents the church's complacency. Its grinding action points to the destructive power the church contains to grind people into uniformity – that is to force people into blind obedience and abstention. Satan is also mechanical. The flapping of his wings only further fixates himself into frozenness. It makes him a part of the structure of Hell, which dehumanises and degrades him in turn. By comparing Satan to the church, Blake is chastising the institutionalised church for its beliefs and its practices.

Furthermore, Blake embraces Dante's use of allegory and comedy. They both use allegory to express their forms of Hell and the afterlife. Blake celebrates Dante and continues the use of this literary form. By employing allegory, he both inherits from Dante and passes

on the allegorical use of language, to convey and construct a system. Blake's use of comedy, present in Dante as well, prompts critical thinking and reflection of texts.

The comedic element in the works is highly relevant to contemporary society, and to myself. As elaborated above, the comedy in the two texts not only draws out laughter, but also provokes rumination and further thinking, which I think is of vital importance in current times. The church had the highest authority in Blake's time and had overarching social power. They instilled their form of gospel knowledge and coerced their religious practices upon its believers. The subversions in Blake's works urge us to question the authority, and to think independently whether to accept the indoctrinated messages or reject them, as he has famously articulated, "I must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Mans" (Jerusalem, Ch. I). The critical thinking Blake conveyed is highly relevant to modern society. We are battered and forged through different means in order to be moulded to a certain form in society. Indoctrination of messages or thoughts is ubiquitous and pervasive. We must see things from a different perspective than what we are told – the Leviathan might not be a Leviathan as we are told; it might be an Edenic place with pleasant music. The ostensibly glamorous and virtuous institution may hide cannibalistic and grotesque, abhorrent, and preposterous secrets – and we should decide for ourselves what is truth.

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