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Learning French in Hong Kong : narrative perspectives on identity construction

Lorraine Vezy de Beaufort

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par Lorraine VEZY DE BEAUFORT

Sous la direction de Prof. Dominique MACAIRE

Learning French in Hong Kong: Narrative perspectives on identity construction

Apprendre le français à Hong Kong : Perspectives narratives et construction identitaire

le 10 mai 2019

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Statement of originality

I , VEZY DE BEAUFORT, Lorraine hereby declare that I am the sole author of the thesis and the material presented in this thesis is my original work except those indicated in the acknowledgement. I further declare that I have followed the University's policies and regulations on Academic Honesty, Copyright and Plagiarism in writing the thesis and no material in this thesis has been submitted for a degree in this or other universities.

Abstract

Learning French in Hong Kong: Narrative perspectives on identity construction

By Lorraine VEZY DE BEAUFORT

Doctor of Philosophy/Doctorate en Sciences du Langage

This doctoral research examines the relationship between language learning and identity construction, focusing on four Hong Kong adults and their experiences of learning French. The study adopts a poststructuralist perspective on identity, which is to say identity is constructed discursively, experientially and in conflict (Trent, 2018) and is therefore fluid and constantly changing according to situation and context. From this perspective language learning is a process that takes place at several levels of context, including the wider socio-political context, the immediate social environment and the level of thoughts, emotions and ideas. It is also, inevitably, a process of identity construction which reflects 'the desire of learners to expand their range of identities and to reach out to wider worlds' (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007, 670).

Using a narrative methodology known as 'narrative inquiry' (Clandinin & Connelly 2000), the study highlights the personal experiences of learners and illustrates various aspects of language learning in the age of 'superdiversity' (Vertovec, 2007). Unlike the three dominant languages in Hong Kong, i.e. English, Cantonese and Mandarin, 'minor' languages such as French have been given relatively little research attention, perhaps because of their apparent remoteness and limited usefulness. Using data gathered from a range of sources including in-depth interviews, language learner histories and written accounts of learning activities online, this inquiry aims to illustrate how even 'minor' languages can be significant in terms of identity. The four participants whose experience of learning languages is investigated in this study have all studied French in formal settings, but their engagement with French has also developed through workplace and travel experiences, as well as through online interaction.

The study was able to highlight the unique and personal experiences of learners and illustrates various aspects of language learning and their significance for learner identity. It is argued that these aspects are often overlooked from a conventional language didactic perspective. Firstly, the study shows that additional language learning can play a significant role in learner identities, despite limited levels of conventional proficiency. More explicitly, additional languages can be seen as an affordance for dealing with prevailing discourses and constraints and become, in so doing, a way to reclaim the self. Additional language learners demonstrate creative appropriation of these languages, combining linguistic with non-linguistic and other semiotic resources in order to personalise them and relate them to their own identities. Secondly, the process of language learning is revealed as being one of growing intercultural awareness, an awareness that is brought to bear upon the learner's own cultural environment and also has relevance for identity as individuals are able to reassess their own environment and themselves in it, reflecting on their existing identities and imagining new ones. The study offers orientations for methodology, theory and pedagogy.

The study concludes by highlighting the need to acknowledge the 'diversity or multidimensionality' of language learners in curriculum and language classrooms (e.g. Byrd Clark, 2010) as well as give learners opportunities to exercise their social selves in the language classroom. Also, pedagogical notions of language and languages need to be reconceptualised to reflect the creative, diverse and complex language repertoires of language of multilingual learners and speakers, which go beyond a conventional understanding of what it means to learn a language and involve the use of a range of linguistic and semiotic resources.

Keywords : Identities ; additional languages; multilingualism ; multilingual competence; translanguaging practices ; superdiversity

'We have, each of us, a life-story, an inner narrative – whose continuity, whose sense, is our lives. It might be said that each of us constructs and lives, a 'narrative', and that narrative is us, our identities'

Oliver Sacks, *The Man who mistook his wife for a hat and other clinical tales* (1998, p. 110).

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Of course, I would like to thank my supervisors. Prof. Dominique Macaire and Dr. John Trent, *THANK YOU* for your professional guidance and your time and most of all, for your trust, energy and positive attitude all through the study. I have found doing a PhD to be quite a lonely process at times, and have greatly appreciated receiving your support and encouragement whenever we met or exchanged by distance. I would also like to thank Dr. Matthew De Coursey and Ms. Nathalie Iseli-Chan for our discussions and for letting me observe your French classes. Not only did I really enjoy taking part in your classes, but this involvement helped me to contextualize my project when I was developing my methodological approach. It is also through your classes that I was able to meet some of the participants in this study. My thank you list would not be complete without Dr. Fairbrother, whose course in qualitative research contributed to my Eureka moment!

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List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in the chapters presenting the data, during the discussion as well as in the methodology section:

EMI: English-medium of instruction

CEFR: Cadre Européen Commun de Référence

CMI: Chinese-medium of instruction

FB: Facebook

FRT: Final Research Text

IG: Instagram

INT1: Interview 1

INT2: Interview 2

INT3: Interview 3

IRT: Interim Research Text

LLH: Language learner history

TLR: Techno-linguistic report

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

For many teachers and learners, languages appear as pragmatic tools that need to be picked up and mastered as quickly as possible. This perception is encouraged by early educational experiences, in which 'foreign' languages are exotic counterparts to the real language of everyday life. It is also encouraged by the commodification of languages and their incorporation into discourses of self-improvement, mobility, employability, and so on. This was certainly my feeling in 2009, when as a busy language teacher in a Hong Kong university I scarcely had time to reflect on what students were doing with these languages, or on how learning English, French or Mandarin Chinese affected them as people.

In that year I attended the Independent Learning Association Conference (ILAC) conference on language learning and encountered Language Learner Histories (LLHs) for the first time. In a workshop led by Felicity Kjisik and Leena Karlsson from Helsinki University, we, as 'students', experienced writing, reading and sharing autobiographical stories about our experience of learning languages. From then on, I began to reflect not only on the role that languages played in my students' lives, but also on the role that they had played in my own life as a French national who somehow ended up teaching both English and French in the multilingual city of Hong Kong. In using the word 'role' I am recalling the fact that my process of reflection also involved coming to see languages not as tools but as characters, wearing different masks and influencing people in different ways at different stages of their lives. For example:

- When I lived in the same house as my grandmother during my early childhood, she often recalled with bitterness the German army's occupation of the Picardie region where she lived at the time. These events had stimulated a profound dislike for anything German, including the language. The few German words she had picked up were pronounced in a robotic, authoritarian manner, imitating the orders she had heard around her. German sounded harsh and menacing to me as a ten-year old child. This contrasted with her imitations of the British English accent, which she did with great gusto, pretending she was fluent even though she knew only a few English words. To me, English sounded supple, fun and desirable.
- In secondary school I had to study both English and German as foreign languages, and predictably I loved everything about learning English, including the pronunciation, which I practised often by myself. I found my English teachers stimulating and appreciative of my efforts and my results were excellent. By contrast my experience of learning German was painful. I recall disliking my German teachers, including the way they taught, and found German pronunciation very difficult. My grades got lower and lower.
- When I went to work in an Israeli kibbutz at the age of nineteen, the level of English I had then was typical of school leavers in France at that time: very basic. Although I had always perceived myself as outgoing and talkative, and thought this was how people in France saw me, I was surprised and frustrated at being seen as quiet and withdrawn by my co-workers in the kibbutz. They commented on how quiet I was and some challenged me to join their conversations. I felt very anxious about speaking up, especially in a group situation. This felt strange and uncomfortable because it challenged the idea I had about who I was and it seemed that my 'real self' had disappeared. I felt that becoming fluent in English would make me 'reappear' to the world and be one with my real, French

self. This was an early encounter with what I would now describe as the relationship between language learning and identity.

- After working as an English teacher in China for a couple of years and then moving to South Korea, I discovered that the native English teachers viewed me as illegitimate. I was even questioned about why I had been hired for the position of English teacher. I could have given up and perhaps it would have been easier to teach French. However, gaining legitimacy as an English teacher was something I felt I had to fight for, and I pursued further studies (a Master's degree in Applied Linguistics). Through my studies I gained more professional recognition, and I began to think more carefully about what it meant to be bilingual.
- Returning to France for occasional visits, French people would sometimes assume I was a foreigner because of my English-accented French. Armed with my experiences and my developing knowledge of multilingualism, I felt comfortable with this and began to define a hybrid identity for myself.

I will return to some of these experiences during the study and merely wish to illustrate the varied roles played by languages, and by perceptions of languages and language users, in my and other people's lives. The examples above also explain why I can easily agree with Alice Chik and say that learning English has been 'more than merely learning a language'; it was also 'my own journey to construct [my] individuality' (Benson, Chik, & Lim 2003, 31).

1.2 Motivations for the study

I continued this process of reflection while teaching English and French at a university in Hong Kong, and introduced elements of LLHs into my teaching in order to provide my students with similar insights into the roles and stories of the different languages in their lives. I also suggested a range of activities for after-class and independent learning, including sharing their feelings about French cultural products (e.g., films and poetry). By this time I had come to realize that languages became 'characters' in people's lives through their emotional and affective resonances.

There were many unanswered questions, however, when I reflected on what students were learning and on how this related to what I had learned. I left my language teaching position in 2013, four years after the ILAC conference, feeling that something fundamental was missing from the enterprise. I realized that I knew very little about my students as individuals, as people. For example, through their choice of French songs or their choice of a particular painter, I had asked myself: why this song or why this painter? Students' self-presentations were interesting too. One had cats she had given French names to; another one had not told her parents that she was learning French; yet another was studying French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist, Jacques Lacan; and another native-like English speaker born in Hong Kong presented himself as French-Moroccan, which triggered many unasked questions in my head. I realized that despite my years of teaching French and English, I had not in fact been very curious about the individuals sitting in my class. Who were these individuals and what were their stories?

To a certain extent I knew a lot about why the people sitting in front of me were in my French classes. I had often heard about their interest in French culture, their specific interest in French cinema or particular French directors. I knew some of them liked the sound of French, just as I had liked the sound of English. In addition to these aesthetic motivations there were more instrumental reasons, in that some needed French to travel to France after graduation. Some were passionate about learning languages and others simply needed to fulfill requirements set by the university. However, these 'motivational' explanations did not satisfy me, because they seemed to barely scratch the surface and failed to reveal how French was, or was not, enmeshed in other aspects of their lives.

The initial idea for a study of French learners in Hong Kong emerged from this situation. Initially, I developed my idea by immersing myself in research studies related to language learner histories (LLHs; e.g., Mercer 2006, 2013) and the relationship between language and identity (e.g., Benson, Chik & Lim, 2003). In parallel, I started to research language learning as seen from a sociocultural perspective (e.g., Li & Zhu, 2013; Jørgensen, Karrebæk, Madsen, & Møller, 2011; Blommaert, 2010; Pennycook, 2010; Rampton, 2006). In doing so I realized that Hong Kong was in fact an interesting place in which to study the role played by so-called 'additional' languages such as French, as these languages provide examples of the kind of 'mobile resources' identified by scholars of language and globalization (e.g., Blommaert, 2010).

Along with my interest in the roles played by languages in people's lives, I also became aware that the wider sociocultural context tended to be neglected in many studies of language learning. Hong Kong – its historical origins and contemporary characteristics – also needed to be integrated into my study as a 'character' in its own right. This became particularly clear because

of the political upheavals, such as the 2014 student protests, that occurred during the early stages of the study. Hong Kong's search for identity was also my students' search for identity, and the relationships needed to be teased out in greater detail. In fact, the stories of language learners, the stories of languages, and the stories of place (Hong Kong) all needed to be integrated into the study, and eventually I settled on narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Clandinin, 2013) as its philosophical and methodological basis, within an overall ethnographic approach.

1.3 Aims and scope

The aim of the study was therefore to gain greater insight into what it means to learn a language, particularly an additional language, under present-day conditions. I chose to focus on learners of French in Hong Kong, as at the start of the study I had seven years' experience of teaching French, as well as English, in a Hong Kong university (I had been living and working in Asia for over ten years before this). Because of the study's ethnographic orientation it was important for me to know as much as possible about the participants, their educational experiences, and the sociocultural environment. However, despite the focus on French I decided I would not exclude the participants' experiences of learning other languages, as these were also relevant to the study's aims. In the early stages of data collection I also began to appreciate that the relationship between languages – Hong Kong's official languages of Cantonese, Mandarin and English, as well as popular additional languages such as French and Japanese – was of central importance to the question of what it means to study a language, any language, in Hong Kong.

The chosen approach and method indicated a need for detailed narrative data in the form of accounts of learning histories and learning experiences. From the initial pool of participants, I selected four for the presentation of the study. Data collection was centred around a series of detailed interviews, but also included other artefacts such as LLHs and records of online activities. The participants were all Cantonese-speaking 'local' students, although their backgrounds turned out to be quite diverse. Given the study's focus on additional language learning I did not require the participants to have French as their major field of study, and the participants reflect different levels of engagement, experience and proficiency. The participants were aged between 20 and 27 years old at the start of the study, and as this is often a life stage of experimentation and rapid change, a longitudinal aspect was built into the research design by conducting several interviews over a period of roughly two years. Through asking participants about their earlier life experiences and future plans there was also an indirectly longitudinal aspect to the study.

The theoretical framework of the study is based on the key concept of identity, which is not only of central concern in sociocultural approaches to language learning (e.g., Norton, 2000), but is also inseparable from the methodological approach of narrative data collection. Our sense of who we are depends on our ability to construct narratives reflecting a certain continuity through time. As the neurologist and author Oliver Sacks explains:

> We have, each of us, a life-story, an inner narrative — whose continuity, whose sense, *is* our lives. It might be said that each of us constructs and lives, a "narrative," and that this narrative *is* us, our identities. (Sacks 1985, 110)

In exploring 'what it means' to study an additional language, then, a key question addressed by the study is how learners' identities are affected by the experience of studying these languages. The approach taken to identity allows the study to consider, among other things, subjectivity, agency, power and imagination. In conjunction with concepts that have emerged from the study of language under conditions of globalization, such as translanguaging, it also involves a reinterpretation of traditional notions of competence and proficiency as well as an examination of representations of French culture and language beyond the usual national stereotypes.

1.4 Significance

The study therefore aims to advance knowledge about the relationship between language learning and identity, by focusing on the case of French as an additional language in Hong Kong. Previous studies of language learning and identity have often involved case studies of immigrants to a new culture (e.g., the seminal study of Norton, 2000). Learning the language of this new culture thus becomes a matter of integration in the sense of living in a new external environment. For learners of additional languages the need to integrate is quite different, and involves instead the integration of internal motivations, wishes and desires. As Clarke and Hennig (2013) point out, additional language learning experiences assist in understanding 'how learning can support learners in their self-development and the formation of their "selves", in ways not necessarily linked to necessity, struggle and survival' (p. 79).

Among studies of language learning and identity in Hong Kong there has also been a tendency to focus on 'large' languages that are studied compulsorily, such as English and Mandarin Chinese (e.g., Flowerdew & Miller, 2008; Xu & Gao, 2014; Gu, 2010). Hennig (2010a, 2010b) is one of

the only studies to focus on an additional language (German), but even in this case the participants were studying the language as a major field of study. Again, there is a need to expand studies of identity beyond the 'large' or 'compulsory' language frame, in order to understand how additional languages can contribute to learners' sense of identity.

There is also a need to gather more ethnographic and longitudinal data about the experience of language learning in Hong Kong, something that narrative inquiry is able to provide. Again, very few studies of additional language learning have adopted a sociocultural perspective and an identity-based approach. In Hong Kong, the study of Humphreys and Spratt (2008) took a mixed-method approach to comparative motivational factors amongst several additional languages including French. Leung (2007) carried out a statistical study of French acquisition in relation to issues of transfer from the L1 and L2 and Hennig's (2010a, 2010b) study of German collected data over a period of two semesters, something that this study will expand upon by conducting interviews over a two-year time frame.

Hennig's study adopted Foucault's concept of 'care of the self' to characterize additional language learning, and this study will expand the theoretical framework to include insights from sociocultural approaches to identity, integrating these with emerging concepts in sociolinguistics such as translanguaging (Li, 2011) and adapting the methodological approach of narrative inquiry accordingly. The study will thus make a contribution to the theoretical basis of narrative-based studies of identity and language learning, using Hong Kong as a case study of the globalization processes that have informed recent theorizing about language (see e.g., Blommaert, 2010).

Finally, the study also has implications for the ways that languages are conceptualized, taught and tested, in Hong Kong and possibly elsewhere. Although detailed recommendations are beyond its scope, the findings will help to inform discussions about language learning in general, by capturing some of 'the ways in which learning is perceived as meaningful for learners' lives' (Clarke & Hennig 2013, 79). Language teachers may benefit from an expanded awareness of how the classroom subject of 'French' is taken up by individual learners, and how their perception of it is shaped by a variety of factors.

1.5 Overview of the study

This dissertation consists of eleven chapters, four of which are devoted to the stories of four participants.

Two chapters (Chapters 2 and 3) introduce the theoretical foundations of the study. Chapter 2 summarises some of the literature relating to the study's areas of interest, providing essential background for the theoretical framework. It covers key concepts and approaches in the study of language and globalization, starting with an overview of the phenomena of globalization before describing how these phenomena have resulted in a reconceptualisation of the study of language. The two foundational oppositions of local/global and agency/structure are briefly introduced before characterizing some useful approaches, such as translanguaging and metrolingualism. The literature review then covers work on the multilingual learner, including previous work on additional language learning both outside and within Hong Kong as well as perspectives on French more generally.

Chapter 3 then introduces the concept of identity, relating it to concepts and studies mentioned in Chapter 2. The chapter starts by evoking contemporary views about language and culture and establishing the link between identity, language and culture. Key aspects of the approach to identity taken by the study are then identified, including the notions of multiple and dynamic identities suggested by Norton's (2000) post-structuralist framework. The relationships between identity and subjectivity, and between subjectivity and agency, are then considered, along with the effects of power. The pedagogical consequences of adopting an identity-based approach are identified as involving a redefinition of competence; Norton's (2012) notion of 'investment' is also portrayed as providing useful perspective on language learning and identity. The notion of imagination, and its relationship with identity, is highlighted as being of particular relevance to this study of additional language learning. An additional, integrative perspective on identity is provided by an outline of scalar theory, which helps to connect theories of identity with its sociocultural context and with the methodological approach taken by the study. Chapter 3 concludes with a more detailed explanation of the positioning of the study.

Chapter 4 presents the methodology of the study, starting with a disambiguation of the uses of the term 'narrative'. The background and history of narrative inquiry are uncovered, along with its approach to the notion of 'case' and the relationship between narrative and identity. The chosen analytical framework – a combination of Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional inquiry space and Barkhuizen's (2016) interpretation of this space – is then explained. As narrative inquiry places great emphasis on the relationship between researcher and participants and the negotiation of a purpose with them, these aspects of the study are presented in some detail before introducing the participants themselves. Data collection procedures and methods, including LLHs, interviews, techno-linguistic reports and other artefacts, are then

outlined. The chapter then describes and explains the procedures by which the data were analysed and used to prepare final research texts for the participants, following the precepts of narrative inquiry.

In Chapter 5, I present important aspects of the Hong Kong context, first characterizing it in terms of its language policies and language educational practices. The recent history of Hong Kong is outlined, with particular regard to recent student protests. These are argued to represent a wider 'crisis of identity' in Hong Kong, which is especially relevant to the lives of the young people who are the study's participants. Moving on to French in Hong Kong, the presence of French is considered both in conventional terms (e.g., the presence of a French community, institutions where French is used or taught, and commonly-expressed reasons for learning French) and in terms of its commercial and visual manifestations.

In Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9, I present the language learning stories of Candice, Yasmina, IC and Nicole respectively. Each narrative begins with a description of my relationship with the participants and then describes the participants' lives in chronological order including important stages in their lives such as childhood, school, university and work. It then continues with their perceptions of Frenchness as described in their stories. The last part of each narrative is interpretative and considers the different aspects of the role of French in their stories.

In Chapter 10, I look at the role of French in the participants' lives across the four stories, highlighting and discussing the major insights gained by the study. Drawing on these insights, I identify the main methodological, theoretical and pedagogical implications of the study. The conclusion as well as the limitations of the study are presented in Chapter 11.

1.6 Research questions

In narrative inquiry, the methodological approach adopted by the study, the task of the researcher is to 'frame a research puzzle' rather than think 'about framing a research question with a precise definition or expectation of an answer' (Clandinin 2013, 42). The notion of 'puzzle' suggests not merely answering questions, the selection and sequencing of which will exert effects upon the research process, but rather putting together different pieces of someone's life or story, all the time being aware that there is more than one possible 'solution' to the puzzle. As the inquiry progresses and the inquirer begins to see causalities and connections between different parts of each story, more precise questions help him or her to see how the pieces of each particular 'puzzle' may fit together, as will be explained in section 4.8.3 in Chapter 4.

To reiterate, my initial expectations at the start of the study were deliberately wide, coalescing into a convergence on the relationship between language learning and identity construction in each individual story. My main research question was:

> What does it mean to learn French in Hong Kong, i.e. in what ways does the learning of French as an additional language contribute to processes of identity formation?

A second question below also helped to keep my focus on how the study could provide insights on the process of learning languages in the 21st century:

> What does this tell us about language learning under contemporary conditions?

Chapter 2 Literature Review

As already mentioned (see section 1.5 above), the literature informing this study is reviewed across two chapters. Chapter 2 provides the general theoretical background of the study whilst Chapter 3 frames the perspective on identity taken by the study.

2.1 General background: globalisation as a social, cultural and economic phenomenon

The rise of globalisation and the increased contact between societies is forcing us to consider the world in terms of new complexities. This is particularly so in terms of two main aspects: first, the ways in which the world has changed and second, the speed and scale at which these changes occur. Regarding the first aspect, Appadurai (2000, 5) talks about globalisation in terms of 'flows' or 'objects in motion', which include 'ideas and ideologies, people and goods, images and messages, technologies and techniques'. Globalisation has also been described as a web of complex interactions, one that involves:

> [S]patial-temporal processes, operating on a global scale that rapidly cut across national boundaries, drawing more and more of the world into webs of interconnection, integrating and stretching cultures and communities across space and time, and compressing our spatial and temporal horizons. (Inda & Rosaldo 2006, cited in Jackson 2008, 349)

Globalisation involves a reconfiguration of our understanding of time and space. In effect, as people are able to maintain contact with each other anywhere 'common assumptions about the

national, regional, ethnic, cultural or linguistic status of the inhabitants often prove useless' (Blommaert 2010, 7). The fact that people maintain relationships between 'distant localities' (Giddens 1990, 64) has been referred to as the 'compression of time and space' (e.g., Pennycook 2009, 25).

The second main aspect of globalisation is the speed at which changes occur in all aspects of our lives, whether social, cultural or economic. The Swedish anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen paints a picture of an 'overheating' world in which 'accelaration has accelerated' (n.d.). Faced with such a fast-changing environment, research across the disciplines has focused on how to evaluate the challenges and opportunities arising from globalisation. Some general observations have been made about globalisation which will help to orient the current study. First, we can say that under globalisation, since cultures are first 'neither closed nor internally uniform' (Eriksen 1995, 290) and secondly, since cultural meaning cannot be taken for granted (Eriksen 1995, 289), there is scope for a diversity of interpretations in the way people feel they belong to a culture. In the context of this study, someone might feel himself or herself a 'Hongkonger' in some particular situations relevant to their concerns, but that feeling of belonging may escape someone else. In other words, the contemporary world is 'not characterized by clear […] binary boundaries, but rather by grey zones and differences in degrees' (Eriksen 1995, 289). A third general observation is that many events and processes can be increasingly seen as local and global at the same time (Eriksen 1995, 282 & 285) even though the focus is often on the influence global events have on local ones.

In earlier works on globalisation, there was often a tendency to celebrate the diversity and opportunity globalisation offered, but from the vantage point of 2017 it appears that there has

been a significant backlash. Whether spontaneous or orchestrated by political interests, the anger and fear engendered by globalisation was a factor in the Brexit vote, the election of Donald Trump and the 2017 French presidential election debates. Changes of demographics and shifts in people's lives are creating a lot of anxiety. Many people feel abandoned by their governments and other institutions in the face of globalisation and are falling back on the need to have borders to protect themselves. The rifts that have appeared between those who have mobility and access to resources and those who are less flexible and feel left behind has consequences for identity formation. This is relevant to this study in the context of inequality of resources and opportunities in Hong Kong.

So despite the fact that contemporary conceptions of culture have moved from bounded groups with shared beliefs and practices to 'more widely dispersed flows' (Wortham 2005, 97), recent developments are suggesting that groups are still important even though they tend to be perceived differently in the age of mobility, both actual and imagined.

One contribution in thinking about language under conditions of globalisation has been the notion of 'superdiversity' (Vertovec, 2007). Echoing Eriksen's diagnosis of 'accelerated acceleration' (n.d.), Vertovec (2007) originally used the term superdiversity to describe the 'diversification of diversity' of migrants in the UK. This was done to draw attention to 'an increased number of new, small and scattered, multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socioeconomically differentiated and legally stratified immigrants' (2007, 1024). In this, superdiversity marked a historical turn with the realization that a new model was needed to capture modern societies' increased mobility and exchanges. This is also to say that a new model

of multiculturalism is needed (Arnaut 2012, 3; also see Blommaert, Spotti, Arnaut, Rampton & Spotti, 2016).

In fact, a new line of thought consequently emerged in the field of language studies as a result of considering the impact of diversity and movements in society on language boundaries and norms. Pietikäinen (2015, 207) underlines that when 'language boundaries and norms are often dislocated, in flux, or undergoing renegotiation', the concept of languages as homogenous and stable systems are considered problematic. Indeed, such a concept is now widely judged artificial, which points to the importance of considering language ideologies in the debate about language in the 21st century (see Jørgensen, 2008; Ag & Jørgensen, 2013; Blommaert & Rampton, 2011; Pennycook, 2006; Silverstein, 1976).

2.2 Orienting the study: global/local and agency/structure

Two important oppositions, i.e. global/local and agency/structure, can be seen as underlying and shaping the general debate about ways to approach and categorize social phenomena. They are critically reviewed in the sub-sections below.

2.2.1 The global-local opposition and the conceptualization of space

As already mentioned, the effects of globalisation are felt in every area of people's lives, including the use of language. Researchers such as Blommaert (2010) and Pennycook (2010), who closely observe language use in mixed urban neighbourhoods where different communities of immigrants live, have exemplified a shift away from traditional societies and cultures towards

more individualized and local lives in more ephemeral networks. Blommaert has noted that language practices have become increasingly detached from their '''original'' community and space of use, to be deployed […] elsewhere' (2007, 2). Jacquemet (2005, 264-265) has pointed out that transnational groups 'interact using different languages and communicative codes simultaneously present in a range of communicative channels, both local and distant'. With particular relevance to this study, Rampton (2006, 137) observed the 'playful but ephemeral' use of German by British teenagers who otherwise show reluctance in learning German in the classroom.

The question is how to categorize fluid and flexible practices such as these. Simple oppositions such as 'global' versus 'local' may once have been sufficient to characterize social phenomena. But as the picture of a heterogeneous, complex and diverse world with its similarly complex practices and behaviours emerged, it has been necessary to see 'global' and 'local' not as an opposition or a dichotomy, but rather as a polarity in which each gains its meaning from the other (see Blommaert, 2015; Pennycook, 2010). Canagarajah and De Costa (2016) point out that local/global distinctions are convenient analytical classifications which have *no ontological reality*. They argue:

> [T]he relationship between [global and local] is complex… The global and local interpenetrate each other. The global is instantiated in the local, and vice versa. Thus they not only resist binary classification, they are also not ontological… [W]hat are considered global or local are relational and change character according to the scales of analysis. (Canagarajah & De Costa 2016, 2)

Similarly, in their study of World Music and identity, Connell and Gibson (2004) suggest apprehending the global and the local in relational rather than oppositional terms:

> Escaping international influences – lyrical, ideological, stylistic or technological – is impossible, and rarely sought, while attempts to produce music with a specific local identity are necessarily shaped by global trends: the global and local are thus relational rather than oppositional. (Connell & Gibson 2004, 356)

Seeing 'global' and 'local' as relational rather than oppositional, or as lacking ontological reality, does not mean that the difference can be ignored, however. Recent political shifts in the direction of nationalism are one indication of this. There has been a tendency among some to over-celebrate fluidity and flow, which may have provoked the backlash against perceived threats to the perceived 'local'. In the subject of language, Pennycook (2010, 80) has noted that along with 'fluidity', it is important to be aware of 'fixity' as a counter-tendency (see also Otsuji & Pennycook 2010, 244). This point is also present in Bauman Z. (2012, 2000) who points out that 'the solidity-liquidity conundrum' are not 'a dichotomy', by which he points to how old and new forms of practice are 'locked, inseparably, in a dialectical bond' and also draws attention to the hybridity, fusion and interdependence of modern life. In relation to these observations, Pennycook (2010) thus suggests that researchers look at language use more closely and in 'local activity as part of everyday life' (pp. 3-4).

Another important contribution to discussions of 'local' and 'global' has been provided by scalar analysis (Canagarajah & De Costa, 2016; Blommaert, 2007, 2010; Wortham, 2005, 2008), a method of analysis inherited from geopolitical studies which can be applied to observe the

different forces operating on language. The use of scales to study social phenomena is seen as a way of visualizing context in the forms of layers of spatial and temporal dimensions, and thus being able to capture fluid, heterogeneous and complex communicative phenomena (Canagarajah & De Costa, 2016, 4).

The notion of space forms is an important part of the analytical framework of this study as it deals with identity formation across time and space. As such, the scalar perspective will be further revisited in the theoretical framework (see Chapter 3, section 3.5).

2.2.2 The agency-structure opposition and the debate about the subject

If reconsidering the global/local polarity helps us to avoid simplistic models of the spatial characteristic of social phenomena, reconsidering the well-known agency/structure polarity is also essential to avoid over-simplifying the capacity of individuals to act within these spaces. Indeed, the opposition of agency/structure is considered problematic by many scholars (e.g., Block, 2009; Layder, 2004).

A broad definition of agency is that it 'refers to the socioculturally mediated capacity to act' (Ahearn 2001, 112). The position that agency plays a central role in explaining social activity is shared by many scholars (e.g., Layder, 1994; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Norton, 1997). Layder in particular has pointed out the need to 'reclaim and reconstruct the individual' in social research (1994, 209). The British sociologist Anthony Giddens is especially known for his view that human beings are 'agents' of their own destiny and have the capacity to consciously 'make a difference' (in Inglis & Thorpe 2013, 226).

However, there are many difficulties linked to describing agency in social activity. One of them is whether or not agency is conscious, intentional or effective (Ahearn 2001, 113; Block 2009). Another is the nature of its relationship with social structure: how much freedom, real or apparent, do individuals have within the social structures that constrain and shape them? The sociologists Antony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu are two prominent voices who have looked to overcome the opposition between human agency and social structures in social theory (Inglis & Thorpe 2013, 209) by giving equal weight to 'structure' and 'human action'. In effect, the essence of structuration theory – which they both embody to some extent – is to look at social structure and individual actions 'not as separate entities, but in fact elements of one single process' which together lead to the 'constitution of society' (Inglis & Thorpe 2013, 209). In other words, structuration theory focuses on describing 'how people *create and are created* by social order, and how the interacting activities of individuals leads to both social reproduction and transformation' (Inglis & Thorpe 2013, 209).

More precisely, Bourdieu has argued that all human beings' actions need to be understood in terms of the power exerted by social structures on individuals although they are not 'fully conscious' of the projection of power onto them (Inglis & Thorpe 2013, 212). Giddens, on the contrary, envisages social actors as 'knowing' and focuses his attention on how people make and recreate society afresh through their practices, which emphasizes human beings' capacity to change social structures (1976, in Inglis & Thorpe 2013, 227).

Beyond the structurationists' attempt at overcoming the agency-structure opposition, Layder (2006) argues for the capture of creative, complex and seemingly contradictory aspects of social phenomena:

> Individuals are capable of both creatively resisting and embracing the cultural and structural guidelines that surround them. Both of these strategies also imply different levels of creativity in dealing with them; conformity and deviance are not the stark alternatives. There are varieties of conformity, some of which appear to have more in common with deviance, but which nonetheless represent a reasoned acceptance of social constraints. The same is true of deviance and resistance; they have many shapes and can be deceptive in appearance. (Layder 2006, 145)

In a similar way, Ortner notes the need to consider a more psychological view of agency and suggests that 'subjectivity' plays an important role in explaining human actions; in fact, she considers subjectivity as 'the basis of 'agency'' (Ortner 2005, 34). By 'subjectivity', she means the presence of a complex matrix of feelings or 'complex structures of feelings' (Ortner 2005, 31) arising from our consciousness which guide our actions but of which we are not necessarily aware. Yet like Giddens, Ortner envisages human beings as 'knowing subjects' capable of 'some degree of reflexivity about themselves and their desires' (2005, 34). In this, Ortner envisages subjectivity as a complement to understanding individuals' actions:

> [Subjectivity] is a necessary part of understanding how people (try to) act on the world even as they are acted upon. Agency is not some natural or originary will; it takes shape as specific desires and intentions within a matrix of subjectivity – of (culturally constituted) feelings, thoughts, and meanings. (Ortner 2005, 34)

To conclude, a new mode of analysis is needed to gain a finer level of perception of human activity in an era of super-complexity. The study of human activity needs to be envisaged as a network of contingent relationships between seemingly opposite poles such as agency/structure (Layder 2006, 112; also p. 133). In capturing social activity, Ortner (2005) also suggests considering subjectivity as a way to come closer to understanding human actions. The complexity of capturing the relationships between these elements suggests using more fine-grained analytical methods.

2.3 New approaches

From the reflections above, developed the insight that language outgrows confined usage in specific places and that the way we use language will change according to the situation we find ourselves in, the place we are at or the people we are with (Pennycook 2010, 2). Also, inevitably, the way we read a situation, a place or other people will be different across time and according to individuals (Pennycook 2010, 2), highlighting the need for a more complex awareness of language practices across time and space. The sub-section below introduces the perspective of language as social practice.

2.3.1 Language as social practice

A practice-based view contains the idea that language is socially constructed and hence constantly reinvented by its users (see Pennycook 2010, 129). Thus we can say that seeing language as social practice highlights the place of agency in the construction of social reality, aligning with late modern conceptions of social reality:

> [W]hat we do plays a major role in shaping the habitats we live in, and it is argued that rather than simply being socialized into the norms of a social group whose monitoring subsequently keeps us morally in line, we 'assemble' ourselves from a plethora of changing options, deciding what is right and wrong for ourselves. (Rampton 2006, 12)

But another facet of 'language as practice' is the fixity factor in that language is also seen as constrained by historicity. Pennycook explains that practices are 'moulded by social, cultural, discursive and historical precedents and concurrent contexts' (2010, 9), which constrain meaning but do not exhaust its possibilities (ibid.).

To summarize, the perspective of language as practice enables the grasp of 'a more dynamic and active sense of language endeavours to create new worlds' (Pennycook 2010, 130). Seeing language as practice highlights the spatial and temporal dimensions of language use, and considers both individuals' agentic power (people have the capacity to manipulate language to suit a particular purpose for a particular situation) and the presence of structural constraints. In this way, the notion of language as practice gives us access to a new understanding of human behaviour, which explains why language practices have become a major target of sociolinguistically-oriented studies of language learning over the past few years (see Heller, 2007; Jørgensen, 2008; Otsuji, 2008; Li W., 2011; Li & Zhu, 2013). From being a set of rules to be implemented, language comes to be seen as a complex and dynamic set of flexible resources. Instead of theorizing about abstract language learners (Ushioda 2012, 64), seeing language as a social practice requires us to 'understand society, not just language' (Blommaert 2013, 621).

In the section below, I will highlight the ways of conceptualizing language practices which are much talked about today and which are of particular interest for this study.

2.3.2 Translanguaging

This study is interested in the way contemporary language learners in Hong Kong use French to fashion identities as 'multilingual, multicompetent actors' (Lam 2000, in Norton 2012, 5). For this reason, language practices are at the core of the investigation and one way of approaching these practices is provided by the concept of 'translanguaging'.

In general terms, translanguaging acknowledges both fixity and fluidity and has been described as 'the ability to choose between following and flouting the rules and norms of behaviour, including the use of language, and to push and break boundaries between the old and the new, the conventional and the original, and the acceptable and the challenging' (Li W. 2011, 94). Li and Zhu (2013) see the notion of translanguaging as being able to capture 'the capacity of the de-/re-territorialized speaker to mobilize their linguistic resources to create new social spaces for themselves' (p. 519).

Li and Zhu use the prefix *trans*- as a way to highlight the dynamic practices of multilingual speakers (2013, 519). According to them, the prefix highlights two different elements of the practice. First, *trans*- suggests the '*trans*-formative' aspect of translanguaging. It describes how people's identity might be transformed as a result of learning a language:

> [Transformative because] it brings together different dimensions of the multilingual speakers' linguistic, cognitive, and social skills, their knowledge and experience of the social world and their attitudes and beliefs, and in doing so, develops and transforms the speakers' skills, knowledge, experience, attitudes, and beliefs; thus creating a new identity for the multilingual speaker. (Li & Zhu 2013, 519)

Secondly, *trans*- refers to the '*trans*-disciplinary' perspective of the concept translanguaging with its emphasis on the sociocultural dimensions of multilingual practices, which I already noted as one of the core aspects of language practices:

> [A] translanguaging perspective sees multilingual practices as a window to human sociality, human cognition, social relations, and social structures. It investigates the structural, cognitive, and sociocultural dimensions of multilingual practices in an integrated and holistic way. (Li & Zhu 2013, 519)

Attached to the notion of translanguaging is the notion of a translanguaging space (Li W., 2011). Li Wei defines the relationship between translanguaging and this space as follows:

> Translanguaging creates a social space for the multilingual language user by bringing together different dimensions of their personal history, experience and environment, their attitude, belief and ideology, their cognitive and physical capacity into one coordinated and meaningful performance, and making it into a lived experience. (Li W. 2011, 1223)

In his view, a translanguaging space suggests individuals evolving in and out spontaneously (Li W. 2011, 1223) and getting a 'sense of connectedness' rather than being restricted to 'actual ties' (Li W. 2011, 1222).

This idea complements the notions of 'light communities' and 'small communities' offered by Blommaert and Varis (2015) to describe self-identification processes in today's world. The authors suggest that identities are more likely to be 'small' and impermanent than big and permanent in an era characterized by fluidity and diversity (Blommaert & Varis 2015, 49). Linked to this, the authors use the notion of 'light groups' to suggest that identity formation needs to be seen away from fixed groups which do not share a 'vast amount of backgrounds' under the new conditions (Blommaert & Varis 2015, 3). Yet, as already mentioned (see section 2.1 above), recent developments have shown the relevance of groups in claiming a sense of self-identity. Thus, even if people's practices appear to be varied, they may continue to be structured and attached to a group of reference.

In brief, we can say that the notion of translanguaging helps to open the way to understanding the developments of people's lives in the 21st century, where people need to manipulate language in profoundly new ways as they juggle different languages across different places and in different time frames, ranging from temporary to more durable.

It is important to emphasise, however, that translanguaging is not a label that can be affixed to certain language practices and not others. It is rather a conceptual tool, a way of apprehending complex language phenomena in a complex world. Flores, Spotti and García (2017) note that the goal of terms such as translanguaging (as well as metrolingualism and polylanguaging

introduced below) 'is *not* an attempt to objectively describe "real" language practices… [but to serve as] a particular representation of language that allows different types of questions to emerge.' (p. 550).

2.3.3 Metrolingualism

An additional conceptual tool is provided by metrolingualism, which originates from the concept of metroethnicity developed by Maher (2005). Again, at first glance, the concept appears to emphasize the fluidity of language practice. The idea of metroethnicity was born from observing the new sense of self-identity young Ainu minority speakers displayed during interactions in today's modern and urban Japan. Maher uses the term 'cool' to describe what he saw as a new culture of hybridity (2005, 93), rejecting fixed notions of cultural identity and drawing in multiple senses of belonging outside the common notions of borders and stereotypes:

> You have an Ainu name? That's cool. Your mother's side is Korean? That's cool. Your sister's (rosha), so you sign (shuwa)? That's cool. Osaka now understands that its Koreatown is no longer an embarrassment, an urban secret, but a cool urban asset. Function is out. Form is in. Cool is the unexplained force that adopts cultural heterogeneity by coopting difference as design and fashion. (Maher 2005, 90)

Regarding language learning, Maher (2005) explains that '[b]ilingualism is Cool but not so "learning English" because English education is still linked to the authoritarian structures of school, company and career' (p. 91). Thus, being part of the Cool operating system means you are not interested in merely learning English, but in knowing English for the lifestyle it

represents as well as knowing other languages, including other Asian languages (Maher 2005, 90).

In the same way, metrolingualism seem to suggest at first fluid, creative and changing practices of language during interactions as well as using language to move in and out of various roles or identities (Otsuji & Pennycook 2010, 246). However, the notion of metrolingualism also contains an awareness of both fluidity and fixity. It describes languages practices which are fluid, as in Heller's point (2007, 343) that 'languages turn out to be floating around in unexpected places', but also language practices which are more fixed in that they are tied to borders of culture, history and politics (Otsuji & Pennycook 2010, 244). Otsuji and Pennycook (2010) give the example of two non-Japanese speakers who use unorthodox forms of English and Japanese in their conversation as a form of play. The authors argue that this form of language play includes both features of fluidity ('bastardising' the language in a ludic manner) and fixity (knowing that they are using the wrong form, as an exchange with another colleague using orthodox linguistic forms, later proves) (Otsuji & Pennycook 2010, 243).

In giving this example, the authors stress the importance of not discarding fixity in understanding language practices and not construing fixity and fluidity as dichotomous (Otsujii & Pennycook 2010, 244; see also Connell & Gibson, 2003). In saying this, they recognize that struggle over 'new' language, culture and identity result from confrontations between new practices and fixed traditions (Otsujii & Pennycook 2010, 244). In this, metrolingualism is both the 'disinvention' of language and its 'reconstitution' according to 'local knowledge of what it means to people in the local context' (Otsujii & Pennycook 2010, 241). In this way, the authors stress that there is much more we need to learn about what it means to be of a certain nationality and what it means to

speak a language within the borders of that cultural and linguistic group (Otsujii & Pennycook 2010, 244; see also Li & Zhu, 2013, 526). In the same way, language learners may be contradictory in their use of language, saying they care about proper language rules, procedures and conducts in learning a language whilst still engaging in unconventional practices.

To summarise, the notion of metrolingualism is useful in representing 'the local perspectives of language users who appear to incorporate within their own practices both fluidity and fixity' (Otsujii & Pennycook, 2010, 243). In this study, the investigation is about what it means to be born in Hong Kong and to speak French in this context where Cantonese, English, Mandarin provide the usual cultural and linguistic boundaries; the concept of metrolingualism (as well as the other language practices presented here) allow me to grasp a finer understanding of the interplay between fluidity and fixity in my participants' practices of French.

2.3.4 Polylanguaging

Jørgensen, Karrebæk, Madsen and Møller (2011) describe polylanguaging as the deployment of resources 'associated with different "languages" even when the speaker knows very little of these [languages]' (p.27). This is not done without method (Jørgensen *et al.* 2011, 27) although language users 'may know - and use - the fact that some of the features are perceived by some speakers as not belonging together' (Jørgensen *et al.*, 2011, 34).

The concept of polylanguaging first suggests that mastering the linguistic rules of an identifiable language is not necessarily the aim of language users. By using elements of a language they do not know well, language users deploy another kind of strategy. For example, they might use a

word in passing as a way to hint at a stereotype (Jørgensen *et al*. 2011, 34) or to index themselves in a certain way by flaunting one's knowledge of a language which carries a recognised value, such as Latin (Jørgensen *et al*. 2011, 34). In short, these strategies are linked to the way speakers want to be seen, which is to say linked to the way they construct and project their identities.

With the concept of polylanguaging, Jørgensen *et al.* (2011, 28) argue that it makes more sense generally 'to talk about "language" than about "a language"', an argument which rallies calls against the conception of language in bounded and monolingual terms (also see Jørgensen, 2008; Makoni & Pennycook, 2007). The concept of polylanguaging also highlights how restricted (and restrictive) the concepts of bilingualism or multilingualism are: what polylanguaging practices show is that users have other concerns than adding up linguistic competences. The conventional view of multilingualism is described by Jørgensen *et al*. (2011, 34) as 'competence in one language plus competence in one more language'.

2.4 The multilingual learner

Having looked at some of the ways language is used and conceptualized in the age of superdiversity, I will now look at the language learner and more particularly at the multilingual learner. This is relevant to this study, set in the multilingual environment of Hong Kong with its three official languages (Cantonese, Mandarin and English). In considering the position of the multilingual in the contemporary world, Arnett (2002, in Lamb 2004, 15) points out that under globalisation part of people's identity 'is rooted in their local culture while another part stems from an awareness of their relation to the global culture'. On the one hand, Gal (2006) notes that

being a multilingual speaker has several apparent advantages (in Creese & Blackledge 2015, 24). Apart from the flexibility and mobility which can give access to more economic possibilities, being a multilingual speaker means having multiple opportunities to find out about oneself in a process of comparison with and self-reflection about others who are from a different culture.

On the other hand, this process of knowing oneself is not easy. Kramsch (2012) notes that multilingual speakers can sometimes experience 'feelings of impostures' as they may be seen as illegitimate speakers of a language or as lacking in cultural knowledge. Multilingual speakers are likely to experience painful clashes with the 'authentic' representatives of a monocultural group. Perhaps partly because of this, multilingual speakers can be viewed with suspicion because of appearing to have 'two conflicting personalities whose shifting linguistic allegiances imply shifting political allegiances and moral commitments' (Pavlenko, 2006, 11). Kramsch adds that multilingual speakers often have issues with finding their 'true voice' (2009, 485), while Pavlenko notes that they also experience feeling 'fake', 'artificial' or 'performative' (2006, 18).

These observations suggest that multilingual speakers are likely to understand the world differently and to have a particular process of self-discovery and identity formation, compared with those whose are mainly affiliated to a single language or culture. However, from the perspectives presented above, there is no such thing as a 'monolingual'. Bakhtin's (1981) notion of heteroglossia, which is highly compatible with the more recent concepts such as translanguaging, in fact refers to 'intra-language varieties' or 'the social diversity of speech types' rather than the diversity of different languages (Bailey, 2007, 258). To put it another way, we are all multilinguals because we have access to different registers, styles and dialects within what may be thought of as a single language. The focus on the multilingual learner is not,

therefore, intended to set up a dichotomy with so-called 'monolingual' learners, but rather to reveal the multiple dimensions of all language learning and use.

2.4.1 Additional language learning: definition and background

Having introduced some issues linked to being a multilingual which are relevant to this study, I will now look at studies of the learners and users of additional languages such as French in Hong Kong.

First of all, I will define the term 'additional language' as it is used in this study. The category 'additional language' is problematic as it depends on both learner-related and context-related factors (for commentary, see Hammarberg 2011; Jessner 2008). In this study, I define 'additional language' as a language that has few or no 'natural' communicative functions in a particular context, and for which there are few opportunities for use outside the classroom. There are arguments for using the term 'foreign language' or 'L3', but the term 'additional language' (henceforth, AL) is preferred here because it does not make *a priori* assumptions about the actual roles these languages play in learners' lives.

If we accept that learning a language is an act of identity (see Block, 2007; Leung, Harris & Rampton 1997; Norton & Toohey, 2011), then learning an additional language may be a way to access a new identity for 'aesthetic effect' or to escape a 'fixed cultural identity' (Pennycook 2010, 85; see also Maher, 2005). Learning an additional language may also serve to distinguish oneself from those who only study compulsory languages such as English or Mandarin, in a process of distinction (see Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Another perspective is that such language

learners gain 'cultural capital for a new aspirational lifestyle' (Benson, Barkhuizen, Bodycott & Brown 2013, 23) which might be different and perhaps more attractive than that offered through the channel of knowing only English, for example. Among the many possibilities, it is safe to assume that a non-compulsory language is an act of identity which carries different meanings for different people.

Yet, despite the insight that studies of additional language learning might provide, there are in fact few such studies in Hong Kong and little is known about the precise ways in which additional language learning might contribute to processes of identity construction. In particular, very few studies in Hong Kong have adopted the kind of approach which is needed to adequately deal with the complexity of these issues.

2.4.2 Review of literature on the teaching and learning of French

This section reviews some of the recent literature on teaching and learning French both outside and within Hong Kong.

2.4.2.1 In the global context

In the global context, several studies have focused on French teaching and learning in relation to identity. Among them are the studies of Coffey (2010; also, Coffey & Street, 2008) and Ros i Solé (2007, 2013, 2016) taking a narrative approach and those of Lamoureux (2012) and Kinginger (2004) adopting an ethnographic approach.

Coffey's study of six British learners of French investigates 'how participants integrated images of France and "Frenchness" into their own autobiographical accounts' (Coffey 2010, 129). He suggests that 'to become a Francophile is to invoke a range of historically constituted discourses' (p. 123) such as, for example, French 'as a language of elegance and beauty' (Coffey 2010, 124). This highlights the symbolic role of additional languages and suggests the existence of an aesthetic dimension in language learning (Coffey 2010, 123 and 125-128). The author also shows that his participants constructed their identities in a relational manner, opposing images of their own language with those of the language(s) they learned. He observes:

> [W]hat is attractive about (experience of) France is commensurate with what is unattractive about (experience of) England. These oppositions draw on the iconographic repertoire of national types, for example, of the English as Protestant puritans. (Coffey 2010, 126)

In addition, Coffey's study highlights the important role played by his participants' experience of visiting France. He remarks on the important role of turning points in life trajectories and in understanding identity construction in narrative studies. In Kinginger's study (2004) of Alice, studying and living in France is a major turning point in the participant's life. The study shows that Alice finds through learning French a way to regain cultural capital in her country (the US) and renegotiate a more favourable identity for herself. Similarly, Coffey (2010, 131) evokes the use of a 'repertoire of privilege' by his participants when retelling their French experience as a way to position themselves towards others.

Yet, one important difference in the present study is that identity construction in relation to French is less likely to stem from engagement in pre-existing communities of practice, as for the average learner there are few opportunities to engage with French-speaking communities in Hong Kong and elsewhere. Instead, learners in Hong Kong are more likely to engage with French through imagination. This reflects the weakening of the traditional links between languages and communities in today's world. As Pavlenko (2001, 279) notes, many people in the world today 'learn and use additional languages without giving a thought to those who could be considered a TL group'.

Another study of French learning that has informed this study is that of Lamoureux (2012) who looks at the transition made by fifteen Francophone students from a Francophone secondary school to university in Canada. In the study, the participants who move from regions where French is spoken by a minority to more bilingual Francophone-Anglophone regions are shocked when they discover that they do not match the image of 'the ideal Francophone - an individual with a particular accent and specific linguistic repertoires' they thought they had (Lamoureux 2012, 163). Although Canada's linguistic context differs from Hong Kong's, Lamoureux's study poses the question of how the sense of one 'locality' constrains people in one linguistic identity when in reality, people's language practices do not generally resemble the practices of only 'one community of practice' (2012, 163). Lamoureux concludes that education needs to take into account the 'complex social, linguistic realities of […] twenty-first-century communities' (ibid.). Similarly, it is necessary to think of Hong Kong people beyond their primary association with a dominant language – i.e. that of being Cantonese speakers – by considering their linguistic experiences as well as their linguistic practices and their relationship with other languages.

Although not directly linked to French, Ros i Solé's research in modern languages in European contexts suggests that language learning is first of all linked to agency, meaning not only the act of making linguistic choices but also that of 'taking control' when language learners tell their stories and 'interpret their language learning experience' (2007, 212). In more recent work, the same author focuses attention on language learners as 'cosmopolitan individuals with subjective and complex socio-political and historical identities' (Ros i Solé 2013). She differentiates between 'intercultural speakers' and 'cosmopolitan speakers' (Ros i Solé 2013, 335), suggesting that we have entered an age beyond simply developing intercultural skills. She argues that it is time to move on from conceptualising individuals as 'statically fixed in particular languages and cultures, consuming homogenised versions of the language' (Ros i Solé 2013, 335) and instead consider how individuals ''live' and 'imagine' languages at their own pace, and on their own terms by engaging in their agency, through personal readings of cultures and tracing their own trajectories within a cosmopolitan vision' (Ros i Solé 2013, 336). Ros i Solé's picture of language learning in the 21st century is that of an individual 'who "dwells" in a variety of languages and cultures' and creatively fashions 'a new cultural identity' by consciously wandering across different cultures and taking what one wants. Ros i Solé uses the term 'intercultural virtual flâneur' to describe this new individual, which gives the image of someone moving freely and being a discriminating consumer of his or her surroundings because 'a flâneur lifestyle' suggests 'a reflective distance' (Ros i Solé 2013, 334-335). The author notes :

> *Flâneurs* are rather detached from society. They stay on the periphery and, like a voyeur, they adopt the gaze of the spectator who observes and studies the world around him like an amateur detective. (Ros i Solé 2013, 334)

Yet, this 'flâneur' and 'cosmopolitan speaker' is not detached from the 'other', he or she is also drawn to the other as a way to explore and construct his or her self, as Ros i Solé explains below:

> There is no clear division between the self and the other, and rather than an 'encounter' of two cultures, there is a gradual building of curiosity and affinity with another culture through personal interests. […] The act of learning a language becomes an act of testing the boundaries of the self, by re-appraising routines and values and by entering processes of becoming. (Ros i Solé 2013, 332)

Ros i Solé (2013) notes that language learners of today are 'constantly questioning and reassessing their views and position' in the world, which has consequences in the way we should teach these individuals (pp. 336-337).

2.4.2.2 In Hong Kong

There have been few studies on teaching and learning French in Hong Kong and none that focus on identity. The only study of additional languages touching this area appears to be that of Hennig (2010) even though she looks at German learning from the perspective of motivation rather than identity. Similarly, in Taiwan, a study of French learners by Dreyer (2009) explored the concept of 'existential motivation' rather than identity.

Before Hennig's study, a language-motivational, mixed-method-approach study amongst Hong Kong university students conducted by Humphreys and Spratt (2008) were useful to briefly situate French among other languages in Hong Kong and in particular, in relation to English,

Japanese and German. Humphreys and Spratt (2008) note the integrative and affective dimensions of learning additional languages such as French, Japanese and German, as opposed to the overwhelmingly instrumental motivation of learning English (p. 322). The integrative dimension refers to the extent to which respondents want 'to be like target language speakers, or to integrate in their culture', according to the authors' interpretation of Dörnyei and Clément's (2001) classification. More precisely, the affective dimension refers to 'cultural interest' and the desire for 'direct contact', which refer to 'the extent of liking for the cultural products associated with the language, and the level of desire to meet people from the target language cultures' (Humphreys & Spratt 2008, 318).

Although wanting to learn French seems likely to be associated with interest in French culture, the model of motivation presented by Humphreys and Spratt (2008) appears limited in its ability to explain language learning under conditions of complex mobility and diversity. Its first limitation is the failure to acknowledge time and change. A second limitation is that the notion of integrative motivation (or the desire to 'integrate' in a culture) seems outdated in an age where online activity is capable of establishing connections with any culture in the world, without the individual necessarily needing to 'integrate' into it (see section 2.2.1 above). Although France might be further away from Hong Kong than Japan, the geographical distance between the two countries (see Humphreys & Spratt 2008, 326) seems less of an issue. Interestingly though, Rampton (2006) points out that foreign language studies are uncommon in sociolinguistics because of this element of geographical distance. He notes, referring to the teaching of German in the British curriculum:

> With an instructed foreign language, the 'authentic' speakers live apart from the students learning it, often hundreds of miles away […] this makes the language's social significance and connotations seem remote and indeterminate (or else tediously tied to the national stereotypes that everyone is all too familiar with). (Rampton 2006, 138)

A third limitation is that although French might appear to be less popular than Japanese - which is regarded as 'highly fashionable' among young Hongkongers (Humphreys & Spratt 2008, 322) - ten years is a long time if 'fashion' is taken into account especially in Hong Kong, where trends come and go very quickly.

A fourth limitation of Humphreys and Spratt's model of motivation for additional languages is that culture is not a fixed notion or a pre-given and external construct as it is a different experience for different people (see section 2.1 above). In his 'plea' for change in research on intercultural communication and education, Dervin (2011, 39) calls for a reconceptualisation of the concept of culture, judging it too often used in 'uncritical, systematic, and reified ways'. This point will be further developed in Chapter 3, section 3.2.

Saying that, the acculturation approach taken by Humphreys and Spratt has produced a useful base from which to question the reasons for learning additional languages in Hong Kong. For example, a recent study of German learning at a Hong Kong university by Hennig (2010a, 2010b) has built on this question and has proposed an interesting perspective about German learning in Hong Kong.

Hennig (2010a, 2010b) draws on Foucault's later works on ethics (e.g., Foucault, 1981, 1984a, 1984b, 1988), which contrast greatly with his previous well-known 'unrelenting determinism' (Clarke & Hennig 2013, 79) in that the author recognizes people's capacity to transform themselves by 'their own means, or with the help of others' through ethical living and through self-reflection' (Clarke & Hennig 2013, 82; see also Foucault 1997, 225). Foucault refers to this as 'care of the self' (see Hennig 2010a & 2010b, Clarke & Hennig, 2013). Hennig (2010b, 30) further describes the concept of 'care of the self' as 'an art of existence', which consists of 'making choices and adding a certain style, aesthetics or way of living to the self by selecting those forms that are relevant to one's life'.

Drawing on this, Hennig (2010a) notes that learning German offers her twelve participants 'certain values […] correspond[ing] to their ethical convictions and beliefs' (p. 319). For example, the German language and culture is seen as 'strong, powerful and superior' (Hennig 2010a, 319) and as having 'moral principles and integrity' (Hennig 2010a, 314). Learning the language gives participants a path to become 'emancipat[ed] and individualistic as opposed to being conformist and dependent on others', which also matches their hopes for themselves in the future (Hennig 2010a, 319). In this, Hennig (2010b, ii) posits that learning German can be seen as an act of 'self-formation'.

However, tempering the notion that individuals are capable of freeing themselves from structural constraints, Clarke and Hennig (2013) add that 'ethical self-formation does not imply that one can become anything one wishes, regardless of the social and historical context in which one lives and has grown up in' (p. 81; see also Hennig 2010b, 30). The authors note that self-formation is primarily a form of intense curiosity and self-reflection and does not equate with the

capacity to actually effect changes. The idea is that by opening a space within our mind through questioning, we rehearse having different convictions and beliefs, which is to say imagining being another form of ourselves:

> Ethical self-formation rather needs to be understood as the freedom to question the historical circumstances that have shaped our lives and how we have come to be, and to nurture a kind of curiosity in ourselves to experiment with how we could be otherwise. (Clarke and Hennig 2013, 81)

Hennig's conclusion is that additional language learners find ways 'to develop, design and live a life they consider meaningful based on their ethical and aesthetic convictions and beliefs' (2010a, 308) and that this is achieved (at least to begin with) through the imagination.

2.4.3 Perspectives on French and Frenchness

Learners of additional languages, including those in Hennig's study, can also be seen as inheriting various widely-circulated beliefs about languages and cultures. In this section, I will elaborate on the notion of representations as well as introduce the notion of Frenchness.

2.4.3.1 Social representations

Social representations are seen to have a large impact on language learning (see Candelier & Hermann-Brenneke, 1993; Castellotti & Moore, 2002). The French sociologist Denise Jodelet has described the concept of social representation ('représentation sociale') as follows:

> [U]ne forme de connaissance, socialement élaborée et partagée, ayant une visée pratique et concourant à la construction d'une réalité commune à un ensemble sociale.[1] (Jodelet, 2005)

In other words, social representations can be seen as networks of collaboratively constructed images of reality, which circulate in society in a fluid manner via various sites and contexts. Representational images are thus close to stereotypes which people 'hold, often unconsciously, and use to make sense of the world and their experiences in it [and which] are always oversimplified' (Gee 2005, 61 in Coffey 2010, 126). Among studies of additional language learning, Coffey (2010) notes that his participants 'drew on shared cultural repertoires of the appeal of French' and that these shared repertoires though perhaps 'subconscious […] underpin the passion for learning French as an autobiographical identity project' (p. 125).

However, seeing representations as akin to stereotypes or shared resources suggests that they are taken up or contextualized in the same way by all learners. This may not always be the case. For example, French is seen as romantic in China and Taiwan, but not in Japan (Dreyer 2009, 34-35). And looking beyond these generalisations based on national boundaries, Moore and Gajo (2009) remind us of 'the paradox' that exists between 'the notion of language [which] is an abstract one' and people 'seem[ing] to have definite ideas about what languages are, and about which languages are spoken in which countries' (p. 145). In effect, under conditions of superdiversity, generalizations are likely to be misleading, not least because there is variation in how cultures are perceived by individuals or within any one locality. To overcome easy simplifications, the

[1] My translation: 'A form of knowledge, socially constructed and shared, which is destined to be used and which contributes to the construction of a common social reality for a group'

study of representations should instead 'unravel the complex discursive process of referencing languages, language speakers and bi/multilingualism' (see Moore and Gajo 2009, 145).

This is why this study – following Pennycook's (2010, 74) recommendations for the study of English – considers how French is taken up, how people use French, and why people choose to study French. It will also look at interactions between the local culture and its more global counterparts, as perceived by additional language learners. Previous studies have started to address these interactions. In her study of learners of German in Hong Kong, Hennig (2010a) notes the existence of 'notions of self-stylisation and distinction, and a sense of societal and cultural belonging through identification or non-identification with certain ethical and sociocultural values of the local culture as well as that of the target language' (p. 313). Coffey (2010) adds that the characteristics perceived to be associated with a culture are 'structured, pre-existing resources which are reproduced over a range of fields (such as school, consumer practices, friendships and family groups)' which individuals can appropriate for themselves (Coffey 2010, 132). Coffey (2010, 126) also describes representational images of different languages and cultures as 'iconographic repertoire of national types' built in a process 'of difference/opposition', as mentioned above (see section 2.4.2.1).

Socially-built representations are particularly important in the age of superdiversity, given the importance of social media and the Internet and the multitude of mediated images which circulate on it (Arnaut, 2012). Never before as it been so easy or so unavoidable, to access images linked to another culture. So even though a language such as French is at first glance little present in Hong Kong, it becomes secondary to the fact that French-related images are widely circulated on the Internet, via films and other cultural products such as, advertising.

Despite great variations in these images and the way they form social representations, it is important to acknowledge that representations of groups strongly affect individuals' beliefs:

> [T]he identities that people display, perform, contest, or discuss in interaction are based on ideologies and beliefs about the characteristics of social groups and categories and about the implications of belonging to them. (De Fina 2006, 353-354).

To summarize, in research, we need to 'avoid easy generalizations about the way communities portray themselves and their relationships with others' (De Fina 2006, 374) (e.g., 'German toughness', 'French sophistication') whilst at the same time acknowledging that culturally-held stereotypes form material that can be exploited by individuals, consciously or unconsciously. Above all, we must keep in mind that 'the construction and presentation of identity is a process in constant development' (De Fina 2006, 355).

2.4.3.2 French and Frenchness

I use the term Frenchness (which in French can be translated as 'Francité') to mean perceptions of both culture and language, reflecting the fact that the two often merge together.

Coffey (2010) describes some of the 'social frames' (p. 123) associated with French and Frenchness, pointing out that a 'symbolic field' has developed over time (p. 124). This field construes French, for example, as 'a language of elegance and beauty, often conflated with the French 'good life' (Coffey 2010, 124). Once again, however, Coffey observes that the task of narrative analysis is to understand 'how these broader social frames are interpreted by

individuals' (2010, 124). As this study will be investigating how the broad frames of social representations of French and Frenchness are mobilized and interpreted by individual learners in Hong Kong, it will also go beyond the kinds of 'national stereotypes' criticized by Rampton (2006, 138).

Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework

3.1 The concept of identity

Having looked at general conditions of language use under conditions of superdiversity and introduced some of the concepts that are useful in gaining a general understanding of language practices under these conditions, I will now look at the individual under these conditions and more particularly at the topic of identity formation linked to language learning. The concept of identity forms a central part of the theoretical framework in this study as it has the capacity to combine and synthesize many of the concepts introduced before.

Bucholtz and Hall (2005) noted that 'the age of identity is upon us' (p. 608). In effect, identity is widely studied in 'sociocultural linguistics' as well as 'in the human and social sciences more generally' (Bucholtz & Hall 2005, 608; also see Lemke 2008, 17; Block 2007, 2009; Gee, 2000). In Second Language Acquisition (SLA), studies of language learner identity have flourished over the past twenty years (Valdés, 1998; Norton 2000; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004; Kinginger, 2004; Morita, 2004; Block, 2007; Gu & Tong, 2012; Darvin & Norton, 2015).

As already noted, it is now a commonplace to say that language learning is also a process of identity formation (see Block 2007; Leung, Harris & Rampton, 1997; Norton & Toohey, 2011). Pavlenko states that 'identities are constructed and reconstructed in language' (2005a, 226). Describing her own experience of learning English in Hong Kong, Chik recalls that it was 'more than merely learning a language…[i]t was my own journey to construct individuality' (see Benson, Chik & Lim 2003, 31). In their study about second language identity linked to study

abroad experiences, Benson *et al*. equally point out that learning a new language 'changes the learner as a person' (2013, 1).

Early theorizations of identity often started with reflections on the experiences and histories of migrants regarding where home might be, what one's native language might be, the question of migrants' sense of identity linked to their new circumstances as well as what kind of identity they were given by others (e.g., Duff 2015, 60).

Norton's study of five immigrant women in Canada (1995, 2000) marked the starting point for a reconceptualization of language learning from an identity perspective. Her study showed the importance of language in defining who we are, how we want to be seen and how we are represented and positioned by others. She explains this in the much-quoted passage:

> [I]t is through language that a person negotiates a sense of self within and across different sites at different points in time, and it is through language that a person gains access to – or is denied access to – powerful social networks that give learners the opportunity to speak. (Norton 2000, 5)

Benson *et al*. (2013) indeed point out that '[s]econd language learners are at the frontline of new experiences of identity associated with globalization and modernity' (p. 27) whilst Lamoureux (2012) argues, in her study of francophones in Canada, that Canadian nationals constantly cross borders within their own Canadian community as they are constantly confronted with 'new, more culturally diverse but narrow language ideology spaces' which affect their sense of who they are (p.151). This is to say that identity is also closely tied to debates on multilingualism and

transnationalism, which include different views of culture and interculturality. In the following section, I will briefly introduce the current debates around these questions, which will also clarify the link between identity, language and culture.

3.2. Identity, language and culture

Views of language and culture are still dominated in most societies by a monolingual ideology, which contrasts with contemporary research perspectives arising from observing language and culture under conditions of globalization, as already hinted at in Chapter 2 (see section 2.1). Monolingual ideology is based on a discourse of homogeneity, boundaries and stability: one homogeneous language for one culturally bounded group of people within the stable boundaries of a territory. It is part of the ideology of the nation-state (Heller 2007, 341; see also Byram 1992, 11), which is also linked to European discourses of colonisation (see Jørgensen *et al.* 2011, 27). In this ideology, languages are envisaged as 'bounded systems' (Heller 2007, 1), which is to say as separate entities (see also Scollon 2001, 146). In the present context of mobility, people tend to use languages in a very different way. Ag and Jørgensen (2013) underline that people living in increasingly ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous settings – especially in urban settings such as Hong Kong – tend not to have 'a particularly close relationship to one "language"' (p. 527). In other words, multilingualism and multiculturalism are facts of life for many people in the world today, especially for those who live in urban super-diverse environments. Ros i Solé (2013) also points out that the 'shortening of distances' through increased democratisation of travels and digital connectivity 'is challenging previous conceptualisations of the 'foreign' and the personally constructed cultural horizons of the language learner' (p. 336).

In a similar way, Dervin (2011) criticises essentialised images of culture in intercultural studies (p.39) where cultures are considered stable and with clear identifiable boundaries. Equally, Ortner (2005, 36) argues that the 'flexible' attributes of culture need to be acknowledge.

Based on a non-essentialist view of culture, Dervin (2011) proposes that approaches to interculturality should focus on encounters between individuals rather than 'encounters of cultures' (Dervin 2011, 38). For him, interculturality should be understood 'as the positioning and negotiation of individuals who come from different spaces-times (rather than "cultures")' (Dervin 2011, 40).

Ros i Solé (2016, 3) also challenges 'the long-held belief that we are born and die with the same cultural identity' and is equally in favour of putting the emphasis on a personalised experience of culture and language. Her new vision of the language learner emphasises the need to acknowledge the personal element (i.e. the identity of the person) in language and culture studies, as follows :

> Learners embark on personal journeys where they draw their own cartographies of the world which use the force of perception, affect and creativity to experience and fashion new road-maps of the world and new interpretations. This view of language learning claims that languages and cultures are not forever ; they come in different versions and sizes to fit the bodies of their owners and their circumstances, and they are not only 'acquired' and 'learnt', but also 'lived'. (Ros i Solé 2016, 3)

In consequence, Blommaert and Rampton (2011) argue (see also Otsuji & Pennycook 2010, 243; Jørgensen *et al.*, 2011) for a move away from pluralizing languages and cultures into separate categories and towards an understanding of the complex and combinatory ways in which they are used.

To reiterate, the notions of language and culture are more unstable and malleable than suggested in a monolingual perspective on language and culture. In the next section, I will present the concept of identity which informs this study, drawing on various frameworks and perspectives as there is no single theoretical framework with which to approach it (see Varghese, Morgan, Johnston & Johnson, 2005). I will draw on some of the 'interrelated theoretical frameworks' which have been used in identity and language studies (see Duff 2015, 61), but at the same time I will attempt to outline a theory of identity that has coherence and is relevant to contemporary conditions.

3.3 Key frameworks, approaches and perspectives in conceptualizing identity in language studies

The theoretical frameworks, approaches and perspectives which inform this study include the broadly post-structuralist perspective on identity developed by Norton (1995, 2000) based on Bourdieu's theories of social practice (Bourdieu, 1977, 1982, 1991). Imagination, introduced in detail in the Community of Practice (CoP) framework developed by Lave and Wenger (1991), also informs this study. Finally, the scalar perspective (e.g., Blommaert, 2010) will be presented as a useful approach to understanding social phenomena - including identity - in this study. Each one of these aspects is developed in the sections below.

3.3.1 The post-structuralist perspective on identity

Bonny Norton's study (1995, 2000) started a considerable research interest in taking a post-structuralist perspective on identity in relation to language acquisition (e.g., Valdés, 1998; Toohey, 2000; Pavlenko, 2003; Morita, 2004). A key characteristic of the post-structuralist view of identity is that people have multiple and changing identities. The concept of subjectivity also becomes important in this view of identity, as identity is seen to be closely linked with agency and power. I will outline these aspects of identity in the sections below.

3.3.1.1 A non-unitary conception of the individual

A post-structuralist perception of identity involves a 'nonunitary and contradictory' conception of the individual (Norton 2000, 125), and an anti-essentialist conception of social structures. According to the latter conception, the attributes of socially defined groups cannot be determined by 'cultural and/or biological characteristics believed to be inherent to the group' (Bucholtz 2003, 400). These conceptions have been developed in the studies of post-structuralist thinkers such as Chris Weedon (1987, 1997), an influential feminist who developed a theory of subjectivity to explain women's experiences of the world. By linking women's individual experiences with the multiple struggles they encountered in their everyday existence, Weedon illustrated her view of individuals as being diverse, dynamic and contradictory, rather than unitary, stable and rational. She in effect showed that individuals needed to be understood in terms of complex identities and subjectivities, which she described as:

> [T]he conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world. (Weedon 1997, 32).

Norton was influenced by Weedon (1987) in her landmark study of migrant women (1995, 2000) in which she challenged the prevailing view of straightforward language 'acquisition' and introduced the notion that it was second learners' difficulties in getting themselves heard in their context that played a crucial role in the process of language learning, despite the fact that they might be motivated to learn the language.

Because of the recognition of the role of subjectivity in Norton's study (see also Block, 2009, 19), I will introduce this notion first before considering the other inputs which led Norton to her theory of identity.

3.3.1.2 Subjectivity and identity

As part of his call for further exploration of the concept of identity in applied linguistics, Block (2009) begins with the need to make a conceptual distinction between identity and subjectivity and he notes (p. 218) that this disambiguation is seldom made. The distinction between the two concepts can be made firstly in terms of the time frames involved. In the work of Weedon (2004), Hall (2004) and Gee (1996), identity is seen to be relatively more permanent, and subjectivity is more 'ephemeral' (Block 2009, 219). For example, Hall (2004, 3) characterizes identity as being 'the particular set of traits, beliefs and allegiances…that give one a consistent personality and mode of social being' (in Block 2009, 218).

This points to the second way in which the two concepts can be distinguished, namely in terms of product and process. Subjectivity is an analytical concept that tries to understand the process of 'how identity is constructed in moment-to-moment activity at the crossroads of self-consciousness and externally-imposed constraints' (Block 2009, 218). A person's sense of identity, in other words, can be seen as the more-or-less durable product of 'a particular mode of subjectivity' (Weedon 2004, 19, in Block 2009, 217). Identities may have short-term or long-term aspects, but from an analytical perspective they are more durable than the ever-changing modes of subjectivity which create them. Identity can be seen as involving a process of 'fixing' in which 'more stable identities' (Block 2009, 217) emerge from the flux of subjectivity. This process reflects people's need to gain a more 'singular sense of who they are and where they belong' (Weedon 2004, 19 in Block 2009, 217). However, fixing needs to be seen as referring not to a permanent self – not time in 'reality' – but rather to a sense of self that moves through psychological time. This is what emerges, for example, in narrative.

An additional perspective on subjectivity as process is provided by 'positioning theory' (Van Langenhove & Harré, 1999; Davies & Harré 1999), which can also be placed within the post-structuralist paradigm. From this perspective, an individual is not 'a relatively fixed end product' but something which is 'constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate' (Davies & Harré 1999, 35). Here, 'discursive practices' (which other authors may refer to more simply as 'discourses') involve both language and other semiotic resources such as styles of dress (Block 2007, 32). They are seen as occurring at various scales (e.g., disciplinary, political, cultural and small-group) and around various topics, such as gender

or class (Davies & Harré 1999, 34). They also occur across different modes, ranging from face-to-face interaction to (mediated) and online interaction.

In positioning theory, discursive practices appear to be similar to the modes of subjectivity in Weedon's (2004) approach – they provide a range of possible fixings of identity (somewhat confusingly, these are called 'subject positions'; see also Pavlenko 2005b). These short-term or long-term fixings are sometimes conceived of with reference to inscriptions, or 'categories which might be qualified as social or even demographic, such as ethnicity, race, nationality, gender and social class' (Block 2009, 216). From the perspective of positioning theory, a person's sense of 'identity' cannot be fixed with reference only to pre-existing categories:

> [W]ho one is, that is, what sort of person one is, is always an open question with a shifting answer depending on the positions made available within one's own and others' discursive practices and within those practices, the stories through which we make sense of our own and others' lives. (Davies & Harré 1999, 35)

As Trent (2018) notes, from a poststructuralist perspective, 'discourses provide individuals with subject positions' (p. 573) and thus with different possibilities for identity.But both discourses and identities are 'fluid and contingent, leaving open the possibility for struggles over which discourses should be privileged and the identity positions that are available to individuals' (Trent 2018, 574; see also Laclau & Mouffe, 1985).

The reference to 'stories' in Davies and Harré's quote above also highlights an important fact about identity, namely that it is always subject to interpretation and reinterpretation by both the teller and the receiver of these stories. This has important implications for the methodological

approach of this study, and also indicates the roles of agency and power in explaining the extent to which people take up or resist prevailing discourses.

3.3.1.3 Agency and identity

Positioning theory thus allows for the incorporation of elements of social theory and psychology into the study of identity. It also balances structure and agency in that while it recognizes the constitutive force of discursive practices, it also recognizes that 'people are capable of exercising choice in relation to those practices' (Davies & Harré 1999, 35). This is also true of the more linguistic-anthropological approach of Ortner (e.g., Ortner 2005), for whom the importance of subjectivity is that it forms 'the basis of agency' (Ortner 2005, 34). According to Ortner, the very idea of agency presupposes a 'complex subjectivity' behind it, so that individuals internalize, reflect upon, and frequently react against – the set of circumstances in which they find themselves (Ortner 2005, 45).

In a similar way, Layder proposes identity as a *self-realization project* which emphasizes the 'interfusion of influences' on the individual (2004, 143). His view first highlights 'the social circumstances which influence and shape [the individual's] trajectory through the social world' and the 'dialectic' between individual agency and structure (Layder 2004, 130), but also the part played by subjectivity in constructing self-identity and explaining people's actions and identity moves.

He presents identity as a 'network of ties and interdependencies in which [people] are embedded and which is unique to them' (Layder 2004, 137). Apart from structural factors, these ties and interdependencies include psychologically-related factors such as, emotions and psychological

factors which we carry since childhood. Layder first considers people's unique 'psychobiography' or what people 'carry in their head' (1994, 209) and then, underlines the role of emotions and particularly what he calls the 'psychological predisposition' of an individual (2004, 136) in self-narrative development. He notes the role of the 'subconscious' in explaining our behaviour (Layder 2004, 11) and suggests that emotions 'underpin our everyday behaviour' (Layder 2004, 11 & 13) as well as influencing our 'rationalization' of events and our capacity to reflexively monitor events (ibid.). Layder's conception of identity as a 'network of ties' echoes Ortner's (2005) characterization of subjectivity as including 'complex structures of thought, feeling, reflection, and the like, that make social beings always more than the occupants of particular positions and the holders of particular identities' (p. 37).

In addition, Layder notes that mental health is a pre-requisite for developing a sense of self (2004, 141). We need basic security, self-esteem, experiencing feelings of love and of being loved, approval (by others and of others), self-worth and self-respect, being comfortable alone and with others, feeling significant, being recognized and being understood (see Layder, 2004, 32-45) to develop a sense of self. In particular, we need to feel 'desired' to feel that we are 'normal'; we need to sense that 'we fit in and are accepted by others' and we hate 'being regarded as 'being difficult to deal with' or not being part of the crowd' (Layder 2004, 40). Layder also notes even though we are all unique in the degree in which these emotions act on us, all of us give 'great importance' to the fulfillment of these distinct emotional requirements in our daily life (Layder 2004, 44-45).

To reiterate, emotion (which Layder refers to as the 'emotional tenor' or 'feeling tone' that surround and envelop each of us) is an important factor in explaining identity (Layder 2004, 136-

137). We can thus say that our emotional state defines 'the points at which we strive to be the person we are and would wish to be' (Layder 2004, 45). For this reason, the notion of identity as *self-realization* is central to this study.

3.3.1.4 Power and identity

As in the previous discussion of agency and structure (see Chapter 2), the theorization of identity needs to acknowledge the fact of power, highlighting its effects on people's possibilities for action and self-determination.

Bourdieu's capital theory and his theorization of language as symbolic capital has been an important source of input towards the conceptualisation of identity (see for example, Norton 2000) as well as a reconceptualisation of language and language learning. It sees language as a source of symbolic power (Bourdieu 1977, 1982, 1991), one which is possessed unequally by speakers and which is used by learners to assert their right to speak. Language learners are easily affected by power relationships for two reasons: on the one hand, they have to express themselves in a language they are not in full control of, which makes them more vulnerable to being silenced (including by themselves) or being ignored by others; on the other hand, they can easily be denied the 'right to speech' (Bourdieu 1977, 648), as they are considered illegitimate speakers. For Bourdieu, being a 'legitimate speaker' involves the notions of being an appropriate speaker for the circumstance, being a legitimate 'receiver' of the message as well as using legitimate linguistic forms including appropriate pronunciation and syntax (Norton 2000, 69).

This hidden form of censorship has consequences for the language learner, as Norton (2000) extensively pointed out regarding the women in her study. She described the great difficulties these women faced in finding ways to avoid this form of censorship. Their opportunities to use English in Canada were not merely linked to language and communicative competence issues, or to motivational issues, but also and overpoweringly to the problem of not being *permitted* to use English. Being denied opportunities to use the language meant that they were also deprived from accessing the society they were trying to integrate with, which meant that they were forced to remain on the margins of Canadian society and remain immigrants (in their minds and in the minds of the people around them). In fact, their identities were in a state of transit between the old world they left behind and the new one they were painfully entering, but to them the fact that their former selves had almost disappeared as they were forced to inhabit a new identity they struggled with, was painful.

Although the language learners in this study are not technically second language learners, which is to say learning French in a French environment, they are nevertheless multicultural subjects who experience power differentials. In Hong Kong, most people have to learn at least two languages (Mandarin and English) as well as their mother tongue, Cantonese. It is interesting to consider the notion of legitimacy in relation to these and other languages. To what extent do Hong Kong people feel they are legitimate speakers of the languages in their life, and how do they counter feelings of illegitimacy? Considering the effects of power raises the possibility that learning a non-compulsory language such as French relates to people's experiences with other languages, as well as to wider power differentials in the local context. In this way, issues of social inequality are also at the heart of this study.

3.4 Redefining language competence

Adopting the perspectives above, the notion of language competence changes. Competence is less about linguistic mastery than the necessity of equal footing of authority for both parties to be able to express themselves. Bourdieu (1977, 648) has termed this condition the 'right to speech' and associated rights such as the 'right to be listened to' and the 'right to be understood' [La compétence est donc aussi une capacité à se faire écouter. [...] On ne cherche pas seulement à être compris mais aussi à être cru, obéi, respecté, distingué] (Bourdieu 1977, 20).

Kramsch and Whiteside apply Bourdieu's theory to the framework of identity by using the term *symbolic* to talk about competence:

> *Symbolic competence* is the ability not only to approximate or appropriate for oneself someone else's language , but to shape the very context in which the language is learned and used. (Kramsch & Whiteside 2008, 664) *(my italics)*

This also drives Kramsch (2009, 188) to envisage language learning as an exercise of expansion of the symbolic self. It is on this basis language that teaching also needs to change, a view shared by many scholars and which is also inscribed in the movement qualified as the bi/multi-lingualism or 'complexity' turn (see Jørgensen *et al.* 2011; Otsuji & Pennycook, 2010; Heller, 2007; Blommaert, 2010). Similarly, Norton's (2012) notion of investment is directly linked to Bourdieu's theory of symbolic capital (Norton 2012, 3; see also Norton Peirce 1995, 9):

> If learners invest in a language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which in turn increase the value of their cultural capital and social power. (Darvin & Norton 2015, 37)

In other words, learners decide to learn a language to gain a wider range of symbolic capital, which will help them construct a different version of themselves, as with the five women in Norton's study (2000, 121). In this way, the notion of investment can be said to address the agency/structure question and to 'accentuat[e] the role of human agency and identity in engaging with the task at hand' (see Kramsch 2013, 195). This engagement can take different shapes. In her study, Norton (2000) shows that despite the power struggles the women in her study came across, they all remained committed to learning English even if they were not allowed the right to speak and if finding alternative ways to speak English was hard. To achieve their goal, they found various ways to negotiate with their context to obtain what they wanted.

Thus, we can talk of investment as a productive concept that helps us understand the nature of human social activity in specific situated contexts, even considering its changes of direction over time (Norton 2000, 128-129).

Yet, is it more than this? If human actions are affected by unconscious forces, as Bourdieu and Layder suggest, then the concept of investment may not be entirely satisfactory. Deeper mechanisms might explain why we take action or engage in specific practices, and we may not be able to explain why we act as we do. Ortner (2005, 46) suggests that there are many aspects of consciousness which escape us.

3.5 The role of imagination

In addition to the poststructuralist perspectives introduced in section 3.3.1, an important input into this study is an enhanced recognition of the role of imagination. The language socialization perspective known as the Community of Practice (CoP) framework (Lave & Wenger, 1991) provides an added perspective on identity construction by elaborating on the notion of language being an 'integral and inseparable part of social practice (Norton 2012, 3) and of learning as essentially a process of social participation in 'communities of practice' rather than the acquisition of knowledge. However, in a situation such as Hong Kong where opportunities to meet the members of the French community are limited, learning cannot be seen as facilitated by 'old-timers' who share 'the performances of community practices' (Norton 2012, 3; Wenger 1998, 162) in the usual physical sense. This is to say that both learning and participation are mainly accessed virtually by Hong Kong learners and are largely in terms of *imagination* (Wenger 1998, 175-181).

Wenger describes imagination as 'an important component of our experience of the world and our sense of place in it' (1998, 176). In a much-quoted passage, imagination is seen as 'a process of expanding our time and space and creating new images of the world and ourselves' (Wenger 1998, 176). In other words, imagination is a 'creative process' (Wenger 1998, 176) which is an 'integral and inseparable part of social practice' (Norton 2012, 3; see also Appadurai 1996, 31). Kanno and Norton (2003) take the notion further by introducing the concept of imagined communities of practice (ICoP), in which we create the possibility of different selves by imagining future relationships 'that extend beyond local sets of relationships' (p. 242) or by

imagining oneself a 'multicompetent, bilingual, and multilingual' speaker (Pavlenko 2003, 251). In this way, imagination should not be seen merely as an attempt to withdraw from reality (Wenger 1998, 177), but instead it should be seen as lying at the heart of language learning. Barkhuizen and de Klerk (2006) showed the power of imagination in their study of Afrikaans-speaking South Africans preparing to immigrate to New Zealand. Although they were apprehensive of changes to come, imagination prepared them to open themselves up to new possibilities as well as to immigrate in a positive spirit (Barkhuizen & de Klerk 2006, 293). Pennycook (2010) also stresses that 'the possibilities of being something not yet culturally imagined, mobilizes new identity options' (p. 85). Imagination thus enables people to explore ways to 'understand their relationship to the world and their possibilities for the future' (Norton 1997, 410).

Imagination also has a clear link with agency. Ryan and Irie (2014) underline the presence of agency in imagination:

> [D]reams or mental-manifestations, are not simply manifestations of pre-existing goals, they also help us envision steps towards achieving these goals […] When we imagine doing something, we also 'experience' the action and feel emotionally involved. (Ryan & Irie 2014, 114)

To reiterate, as we 'move back and look at our engagement through the eyes of an outsider', imagination can be said to give us flexibility, freedom and energy, and can facilitate the exploration of new identities and new relations (Wenger 1998, 185). Early and Norton (2012) noted that imagination is particularly important for language learners who 'are experiencing

asymmetrical relations of power and legacies of discrimination' (p. 199). Norton (1997) also notes that that through telling their stories, language learners have access to 'power and privilege' (p. 410). Yet, the philosopher Charles Taylor cautions that although the power of imagination is crucial in shaping human life, 'wishing does not make things so' (Calhoun, 2016 Oct. 13), as the Canadian participants in Lamoureux' study (2012) discovered when they were denied the status of legitimate Francophones in Francophone universities in Canada, which they had imagined would only be a formality.

To conclude this chapter on identity, I will outline an approach inherited from human geography which is known as the scalar theory. This theory guides the study in understanding how processes of identity construction simultaneously come into play across several layers of social contexts and in doing so, helps the researcher to gain a more complex understanding of identity construction. It also creates a link with the methodological approach in this study by starting to theorize the ways in which space, time and place are formative dimensions in processes of identity construction.

3.6 Scalar theory as a useful background for this study

As already mentioned, the type of societal complexities generated by globalization force us to look beyond dichotomies (such as the global/local dichotomy) to reach an understanding of complex social phenomena. Bailey, Canagarajah, Lan and Powers (2016, 331) highlight the usefulness of scales in providing a framework to understand the sociolinguistics of globalisation. Indeed, Eriksen (1995, 289) suggests that scales can provide the means to usefully explore societies by highlighting 'differences in degree rather than as absolute contrasts'.

3.6.1. The workings of the scalar approach

From an identity-based perspective, the learning of another language reflects 'the desire of learners to expand their range of identities and to reach out to wider worlds' (Pavlenko & Norton 2007, 670). This 'reaching out' occurs in several ways, and here I combine Pavlenko and Norton's insight with a scalar approach (Blommaert 2007, 2010; Canagarajah & De Costa, 2016; Wallerstein, 1998). Drawing on insights from studies in human geography, the scalar approach is a way of dealing with the interconnectedness that characterizes social and linguistic life in the era of globalisation.

In the scalar approach, social events and processes are also seen as occurring within interrelated scales that have both spatial dimensions (e.g., local/global) and temporal dimensions (e.g., past/present, or temporary/durable). In summarizing the scalar approach, Blommaert (2007, 5) notes that 'every social event develops simultaneously in space and in time, often in multiply imagined spaces and time frames' (Blommaert 2007, 5).

The spatial dimension of identity relates to the fact that identity construction takes place at various spatial scales, ranging from the relatively local (e.g., workplaces and nation-states) to the relatively global. As noted in Chapter 2, the locality or globality of these groupings is always a matter of perspective, rather than being ontological (Canagarajah & De Costa, 2016, 4). Thus 'France' may be initially characterized as a local (national) scalar phenomenon, but one that becomes increasingly global as images of Frenchness are circulated via global channels such as films and advertising. However, as the interpretation of these images varies from place to place

and from individual to individual, globality does not imply that they are always the same. In other words, although images of French culture may sometimes appear to be more-or-less shared, forming part of social representations (Dreyer, 2009) or what Coffey (2010, 126) calls an 'iconographic repertoire of national types', they are taken up in different ways by different people.

The temporal dimension of identity can be understood in terms of what (Wortham, 2005) calls timescales (see also Lemke, 2000). Individuals have biographical trajectories through time, along the ontogenetic timescale of human lives. Within these ontogenetic timescales, there are short-term or microgenetic timescales, which may range from single interactions to more durable patterns of association. The microgenetic and ontogenetic timescales can in turn be seen as nested within longer-term sociohistorical timescales, ranging across hundreds or thousands of years. There are two main ways in which the temporal dimension can be observed in interaction. First, explicit reference to past, present and future can be made, for example in stories and narratives (Barkhuizen, 2016). Secondly, what is talked or written about can be seen as referring to things that are durable in nature.

Although scalar approaches can illustrate how all social and linguistic events are shaped along these timescales, the concepts of space and time cannot easily be separated in the analysis of social phenomena. In fact, Lemke (2000, 282) describes identity as 'a multi-timescale dynamical system' that develops across co-present spatial and temporal scales. Bakhtin's (1981) concept of the chronotope also captures this interrelationship (see also Canagarajah & De Costa 2016, 4). To illustrate these spatiotemporal connections, Blommaert (2007, 6) provides an example of an interaction between a thesis supervisor and a postgraduate student. The student informs the

supervisor that he or she intends to begin the dissertation with a chapter reporting on the fieldwork. The supervisor disapproves of this, and replies: 'We start our dissertations with a literature review chapter here'. The temporal dimensions here are the future-oriented approach of the student and the past-oriented approach of the supervisor. The spatial element is given by the 'here', which is the institution in which the interaction occurs, but this in turn carries the temporal qualities of durability and non-negotiability in terms of its practices. The speakers' appeal to these scales, and their possible contestation, are therefore matters of power.

Even in the 'here and now' of interaction, what people say and how they say it involves references to various interrelated spatiotemporal dimensions, and so once again imagination is an important factor. In an approach that expands upon Blommaert's vision of 'multiply imagined spaces and time frames' (2010, 34), Kanno and Norton (2003, 242) see imagination as allowing the language learner to envision himself or herself taking part in 'future relationships that exist only in [his/her] imagination as well as affiliations – such as nationhood or even transnational communities – that extend beyond local sets of relationships'. Under contemporary conditions, global media and digital interaction have expanded the range of possibilities for relationships, creating an 'expanded space of self-authoring' (Francis 2010, 126-127). With new technologies, language resources can be 'detached from their original community and space of use and are deployed elsewhere' (Valentine, Sporton & Bang Nielsen 2009, 191; see also Jacquemet, 2005).

Nevertheless, while the spatial and temporal dimensions exert their effects in dynamic interaction, there may be some value in trying to separate them in analytical terms. Blommaert (2007, 6) identifies some of the dimensions along which social events are performed and evaluated; the spatial oppositions include 'local/translocal', while 'momentary/timeless'

describes part of the temporal dimension. It is the interrelationships between the two that must be constantly acknowledged.

One of the main points of interest of the scalar approach is that it allows for the acknowledgement of power and inequality as ever-present aspects of social phenomena. Even in its spatial dimension, the metaphor of scale reminds us that space is 'stratified and therefore power-invested' (Blommaert 2007, 4). The supervisor/student interaction example given above shows how the recommendation of established institutional practice is also a demonstration of power. Language is one of the most important resources involved in maintaining and contesting these relations of power (Bourdieu 1977, 1987, 1991). However, while scales may be initially seen in terms of hierarchies, it is important that scales should not be understood as being fixed or deterministic (Canagarajah & De Costa, 2016). What is also of interest are the processes of rescaling (or 'scale redifferentiation') by which hierarchies and power differentials are contested (Brenner, 2011). These processes allow individuals to access resources from different scales, potentially resisting or even overcoming the impositions of hierarchical orders. In this way, the scalar approach offers yet another perspective on processes of identity construction, and reminds us of the role played by agency and imagination, while not neglecting power and structural constraints. The data in this study illustrates some of the ways in which additional languages provide learners with opportunities for rescaling, partly in response to the effects of these constraints.

Chapter 4 Methodology

4.1 What it means to take a qualitative approach: a brief introduction

As the aim of the study is to uncover what French learning means in terms of identity construction for some individuals in the Hong Kong context, I chose to take a qualitative approach as it privileges close attention to individuals. This follows a more general movement in the social sciences and in educational and language learning studies where the individual is viewed as a central source of understanding (e.g., Danilo, 2007; see also Passeron & Revel, 2005).

Qualitative approaches are seen to offer the most promising way of opening 'dimensions of insight into the processes of language teaching and learning' (Richard 2003, 147) because they look at learners as 'real persons-in-context' as opposed to abstract language learners (Ushioda 2012, 64; see also Toohey & Norton 2010). This is the reason why many language researchers (e.g., Norton-Peirce 1995; Norton, 2000; Valdés, 1998; Kinginger, 2004; Morita, 2012) have taken a 'social turn' (see Block, 2003; also see Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

In this study, I am using a narrative approach. More specifically I am engaging in a particular process of narrative inquiry. In the sections below, I will explain what engaging in narrative inquiry means, starting with an introduction of narrative research in general and then, presenting the epistemological grounding of narrative inquiry and explaining what is meant by the term 'case' in this methodology.

4.2 Narrative inquiry as the method of investigation in this study

4.2.1 Definitions

Research using narrative methodology has grown exponentially in the last few decades and it has become difficult to determine what the terms 'narrative', 'narrative methodology' and 'narrative inquiry' actually refer to across different studies. Taylor (2003, 195) notes that narrative studies is 'a broad field encompassing a range of theoretical assumptions and analytical approaches' (in Barkhuizen 2011, 392). Regarding the term 'narrative inquiry', Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik (2014) use it as an umbrella term to designate different narrative approaches. In this, their use of the term 'narrative inquiry' differs from that of Clandinin and Connelly (2000) (also Connelly & Clandinin, 1990 ; Clandinin, 2013), whose approach to narrative inquiry is the main one guiding this study. The reasons for choosing these authors' approach is firstly, the clarity of their explanations regarding the ontological and epistemological assumptions of this methodology and secondly, the clarity of their explanations as to what narrative inquirers do or should do. Also, as a woman researcher, I was perhaps particularly drawn to Clandinin's descriptions of narrative inquiry. However, Barkhuizen's work and guidelines (2011, 2016 ; also Barkhuizen et al. 2014, 84-93) were a useful addition and perspective on Clandinin & Connelly's approach.

Polkinghorne's (1995) distinction between 'analysis of narrative' and 'narrative analysis' also helped to consolidate my understanding of the methodology with 'analysis of narrative' focusing on 'analytic procedures to produce taxonomies and categories' which are common across stories and 'narrative analysis' consisting of seeking data in the form of descriptions of events and

actions ‘to produce explanatory stories’ through a process of emplotment (Polkinghorne 1995, 5). ‘Narrative analysis’ is the type of research process which I have used in this study.

It should be noted as well that the type of narrative inquiry approach taken by this study is known in Francophone research as ‘étude de récits de vie’ or ‘méthode de recherche biographique’ (see, for example, Pineau & Legrand, 1993 ; Bertaux, 2005; Delory-Momberger, 2004, 2005 ; Gaulejac, 2002 ; de Villers & Joassart, 2006 ; Molinié, 2019, 2015 ; Chaxel, Fiorelli & Moity-Maïzi, 2014).

4.2.2 A brief history of narrative research

Narrative research as a mode of exploration of the human has exploded in the field of language education in these past few years (e.g., Barkhuizen 2007, 2009, 2010, 2011; Benson & Nunan, 2005; Kinginger, 2004; Pavlenko 2001, 2002, 2007; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000; Kramsch, 2006; Liu & Xu, 2011). Since the 1980s, there has been an exponential development of narrative research approaches in the social sciences, forming a narrative turn of sorts. Key actors in the development of narrative approaches in the social sciences include Polkinghorne (1995, 1988) and Ricœur (e.g., 1990) with their views on the interpretation of texts, and Bruner (1987, 1991) with his view of narrative as the ‘ontological basis of human knowledge’ (see Watson 2007, 371).

Barkhuizen (2011, 396) notes that the point about narrative research is that it ‘recognizes the active, fluid nature of meaning making, and aims to avoid conceptions of narrative knowledge as stable, permanent, and unchangeable’. Because of this, Barkhuizen (2011) chose the term

'narrative knowledging' to emphasize the exploratory and complex nature of examining human experience in the narrative mode of inquiry.

One of the philosophical bases of narrative research comes from Dewey (1938, 1958, 1981) who observes that the self does not exist by itself, but is constructed in constant interaction and friction with the world:

> [E]very experience is constituted by interaction between "subject" and "object," between a self and its world, it is not itself either merely physical nor merely mental, no matter how much one factor or the other predominates. ... […] In an experience, things and events belonging to the world, physical and social, are transformed through the human context they enter, while the live creature is changed and developed through its intercourse with things previously external to it. (Dewey 1981, 251)

Another of Dewey's contributions which is useful to narrative research is that thinking about human experience means thinking about continuity:

> Experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences. Wherever one positions oneself in that continuum – the imagined now, some imagined past, or some imagined future – each point has a past experiential base and lead to an experiential future. (Clandinin & Connelly 2000, 2)

With regard to the usefulness of narratives for research, storytelling gives analysts a view of how narrators 'represent social worlds' (i.e. how they make sense of the world), which also gives 'a

glimpse of how people construct a sense of self' (De Fina & Georgakopoulou 2012, 160; see also De Fina 2006, 352). Narratives also inform analysts about how people 'establish themselves as members of particular groups' (De Fina 2006, 352). As such, narratives are almost indispensable in studies of language and identity.

4.2.3 Narrative research: ontology and epistemology

The ontological basis of narrative research centers around the fact that we need stories to 'fill our world with meaning and enlist one another's assistance in building our lives and communities' (Connelly & Clandinin 2006, 35). Clandinin and Rosiek (2007, 2) note that stories have been around human beings 'for as long as we could talk' and Ochs and Capps (2001, 59) that 'the impulse to narrate' is rooted in our need to communicate. The fundamental role of stories in human social life is summarised by Clandinin and Rosiek in the following terms:

> *The only thing that keeps us from floating off with the wind is our stories. They give us a name and put us in a place, allow us to keep on touching*. (Clandinin & Rosiek 2007, 2)

Connelly and Clandinin (2006, in Clandinin 2013, 13) further explain that stories are 'a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful', and Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002, 329) equally point out that narrative is an activity by which people make sense of their lives as they engage in 'think[ing] about, and understand[ing], their personal or another individual's, thinking, actions, and reactions' (see also Barkhuizen 2011, 393; Bell, 2002). Ochs and Capps (2001, 3) further remark that the process of making sense of experience is not only undertaken by

narrators; readers or listeners are also involved if we take the perspective developed by Bakhtin and realize that the true essence of a text '*develops on the boundary between two consciousnesses, two subjects'* (ibid.; see also Bakhtin 1994, 111).

An important aspect of using stories as a mode of knowing is that the researcher deals with a different kind of truth to scientific or historical truth. Bruner (1990, 111) calls it 'narrative truth', drawing attention to the fact that neither external criteria nor internal criteria can ever ensure that the 'rightness' of a life self-report has been grasped (Bruner 2004, 693). Thus, narrative epistemology has a different focus to positivist ways of knowing (De Fina & Georgakopoulou 2012, 16). Its focus is to understand 'the concreteness of human experience' (see De Fina & Georgakopoulou 2012, 18) in its particularities. De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012) further describe this way of knowing as follows:

> Human intention and emotion predominate over reason and objectivity, and the worlds of action and consciousness are presented as parallel but separate universes. At the center of the narrative mode are human vicissitudes and drama, and the particularities of human existence rather than its general patterns receive the greatest attention. (De Fina & Georgakopoulou 2012, 16)

Thus, the epistemology of narrative research is 'interpretive, meaning-seeking, subjective and particularistic' (De Fina & Georgakopoulou 2012, 20).

Furthermore, following Bruner and Dewey, narrative research starts from the standpoint that any narrative is a never-ending composition. Capturing lived experiences is never a completed

process nor can it be definitely fixed as experience is by essence the expression of a 'continuous interaction of human thought with our personal, social, and material environment' (see Clandinin & Rosiek 2007, 6), which can only be captured selectively (Clandinin & Rosiek 2007, 6).

To summarise, a narrative inquiry can be considered a complementary source of data to more traditional empirical approaches (Pavlenko 2002, 213). Its purpose is to capture 'the stream of human lives' (Clandinin & Rosiek 2007, 12). As an epistemology, it embraces subjectivity as a mode of knowing, with subjectivity being 'an essential element of understanding' rather than 'a failure to be eliminated' (Stake 1995 in Duff 2010, 56). In an interview, the philosopher Charles Taylor notes than we can only apprehend phenomena from the prism of our own perception:

> [I]mportant currents in behavioral and social science have been driven by a desire to achieve "objectivity" by disengaging from interpretation. Of course, knowledge of humans includes many "objective" elements from physiology to demography. But it cannot be complete – or wise – on these bases alone. Humans are not altogether objective and transparent even to themselves…. Cultures vary and no analyst's knowledge escapes culture. Like other human practices, moreover, voting often expresses meanings that go beyond manifest, instrumental decisions. (Calhoun, 2016 Oct. 13)

4.2.4 The notion of case in narrative inquiry

As noted above, narrative inquiry focuses on individuals and their particularities (see De Fina & Georgakopoulou 2012, 17). For example, this study focuses on four individuals and their experiences of learning languages in Hong Kong. In this way, this study can also be thought of

as a case-study empirical inquiry (see Duff 2010, 22; also Polkinghorne 1995, 15). Like narrative inquiry, the case study approach has been described as exploratory (see Duff 2010, 44) and as an 'intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity' (Merriam 1998, 6) which yields rich data and thick descriptions within and across cases (Creswell 2013, 101; see also Morita, 2012; Duff, 2010).

Most importantly, the case-study approach and narrative inquiry have in common that they do not have generalization as their primary aim, but try to capture phenomena in their complexity. For this reason, the 'cumulative effect' of reasoning in these approaches is 'a collection of individual cases in which thought moves from case to case instead from case to generalization' (Polkinghorne 1995, 11). In this way, the analytical procedure in both these approaches is very different to the paradigmatic analytical procedure in other methodologies with their focus on producing 'taxonomies and categories out of the common elements across the database' (Polkinghorne 1995, 5; also see Duff 2010, 48).

Passeron and Revel (2005) refer to this way of thinking as 'penser par cas' ('thinking by singularity' or 'thinking by case'). In the 'penser par cas' approach, the authors note that cases are not only examined in relation to each other, but in relation to an 'enigma to be solved' ["énigme à résoudre"] (Passeron & Revel 2005, 20). This is to say that the focus of 'penser par cas' is on the circumstances surrounding each case. However, as the circumstances – the contexts – of the situation are expanded, the uniqueness of the 'singularity' of each case appears (see Passeron & Revel 2005, 17-18). Passeron and Revel summarize this as follows:

> Faire cas, c'est prendre en compte une situation, en reconstruire les circonstances – les contextes – et les réinsérer ainsi dans une histoire, celle qui est appellée à rendre raison de l'agencement particulier qui d'une singularité fait un cas [To think by case means to take into account a situation, to reconstruct its circumstances –its contexts – and to insert them into a narrative which will bring to light the process by which a singularity is transformed into a case] (Passeron & Revel 2005, 22)

And thus, the practical or theoretical interest of this way of thinking is to illuminate both situations and cases with the view to re-assess both what is already known and how knowledge is sought. One of its advantages resides in its potential to modify researchers' way of thinking (see Passeron & Revel 2005, 20). Clandinin and Rosiek (2007, 26) remark the need for research to 'respectfully examine, rather than conveniently ignore, the cases that don't fit our categorizations and dichotomies' whilst Barbour points out the usefulness of 'grey areas that force the researcher to question straightforward models or typologies' (2008, 29).

To summarize, the way of thinking adopted in narrative inquiry can also be described as 'penser par cas' (i.e. case-oriented). In this study, the cases are 'bounded together' by their origin (they are all Hong Kong citizens and Cantonese speakers) and by a common experience of learning French in Hong Kong. The study examines the ambiguities and complexities of these experiences not as a way to detect anomalies so as to confirm a rule, but as a way to develop more sophisticated insights (see Barbour 2008, 29). In this study, for example, I hope to gain a more complex understanding of and perspective on what it means to learn a language such as French, which is not a compulsory language in Hong Kong. In this way, I hope to usefully complement other studies which have explored identity with a similar case-oriented approach

(e.g., Norton 1995, 2000; see also Morita, 2012; Kinginger, 2004; Toohey, 2000; Valdés, 1998), but which have not taken a narrative inquiry perspective.

4.2.5 The relationship between identity and narrative

As already mentioned in Chapter 3, the view the study takes of identity is that of a social process whereby individuals 'manage and negotiate their selves in social circumstances' (De Fina & Georgakopoulou 2012, 159), highlighting the 'situationally-motivated' aspect of identity (Bauman R. 2000, 1). In this perspective, identity is considered multiple and constantly changing as people deploy a range of identities in response to social situations, or develop new identities in response to changing social conditions. Researchers such as Norton (2000; Norton Peirce, 1995) have also made the link between ever-changing identities and the unequal relationships of power that exist in society. For example, Norton (2000) showed that women who migrated to Canada coped with positions of inequality by deploying a range of identities – at work or in their family. Only when they did so were they allowed and able to claim the right to speak English (see Chapter 3, section 3.3.1.4).

The link with narrative is that the construction and reconstruction of social identity is revealed by narrative. Barkhuizen (2011) makes the remark that by 'telling stories, participants are performing themselves; they are doing their identities' (p. 399). Schiffrin (1996) similarly highlights the role of narrative in providing human beings with a conduit for communicating (including to themselves) who they are:

> The ability of narrative to verbalize and situate experience as text (both locally and globally) provides a resource for the display of self and identity (Schiffrin 1996, 167)

Polkinghorne (1988) argues that narrative structure enables us to understand who we are by 'configur[ing] a sequence of events into a unified happening' (p. 18). Bruner (1987, 15) even goes one step further by suggesting that we eventually '*become* the autobiographical narratives by which we tell about our lives' [emphasis in original].

Poststructuralist thinkers such as Weedon, who observed that the subjectivity of the women she studied could be described as 'constantly reconstituted in discourse each time we [they] think or speak' (1997, 32), have inspired researchers to think of narrative as 'fertile ground' for learners to express their self-identity and to 'explore new identity formations' (see Early and Norton 2012, 199; also see De Villers & Joassart, 2006). Watson (2007) reflects that narrative is the ultimate 'focus of interest' in revealing identity moves since it provides an observation of the individual in his or her social environment. She notes:

> If identification is conceived as an ongoing performance accomplished locally in and through our everyday interactions then it is the narratives that emerge in this context that become the focus of interest. (Watson 2007, 372)

Schiffrin (1996) refers to narrative as the action of creating a 'story world', which reveals not only the social and cultural expectations within our society but also how we position ourselves in relation to them (p. 70). In other words, as Riessman (2008, 105) points out, '[s]tories don't fall from the sky…; they are composed and received in contexts – interactional, historical,

institutional, and discursive', which is to say that narrative is the product of a particular context. Block (2007) also remarked that identity work is not exclusively revealed through narrative as we also perform who we are from the way we dress, act or move:

> [Identity is] socially constructed, self-conscious, ongoing narratives that individuals perform, interpret and project in dress, bodily movements, actions and language. (Block 2007, 32)

However, researchers note that the process of identity construction is 'facilitated by linguistic properties of the narrative genre' with the use of language helping to 'convey temporal continuity, a self/other distinction, and reflexivity of the self' (see Schiffrin 1996, 169).

4.2.6 The narrative inquiry methodological approach: key points

Narrative inquiry is described by Clandinin as a way of 'thinking narratively' about people's experiences (2013, 38). I will refer to this methodology simply as 'narrative inquiry' as do Clandinin and Connelly (2000; also Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), Clandinin and Rosiek (2007), who concentrate their research work on this methodology.

This type of narrative approach is intended to be *explanatory* rather than descriptive (Polkinghorne 1988, 161); its outcome is a constructed (or re-storied) narrative account 'explaining "why" a situation or event involving human actions has happened' (Polkinghorne 1988, 161). In doing so, it sequences events in the story and makes connections between them (Polkinghorne 1988, 161; also Polkinghorne 1995, 15). The intention is to go beyond narrative as

‘merely an analytic or representational device’ (Clandinin 2016, 38) and to avoid fixing phenomena. The focus instead is on highlighting ‘the shifting, changing, personal and social nature of the phenomenon under study’ (Clandinin 2013, 38).

The analytical process follows three main principles described below:

a) Firstly, the process highlights the ‘context sensitive and particular’ aspects of experience (Bruner 2006, 116). In other words, people are not dealing with the world ‘event by event’ but rather visualize events and choices of their lives ‘in larger structures’ (Bruner 1990, 64 in Polkinghorne 1995, 7). In this way, the analytical process consists of illuminating the co-construction of human experience and its social context, including larger and wider macro-contexts such as ‘broader sociopolitical discourses’ (Barkhuizen 2011, 451). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe the co-construction process in narrative inquiry as ‘a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus’ (p. 20). This process will be further explained in section 4.7.1.

b) Secondly, the narrative inquiry analytical process looks to configure the various pieces of data ‘into a coherent whole’ instead of ‘pulling experience apart’ (Barkhuizen 2011, 401-402). In other words, narrative inquiry focuses on the ‘continuity and wholeness of an individual’s life experience’ (Clandinin and Connelly 2000, 17). The end product at the closure of the analytical process is a reconstructed narrative.

c) Thirdly, narrative inquiry supposes a deep collaboration between researcher and participants all through the inquiry. Clandinin describes narrative inquiry as being a type of research *with* participants as opposed to *on* participants (2013, 42-44). The relationship between researcher and participants requires a deep ethical sense from the researcher (see Clandinin 2013, 30). During the narrative process, participants reconstruct their own experiences through the process of re-living and telling them, and the researcher actively participates in this reconstruction by asking questions and by simply listening whilst also sharing elements of his/her own experience. During the process, the researcher does not cast himself or herself *out* of the research process (Clandinin, 2013), as already made clear in the introduction (see Chapter 1). Because of all these reasons, Clandinin reflects that narrative inquiry is 'markedly different' to other methodologies (2013, 42-43).

4.3 The analytical framework in this study

In this study, I used Clandinin and Connelly's three-dimensional analytical space (2000, 50; see also Clandinin 2013, 39-42) along with Barkhuizen's (2016) approach to visualising this space.

4.3.1. Clandinin and Connelly's three-dimensional analytical space

In Clandinin and Connelly's analytical space there are three dimensions, which are metaphorically described as temporality, or the times – past, present and future – in which experiences unfold; sociality (also referred to as 'interaction') – the personal emotions and desires, and the social environment narrators interact with, and place – the place or sequence of places in which experiences are lived.

The temporal character of experience in narrative inquiry means that experience unfolds in the past, present and future, including the imagined future (see Barkhuizen (2016, 659; see also Barkhuizen & de Klerk, 2006).

However, as Layder points out, we can only ever look at our experience than from the present; he thus notes that past, present and future are 'compressed into the immediacy of the unfolding present' (Layder 2004, 136). Yet, the past can also be said to exist separately from the present and future 'as a guide to the present or future' (Bruner 2004, 708). Georgakopoulou (2006) also suggests that using the past helps us rectify our identity trajectory in the present and gain a perspective on the future:

> [S]tories become rehearsals for later action more than reconstructions of the past; they are more about imagining the future than about remembering the past. (Georgakopoulou 2006, 127).

Despite this, Layder (1994, 209) developed the concepts of 'psychobiography' and 'psychobiographical experiences' to describe how our attitudes and dispositions towards certain behaviours in the present are firmly linked to the past. Bourdieu (1990) with his concept of *habitus* similarly emphasizes that our present actions and thoughts are embedded in the past, whilst not being entirely determined by it.

The second dimension, sociality, involves considering the social space from the point of view of interaction with the environment: first, 'social influences' (the outward aspect), which refer to other people, their intentions, purposes, assumptions and points of views, which constitute the

social environment (see Ollerenshaw & Creswell 20002, 340); and then, personal reactions to the environment (or inward aspect), which refers to personal conditions such as, 'feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions of the person' or the person's reactions to the environment (Clandinin & Connelly 2000, 50; also Clandinin and Rosiek 2007, 39 & 41).

The third dimension of the analytical framework is expressed by the term place. Connelly and Clandinin define this term as 'the specific concrete, physical, and topological boundaries of place or sequences of places where the inquiry and events take place' (2006, 480).

4.3.2 Barkhuizen's analytical framework

Barkhuizen's analytical framework (2016) is inspired by Clandinin and Connelly's 'three-dimensional inquiry space' with its temporal, social and place dimensions. It is useful because it enables the inquirer to visualize that space more clearly, especially in terms of the 'sociality' dimension. This is achieved by drawing attention to the embedded relationships between people's lives and their environment. Barkhuizen's visual depiction of this framework (see Figure 1 below) shows environment (or context) in the form of three concentric circles which surround the individual:

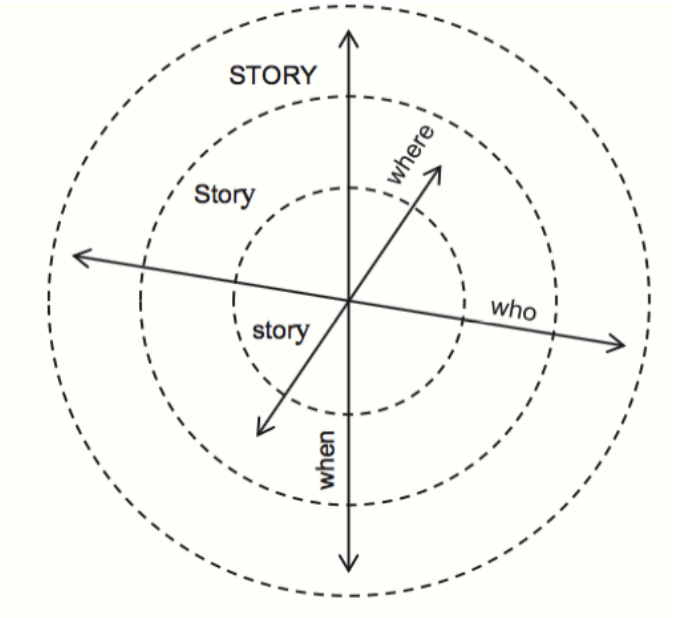

Figure 1: Barkhuizen's analytical framework (2016)

For Barkuizen (2016, 663), the first level of context is the lower case 'story' level, which includes the inner thoughts, emotions and ideas of the participants. This refers to the immediate psychological and interpersonal contexts surrounding the individual. The second 'Story' level extends to include the surrounding institutional context, such as the school or workplace. The third 'STORY' level (upper case STORY) refers to broader sociopolitical contexts, such as national language policies, discourses of national identity, etc.

What is interesting about this graph is that each circle represents various levels of constraints, as well as agency, from the perspective of the scalar theory (see Chapter 3, section 3.5). More precisely, the graph illuminates firstly how individuals are constrained by their own feelings and personal conditioning (see Chapter 3 section 3.3.1.3); secondly, it represents other people's intentions, purposes, assumptions and points of view which constrain individual actions; thirdly, it surrounds the individual with sociopolitical discourses, policies and debates, which are another

kind of pressure on the individual. Although these seem further away from the individual, they arguably affect the individual more than the other two. In effect, Barkhuizen (2016, 663) wants to show through this graph that there is a different potential for agency at each level of context. The upper-case STORY reflects both the wider scale of sociopolitical discourses and also their greater power and durability; at this level of context, there is little or no scope for individual agency. The lower-case story (the personal space) is where agency is more likely to be revealed.

To summarize, in this study I used Clandinin and Connelly's three-dimensional inquiry space along with Barkhuizen's interpretation of that space. These two combined frameworks helped me visualise the space in which each individual story unfolds. Using these two frameworks, I was able to capture the complexities of experience by connecting past, present and future (i.e. moving backward and forward), connecting internal conditions (such as feelings and hopes) as well as outward conditions (people, the social environment) by situating experience in relation to a place or places (see Clandinin & Connelly 2000, 49 and 54).

4.4 Approaching the participants

As already mentioned, the process of narrative inquiry is first and foremost a collaborative process between the participants and the inquirer (see Clandinin 2013, 44; Clandinin & Connelly 2000, 71-79; see also Ollerenshaw and Creswell 2002, 332). In this way, Clandinin (2013, 34) remarks that narrative inquiry involves a lot more than interviewing participants or writing their stories down. In fact, narrative inquiry has deep implications for the participant and the researcher alike (Clandinin 2013, 43-44) as it seeks to uncover meaning alongside the 'interwoven' story of the researcher, 'as she or he gains insight into himself or herself' through

the inquiry (Ollerenshaw & Creswell 2002, 332). Barkhuizen describes his own involvement in the research process as follows:

> In my case, I was not merely passively listening to the migrant participants' stories, I was actively involved in constructing them. I was part of the story being produced, both as narrator and as character. And I could hardly retell their stories without talking or writing about my own experiences. (Barkhuizen 2011, 393)

In this constant exchange between participant and researcher, both may discover something about themselves that they did not know before (see de Villers & Joassart 2006, 216). In this way, Clandinin and Connelly have described narrative inquiry as 'a more difficult, time-consuming, and yet, profound method' (Connelly & Clandinin 2006, 478). One difficulty is that narrative inquiry requires the overall negotiation of 'a shared narrative unity' (Connelly & Clandinin 1990, 3), which is to say that both the participants and the inquirer need to maintain, at all times, a common understanding of the purpose of the study as the inquiry advances and new understandings appear. Another difficulty is that inquirers 'cannot subtract themselves from relationship' (Clandinin & Rosiek 2007, 39). In fact, the narrative inquirer has many ethical responsibilities and commitments throughout the inquiry (see Connelly & Clandinin 1990, 4).

This began in earnest when I sought to establish a collaborative relationship with the participants in this study. This was achieved through a series of negotiations as described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000, 71):

1. Negotiating access to the participants
2. Explaining the purpose of the inquiry to the participant and negotiating their involvement around a sense of purpose
3. Negotiating relationships between the researcher and the participant to readjust the sense of purpose and thus, lessen discrepancies between the narrative told and the narrative reported
4. Negotiating transitions from the moments of data gathering to the closure of the inquiry
5. Negotiating a way to be useful to the participants

In the sections below, I will explain the main stages of negotiation with the participants.

4.4.1 Negotiating a relational inquiry space with the participants

Clandinin and Connelly (2000, 63) describe negotiating entry with the participants in the inquiry as 'entering the field'. Negotiating entry is described as a crucial step of the inquiry as all the participants need to 'have voice within the relationship' (see Connelly & Clandinin 1990, 3-4). This is why all the elements of the negotiation - including 'when and where and why the act of selection took place' (Dewey 1958, 271 in Clandinin & Rosiek 2007, 6-7) - need to be made clear. In this section, I will explain how I approached the participants. I will also link these explanations with the ethical considerations that evolved as I designed the study.

First of all, I designed the study in such a way as to include two types of participants, former students with whom I had maintained contact through Facebook, and undergraduate students

who were learning French at the time of the inquiry. In this way, I would be investigating people with whom I had developed a relationship with as well as people who did not know me. This rationale came from thinking that including undergraduates who were taking French classes at the time of the inquiry could give me a perspective on French learning as it actually happened.

4.4.1.1 Former French students

My former students had studied French at university with me and had left university two to seven years before the start of the study. They had since found employment in Hong Kong or were continuing their studies at postgraduate level. In February 2014, I contacted all the former French students I had kept in touch with (around forty individuals) to see how many might be interested in taking part in the study. I circulated details about the project, first on Facebook and then by email:

> *In my research, I am interested in local individual stories of French learning in the context of Hong Kong. I want to investigate how individuals come to learn French and what it means for them to know an additional language such as French. I invite you to join my study if you are interested in exploring this topic with me.*

Full details of the information given to former students are in Appendix 1a. Along with this description, I gave an idea of the timeframe involved and the number and type of activities that would be involved (see Appendix 1b).

As sixteen people answered positively, including nine students from Hong Kong, I decided to limit the project to Hong Kong citizens. I thanked other students for their interest and re-contacted the Hong Kong students, asking them to wait for further information pending the approval of my proposal.

In March 2014, when my proposal was approved, I sent these people (eight females and one male) further details of the language learner history (LLH) written activity as well as a survey (see details of these activities in section 4.6. below). All responded positively, but two dropped out in the autumn of 2015 as they could not find the time to complete their LLH or survey. Another one dropped out after the first interview because of work pressure.

Before I started the actual inquiry with each participant, I made it clear that I would be unable to tell them ahead of time how many of them would be included in the final data analysis since I could not yet picture exactly where the inquiry would lead me. The participants were all interesting to me, each with their own singular story, and it was difficult to make a selection. I eventually informed three participants of my final decision not to include them in the final analysis. The three cases were not included in the final analysis mainly because the scope and time of my study was limited, and I felt we would have needed more meetings and discussions to continue exploring their stories. In the end, I only kept three cases among my former students, which was manageable for a study of this kind.

4.4.1.2 The undergraduate students studying French during the inquiry

In terms of the group of undergraduate students that I wanted to get access to, I started by approaching two French teachers in two different Hong Kong universities in the autumn of 2014 whilst I was developing my thesis proposal. I wrote and talked to them about what I intended to do. As part of my negotiation with them I asked if I could conduct an LLH activity (see section 4.6.2) introducing it via the free software Kaleidoscope[2], which was used and developed by Helsinki University to encourage self-reflection about English learning and which I had discovered during the 2009 ILAC conference (see Chapter 1). In exchange, I offered my help both in class and online.

In one class I was able to offer my help to students during oral activities, observing the class and the students the rest of the time, and I also introduced informal topics of discussion related to French culture and stereotypes on the class Moodle account. In the other class I worked more closely with the teacher, who used drama techniques to teach French. I modeled dialogues with him and helped groups of students with dialogue writing and role-playing. This teacher also invited me to begin my collaboration with him in the second semester of 2014-2015, as a point of entry for my inquiry. I realized from asking for volunteers to take part in my study that very few people were willing to make a commitment, even though I felt accepted by the class. Since narrative inquiry is based on close collaboration between inquirer and participants, it became clear that I needed to work harder at developing a relationship with this category of potential participants. Creating a closed group account on Facebook and another account on Instagram was one way of making myself more familiar to students (see section 4.6.7 below).

[2] Kaleidoscope platform: http://www.helsinki.fi/kksc/alms/kaleidos.html Accessed on 11 Dec. 2018

In the end, eleven students (six in one of the universities and five in the other) took part in the first phase of the research project and of these eleven students, six agreed to continue with the second phase of the research (see Appendices 1b, 2a and 2b for details of the information given to undergraduates about the project). This number, which was higher than expected, suggested that I had succeeded in gaining the undergraduate students' trust and raising their personal interest in the study, which is an essential aspect of an inquiry of this type.

As with the 'former student' group, although six undergraduate students completed the data collection process until the third and final interview, I had to make a decision as to how many and who to include in the final analysis for this thesis. Among these six students, there were three with whom I developed a closer relationship. One of them is from Taiwan. I initially kept this student in the study (with her knowledge and approval) because I thought she could enhance my understanding of the Hong Kong context. However, as the study developed and the stories from Hong Kong developed in interesting ways, I decided not to retain her data in the final stages of the study. I kept only one participant from the undergraduate student group for the final analysis, taking care to relay to the other participants my reasons for not including them (as I had done with the participants of the former student group).

The study thus included four participants in total, including one undergraduate student (Candice) and three graduates who had taken my French classes (Yasmina, IC and Nicole). Their profiles will be introduced in section 4.5 below, but I will first continue to introduce further aspects of the negotiation process.

4.4.2 Explaining the purpose of the inquiry to the participants

Right from the start, I kept in mind that the research would be 'on, for and with subjects' and that 'the researcher and the researched are equal' following Norton (2000, 23). First, this involved making clear at every stage of the research what my purpose was in conducting this study and what it would involve for the participants (see examples of consent forms in Appendices 3a, 3b and 3c).

Also, the series of interviews with the four participants were also opportunities to revisit my own relationship with languages and my own story of learning languages, as listening to their stories naturally made me recall my own experiences in a process of 'living, reliving and retelling', as described by Clandinin (2013, 34). This led to discussing similarities between our experiences. For example, in one case the participant and I talked about our mutual experience of having fallen silent in an international group of people and of experiencing their perceived mistrust and surprising judgment of us. In another interview with a different participant, we talked about how speaking in English – a second language for both of us – made us feel lighter and more relaxed.

To reiterate, the purpose of the study was refined and clarified as the inquiry progressed, following the stories the participants told me and the process of self-reflection these triggered in both myself and the participants. It is in this way that the process of co-constructing the meaning of what it means to learn French in their lives began. I will explain further what is meant by 'co-construction' in section 4.7.1 below.

4.4.3 Readjusting the sense of purpose

As the end of each interview, I arranged a few minutes to talk about what we had discussed - this sometimes developed into another (unrecorded) conversation. During these debriefing sessions I would ask the participants about their experience during the interview and if and how they had benefited from it (see De Costa 2014, 415). As well as giving them time to take some distance from what they had just shared with me in the interview, these sessions were intended to reduce potential feelings of unease (perhaps caused by relations of power) and give participants the opportunity to clarify any aspect of the study. Allowing participants to comment on the interviews was also meant to encourage a sense of ownership over the study.

As would be expected from a consideration of identity – its ever-changing nature and its performance in discourse – it became more and more obvious that the participants' perspectives were changing during the two years the inquiry took place and as their purpose for taking part in the study also evolved. Nicole, for example, suggested that although she might have joined the project out of curiosity and/or as a way to be helpful, the project helped her to take some distance from herself and thus, to see herself more clearly. Upon receiving my first analytical text about her experience, she sent me an email with this comment: 'Thanks so much for this research on me! It recalls some forgotten memories and the way how my old self thinks' (Nicole email 27 Aug. 2017). A similar comment from Yasmina highlights the self-reflective process in action during the study: 'You you almost forget that kind of feeling already so… is it is it representing something that I really want to express?' (Yasmina INT2). In IC's case, the purpose of the study broadened from talking about language learning to commenting on the sociopolitical changes in Hong Kong at the time of the inquiry (see Chapter 8).

These examples show that to some extent the participants were carefully thinking about the purpose of the study for themselves. Candice summed up the research for her as a 'win-win' situation (Candice INT2), explaining in what ways the study was benefiting her:

> because when I'm clear about myself, the outside world seems to be clear… it's like a mirror, what you see in the mirror is actually not about the things or the actual things, it's about myself (Candice INT2)

4.4.4 Negotiating a way to be useful to the participants

As should be clear by now, this research was designed to be of some benefit to the participants. I designed the study from the point of view that I should aim to be a resource for the participants (Candlin & Sarangi 2003, 279), as a way to give back to the people who had allowed me access to their stories, their classrooms, their social media sites and so on (see Clandinin 2013, 51). Also, the study was intended to explore the participants' experiences 'in a respectful manner' (Bell 2002, 211). I took care to give participants time to develop their answers as they wished, and in so doing tried to help them find a sense of purpose for themselves in our conversations. In addition, I tried to address issues of power assymetry in the relationship between me, as the inquirer, and my participants (see Connelly & Clandinin 1990, 4) by asking participants to suggest meeting places for each interview to give them some amount of control. I also tried to remain alert to signs of fatigue, and to adjust the interviews accordingly. Mostly we met in places where we could relax, drink and eat so as to make this moment as pleasurable as possible. Interviews took place in a range of locations, including hotel lobbies, outdoors or in cafés, which

participants would always be offered to choose, and occasionally in my home (see details of our meetings in Appendix 4).

Another way to give back (as already mentioned in section 4.4.1.2 above) was to help with French learning – either with oral presentations or with questions related to French learning – in the two classes I observed as part of the study. In addition, I created two social media accounts (Instagram and Facebook) to provide opportunities for interactions in French or about French culture online (see details of the IG account and the FB group in section 4.6.7 below).

In the next section, I will introduce the four participants who took part in my study. A complete narrative for each participant, including biographical details, will be presented in Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9.

4.5 The participants: Candice, Yasmina, IC and Nicole

The participants in the study are all female and are under thirty years old. Their pseudonyms in this study are Candice, Yasmina, IC and Nicole. Of these four participants, only Candice has not been my student in the past although I was her French teacher's assistant in the French beginner class she attended in the first semester of 2015-2016. I met the other three in my French classes at a local university between September 2006 and August 2013. All four of them took French as a free elective.

Despite all being 'Hongkongers', the participants' backgrounds naturally differ in many ways reflecting the natural diversity and overall tissue of HK society, for example, in terms of their

language background. Although all four participants recognize Cantonese as their mother tongue, I discovered that the language situation differs significantly in each family. This illustrates the social and linguistic diversity of Hong Kong, where other varieties of Chinese than Cantonese and Putonghua (e.g., Hakkanese and Shanghainese) as well as other languages (e.g., English and Tagalog) cohabit.

There are of course other differences between these four women, including their social background and the type of schools they went to (e.g., English Medium of Instruction (EMI) or Chinese Medium of Instruction (CMI) schools; high-ranking or less prestigious schools). The individual profile of each participant will be made clearer during the retelling of their individual stories in Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9.

As the aim of the study was to look at French learning in relation to identity in the Hong Kong context, the participants have in common that they share a common history in Hong Kong; they are all Hong Kong citizens, have gained their primary, secondary and tertiary education in Hong Kong and consider Cantonese to be their mother tongue.

Although a positivist approach to research would see a close relationship between researcher and participants as undesirable, as Clandinin (2013, 34) repeatedly notes, narrative inquiry is conducted 'alongside' the participants (see Shkedi 2005, 68; Barkhuizen 2011, 398). Collaboration involves trust, empathy and interest in each other's experience. This explains why three of the participants (Yasmina, IC and Nicole) are former students of mine. As we had known each other for four to seven years before the research project started, we had had time to learn about each other and develop the kind of relationship necessary for this type of study. In

Candice's case, although our relationship began because of the study, it quickly became closer due to shared interests and a sense of ease with each other. Studying people known to the inquirer is not unusual among narrative inquirers. For example, Barkhuizen (2016) studied Sela again after interviewing her for the first time in 2006.

Among the other factors leading to the selection of these four women, all have a high level of English, which was the language used for data collection and was a second language for all of us. In the interviews, it also became clear that they had a certain ability to verbalize their experience, and also enjoyed the introspection process which this study required (see De Villers & Joassart 2006, 216).

The summaries below briefly introduce each participant and how we met each other. More detailed information about each participant is available in chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9.

4.5.1 Candice

Candice was 20 years old at the start of the inquiry. My first encounter with Candice was in her French beginner class at a Hong Kong university, where she was studying for a B.A. in Chinese Studies until the summer of 2017. During the first semester of 2015-16, I observed and assisted the teacher of her French class. Candice was then in the third year of a four-year B.A. programme in Chinese Studies. She had just spent the previous semester in Switzerland (in the German-speaking side of Switzerland) as part of a study-abroad programme.

4.5.2 Yasmina

Yasmina was 24 at the start of the inquiry. I met her for the first time when she enrolled in my French beginner classes at a Hong Kong university in 2012. She was then in her final year of a B.A. in Cultural Studies. Just before graduating, in the summer of 2013, she enrolled in a French summer programme in Nancy, France, in partnership with the university. She spent three weeks there and traveled across Europe afterwards (to Germany, England and Denmark). Since graduation, Yasmina has worked in arts-related employment. She has changed job three times. She now works at an arts venue in Hong Kong.

4.5.3 IC

IC was 27 at the start of the inquiry. I met IC for the first time in 2006 when she enrolled in my French bearing beginner classes during the second year of her English major undergraduate degree studies at a Hong Kong university. In 2007, IC took part in a one-month summer programme in England before going to France, where she studied for a week in an intensive summer course at the Alliance Française (AF) in Paris. She has travelled several times to Europe for work since. Since graduating in June 2008, IC has worked as a corporate trainer for various companies, including two international ones.

4.5.4. Nicole

Nicole was 27 at the start of the inquiry. I met Nicole for the first time in 2008 in my French beginner classes when she was in the second year of an undergraduate degree in Visual Studies.

In the summer of 2008, Nicole went to study French on a three-week intensive summer course at a private school in Paris. After the course ended, she stayed in Europe for one more week touring several cities. This was Nicole's second trip to Europe. She has traveled to Europe a total of four times, including once as a volunteer for the AIESEC student organization. After graduating in June 2009, Nicole did various temporary jobs before finding various employment as administrative assistant, including in a small family-run French company in Hong Kong. At the end of the inquiry, she was working in marketing for a Japanese company.

4.5.5 Summary of information for each participant

Table 1 below gives other relevant information about each participant, including their previous study of French, their trips and studies abroad, and the presence of other languages in their lives. The letters used in the table refer to:

E = English C = Cantonese P= Putonghua AF = Alliance Française

Pseudo	**Age/start of inquiry**	**B.A. graduation year + Major**	**Experience of learning French (Pre-university and whilst at university)**	**Trips abroad**	**Language(s) spoken at home + considered mother tongue**	**Other languages than E, C and P**	**Parents' languages**
Candice	20	2017 Language Studies (Chinese)	Pre-uni: AF (1.5/2 hrs/week; between 1 and 2 years) Uni: 1 beginner level course (HKIEd)	Study-abroad programme in Switzerland (1 month); Study-abroad programme in Taiwan (1 semester)	C Mother tongue: C	Japanese Hakkanese Korean German Italian	Mother: C, P and E (weak) Father: C, E (fairly fluent)

Yasmina	24	2013 Cultural Studies	Uni: 2 beginner level courses Post-uni: AF (3hrs/week in autumn 2015 i.e. 3 months)	Summer programme in France (3 weeks); trip around Europe with Europass; Japan (several trips), China, Taiwan	C Mother tongue: C	Japanese South China dialect	Mother: C, P Father: C, P, E (weak)
IC	27	2008 Language Studies (English) (+ M.A. in Language Studies in 2013)	Pre-uni: / Uni: 2 beginner level courses Post-uni: /	Uni summer programme in England (1 month); summer course in France (1 week); several trips to the U.K. and China for work; Italy, Iceland, Japan	C Mother tongue: C	Japanese Italian	Mother: C Father: C
Nicole	27	2009 Visual Studies	Pre-uni: / Uni: 2 beginner level courses Post-uni: Private lessons started in 2012 (1 hr/week)	School trip to Sydney (3 weeks); Summer programme in France (1month); several trips to Europe (2008, 2010, 2015 including Romania for AISEC (12 days; 2007)	C Mother tongue: C	Shanghaïnese Japanese Thaï German Korean Portuguese Polish	Mother: C, P Father: C, P, E (very weak)

Table 1 : Summary information for each participant

4.6 Collecting data

In line with Connelly and Clandinin (1990, 4), I used a variety of data collection methods in order to gain a sense of how their experience of knowing French was embedded in their lives.

An important term in narrative inquiry is 'field texts'. This is preferred to 'data' to describe the raw material that narrative inquirers work with (Clandinin & Connelly 2000, 93). In terms of their content, field texts are conceived as inquiries within the inquiry (see Clandinin & Connelly 2000, 115) as well as 'co-compositions that are reflective of the experiences of researchers and participants' (Clandinin 2013, 46). In other words, they are the start of the interpretive process – of the general sense-making activity – going on throughout the inquiry (see Connelly & Clandinin 1990, 93 & 375; also Barkhuizen 2011, 393; Ochs & Capps, 2001, 35). Clandinin and Connelly (2000, 95) suggest 'routinely and rigorously' making notes about the context, including temporal and spatial details as well as information about the personal and the social. Connelly and Clandinin (1995) talk of this process as an 'active recording' process (p. 5).

In the sections below, I will introduce the varied data collection methods and the field texts I collected during the study whilst also describing the longitudinal aspect of the study. It should be noted at this stage that according to the ethical clearance applied for and received approval for in June 2015, I am 'the only person able to access the data'. For that reason, the corpus collected for this study (including transcripts or recordings) cannot be made available in full to readers of this thesis.

4.6.1. The data collection process: longitudinal aspect

Although limited to two years of data collection (from September 2015 to August 2017), the study can be said to have the elements of a longitudinal study. First, as mentioned by Duff (2010), the Language Learner Histories (LLH) collected in this study can be seen as 'reflections on a long temporal period (e.g., across decades), reflecting a longitudinal perspective' (p.40).

Furthermore, I had known three of the participants for several years before the study began and in some ways there was a longer timeframe than that indicated by the study itself.

Blommaert (2013) notes that engaging with participants over a long period of time has the advantage of encouraging 'relaxed identity work' (p. 620) and moments of 'conviviality' (p. 619). This period of time also allowed for the observation of 'natural changes in the individuals' behaviour' (Duff 2010, 40), which met the study's aim of understanding identity development across time and space in the Hong Kong context. More importantly, it gave participants time to think about the object of the inquiry and to develop their reflections about their experiences of learning French in Hong Kong. Appendix 13 gives an example of IC's views about language learning changing during the study and how the two-year inquiry process gave participants time to reflect more about their experiences of learning languages.

4.6.2 Language Learner Histories (LLH)

LLHs are described as 'self-report-based, introspective research narratives written by students about their own language learning' (Oxford, 1995 cited in Chik and Breidbach 2011, 554). They are commonly used to elicit individual reflections on learning experiences and on 'how and why these languages were acquired, used, or abandoned' (Pavlenko 2007, 165). Mercer (2013, 164) observes that LLHs have the potential to generate 'a reflective process that leads to a deepened appreciation and understanding of personal experience'. This can be beneficial as a way to re-interpret past events, for example in revisiting perceived failures in language studies (e.g., see Ryan & Irie 2014, 120). Ford (2011, 30) also explains that LLHs help learners to visualize their progress and thus maintain or regain motivation (see also Oxford 1995). Because of this, an LLH

activity can also be considered a form of ‘giving back’ to the participants (see section 4.4.4 above).

Finally, LLHs are particularly useful in study of identity as they help learners ‘construct coherence by finding connections or relating past experiences to the present and future” (Ford 2011, 30). Mercer (2013) notes that LLHs are a way to ease participants into the task of reflecting about ‘their identities, experiences, perceptions and emotions related to their language learning histories’ (p. 161; see also Chik & Breidbach 2011, 554; Benson, 2011).

The instructions for the completion of the LLH are presented in Appendix 5.
Participants were given two alternative ways of preparing their LLH, following my observation that Mercer’s model (see Mercer 2013, 185) confused some students. Option 1 was to develop a text according to five clearly defined paragraphs whilst Option 2 was to tell stories of language learning in any order and with whatever details that they wished to include. In both sets of guidelines, I asked the writers to be as detailed as possible.

4.6.3 The interviews

Three interviews were carried out at approximately the beginning, middle and end of the first year of the inquiry. Details of the approach to interviewing and transcription are given below.

4.6.3.1 The approach to interviewing in this study

To start with, the approach to interviewing in this study can be said to have emerged partly from 'unpacking' my own story of learning English (see Clandinin 2013, 34 and Chapter 1), in particular following the discovery that my story of learning languages was intricately connected with many other aspects of my life: people, places and wider contextual elements. This reflection began to make me think of ways I could unearth the complexities of personal experiences.

The approach to interviewing in this study reflects this and the need to produce narratives. Participants needed to feel at ease in sharing personal aspects of their lives, and in taking part in exchanges with me, as part of the process of co-constructing meaning, i.e. what it means to learn a language such as French in Hong Kong. These exchanges required time and space to develop (see Connelly & Clandinin 1990, 4).

In this way, the interviewing technique adopted in this study resembled more 'an everyday conversation' with 'multiple turns at talk' than a research interview (Barkhuizen 2011, 392), and the interviews can be described as 'discursive' interviews (Barkhuizen 2011, 398) or 'in-depth' interviews (see Shkedi 2005, 59-68; see also McCormack 2000a, 2000b, 2004). The interviewing technique makes the researcher a 'traveler' of information rather than a 'miner' (see Kvale 2007, 19). Etherington and Bridges (2011) explain the focus of interview questions in narrative inquiry, noting that questions are there to:

> help the storyteller address cultural context; their embodied engagement in the events, their senses, feelings; thoughts, attitudes and ideas; the significance of other people; the choices and actions of the teller: based on values, beliefs and aims; historical continuity; and metaphors, symbols, and creative, intuitive ways of knowing which create pictures that capture vivid representations of experiences. (Etherington & Briges 2011, 11)

In this way, general, open-ended questions in conversational mode were preferred to explore the territory, yet they were organised within a structure (see Barkhuizen *et al.* 2014, 21; Barbour 2008, 113-132). This was for two reasons: firstly, they guided the interviewee during the interview and secondly, they would be useful during the reconstruction of research texts at the end of the inquiry. Each interview began with introducing the different areas (or themes) of the interview to make the interviewee aware of the purpose, yet taking care not to limit the story being shared (Barkhuizen *et al.* 2014, 21). Riessman (1993) remarks that narratives 'emerge when you least expect them' (p. 56). In other words, I let myself be led by the interviewee as much as possible yet strived to cover all the themes I had envisaged. If they were not all covered during the time allocated for the interview, I made note of this for the following interview. During the interviews, I also reduced my note-taking to mere key words in order to maintain eye contact as much as possible as well as remain alert to the 'emotional micro-process' during the interactions, which may involve non-verbal as well as verbal reactions (see Wengraf 2001, 191-206).

In the preparation stage of the interviews, I worked on questions which I conceived on the model of in-depth semi-structured interviews such as those described in Barbour (2008, 113-132; see also Wengraf's description of 'lightly-structured depth interviews', 2001, 111-151). This meant

preparing prompts 'should interviewees not flag up anticipated issues' (Barbour 2008, 113-132) and questions that were focused and yet open, with questions such as 'Can you tell me about…?', for example (see Wengraf 2001, 111-151; see also my interview guides in Appendices 7, 8a, 8b, 9a and 9b). More specifically, the preparatory stage was conceived as a guide for the researcher rather than as a precise road map for the actual interviews (see Shedivy 2004, 107). It was never my intention to cover all the questions I had prepared during the interviews, but I hoped that by internalizing questions around the themes I wanted to cover, I would be able to free myself for listening to and interacting with the participants during the interviews.

4.6.3.2 Design of the three interviews

The three interviews in this study developed following the iterative process of any qualitative methodology (see Maxwell 2013; see also Clandinin 2013, 49). This is to say that each stage of data collection was built on the previous stages. In this way, the design of each interview was based on the field texts collected in the stage preceding the interview (for example, LLHs, after interview-notes, field notes, memos, artifacts recordings of interviews and transcriptions, if they were available).

Another aspect of the design was that the first and second interviews were preceded by a preparatory activity given to the participants (see Wengraf 2001, 191-206). This was conceived as a way to stimulate the reflective process as well as introducing the participants to the structure of the interview. In this way, the first interview was based on the LLH and the second interview was based on the techno-linguistic report as well as on what had taken place in the

FRENCHINHK Facebook closed group (these activities are explained in more detail in sections 4.6.4 & 4.6.7 below). For the third interview, no preparatory activity was necessary as its purpose was to revisit aspects that seemed unclear or which I felt had not been explored enough.

All of my meetings with the participants were recorded using an iPhone. Each interview lasted between 1 and 2.5 hours, the total length of recording was between 6.5 and 7.5 hours for each participant.

Also, it should be noted that apart from the recorded interview meetings, there were other informal meetings which were not recorded (see details in Appendix 4). In addition, recorded interviews were often preceded or followed by an informal chat around a meal or a drink during which we caught up with news of our lives.

4.6.3.3 The focus of the three interviews

The focus of the first interview was ‘to put the participant's experience in context by asking him or her to tell as much as possible about him or herself in the light of the topic up to the present time’ (Seidman 1998 in Wengraf 2001, pp. 111-151). More specifically, it focused on investigating participants’ relationship to their environment (including family, education and jobs). The interview also aimed to investigate participants’ descriptions of themselves and language learning experiences, including beliefs, practices and experiences abroad. It also explored some of the information shared by the participants in their LLH. Full details of the interview questions for the first interview are presented in Appendix 6.

The second interview was designed 'to concentrate upon the concrete details of the participants' present experience in the topic area of study' (Seidman 1998 in Wengraf 2001, pp. 111-151). It focused on the participants' notions of 'Frenchness' (for example, through investigating their views about trends, lifestyles, French language and culture, and French in comparison to other languages), and exploring how participants portrayed themselves, for example on Facebook. Also, the second interview explored the information provided in the techno-linguistic report, which was one of the two preparatory tasks for this interview. These interviews took place in the middle stages of data collection in January and February 2016. The participants had become more familiar with the purpose of the research project by then and had also been participating in the FRENCHINHK closed Facebook group, which was created in October 2015 to encourage reflection on the meaning of learning French (details of this group are given in section 4.6.7 below). The second preparatory task for the second interview involved looking back at postings on this FB group. Details of the type of questions prepared for the second interview are presented in Appendix 7a (the researcher's guide) and Appendix 7b (the participants' preparatory task).

The third interview in May 2016 did not require any preparation by the participants. The aim of this interview was to probe changes in French language learning experiences across time (e.g., across a semester and/or across one academic year for the participants in Group 1) as well as to address gaps in the stories and clarify areas that were unclear or needed elaboration. To prepare for this interview, I listened back to the first and second interview recordings and looked at the field texts, whilst noting down specific areas or points to probe into. I then designed a specific interview guide with 'narrative-pointed' questions for each participant (see Wengraf 2001, pp. 111-151). The interview guide developed for IC is presented in Appendix 8 as an example.

4.6.3.4 Post-interview notes

Post-meeting notes were written up without delay and were then transferred immediately onto my computer (see Wengraf 2001, 191-206). These notes included details about the length of the interviews, notes regarding the manner in which each meeting was organized, the content of the debriefing session at the end of each interview and my own observations of how I had perceived the atmosphere of the meeting. I also took notes about what had gone well in the interview in terms of interview flow and what I had been unable to cover. At the end of my notes, I listed the points I needed to revisit in subsequent interviews. Finally, I noted the points raised in our post-interview discussions.

Finally, in my post-interview notes, I jotted down 'flashing' impressions I had of the participants and their stories, especially at the beginning when we were getting acquainted. I summarized my impressions in short phrases (e.g., 'Deep thinker', 'Not afraid to be different although might suffer a little from it', 'A girl more worried than a year ago').

Collecting these field notes started the analytical process. Wengraf (2001, pp. 111-151) remarks that writing down notes immediately after the interviews is 'vital' for 'subsequent analysis':

> [Y]our brain is already re-ordering the material in a free-associative flow. It is already making connections within and outside the interview itself; it is already providing material about emotions and feelings; it is already complementing the dry chronology of the tape-recording with the data-provision of your own brain. It is therefore your 'closest-

to-experience' start of your eventual theorizing of that experience (Wengraf 2001, pp. 111-151).

4.6.3.5 Recording and transcribing the three interviews

Transcribing was an important step in this study, as in narrative inquiry it is actually considered a major element of the analytical procedure (Riessman 1993, 11; Kvale 2007, 93-101). Mishler (1991) notes that the way 'we arrange and rearrange' an interview text is a process of 'testing, clarifying and deepening our understanding of what is happening in the discourse' (Mishler 1991, 277). Riessman (1993) has likened transcribing to 'photographing reality', which conveys the idea that transcribing is an interpretive practice (p.13). Thus, Riessman (1993) notes that decisions regarding the manner of transcription are important for researchers because it is these decisions which create the ground for their arguments (p. 13).

However, questions arising at the transcription stage are multiple. Wengraf (2001, 208-223) notes that transcribing is anything but straightforward since transcribing is in effect translating others' thoughts and intentions. Wengraf (2001) remarks that any decoding is also an encoding (pp. 208-223). Mishler (1986) further notes that any form of transcribing is 'only a partial representation of speech' and that 'each representation is also a transformation' (in Wengraf 2001, 208-223). This explains why Mishler (1986) remarks that researchers 'must be wary of taking their own transcripts too seriously as the reality' (in Wengraf 2001, 208-223).

Following these considerations, I followed Mishler's advice and aimed for a form of transcription guided by both 'theoretical concerns and practical constraints' (Mishler 1986, in

Wengraf 2001, 208-223). To start with, my focus in this study was not on minute aspects of the texts as in the 'small stories' narrative approach (for e.g., see Bamberg, 2006; Geogakopoulou, 2006). Instead, my study was about trying to grasp the whole experience. This is why a verbatim transcription was chosen in this study. In addition, 'striking features of the conversation' (Riessman 1993, 56), such as intonation, short and long pauses, laughs and changes in volume, as explained in Kvale (2007, pp. 93-101), were also highlighted. This gave a useful perspective on participants' reactions to my questions and research topic. Wengraf (2001, 208-223) remarks that 'the task of interpretation intrinsically requires the attribution of meanings and connotations and strategies to the speakers in a transcript', which also illustrates the co-constructive aspect of narrative inquiry. Overall, the transcriptions in this study can be described as 'unedited as possible', with attention given to avoid 'tidying-up' transcripts (see Wengraf 2001, 208-223). The exact transcription conventions used in this study are presented in Appendix 9.

My second reason for choosing the form of transcription used in this study was also practical, since the amount of data was considerable. I engaged two student helpers to assist me with the task of transcribing. Maintaining consistency across the transcripts meant that the transcription conventions needed to be easy to use. In total, they transcribed about two thirds of the recordings across twelve interviews (see Appendix 14 for details of the length of each interview).

Following Wengraf (2001, 208-223), I used the transcribing stage to make notes about thoughts that came to me regarding the participants and their stories. Wengraf (2001) particularly stresses the importance of catching this opportunity 'to generate and sense new understandings of 'what it's all about' (pp. 208-223). If I was not the transcriber, the same 'once-off opportunity to hear

the tape freshly' was attained when checking the work of the other transcribers (Wengraf 2001, 208-223).

4.6.4 Techno-linguistic report

To get a view of my participants' involvement with French, I adapted Barton and Lee's (2013, 168) idea of an electronic logbook. As a field text, I designed a table labelled 'techno-linguistic report' in which participants were asked to list the various technologies they had used since starting to learn languages (see the instructions concerning the completion of the techno-linguistic report in Appendix 10).

This techno-linguistic report (or TLR) gave me insight into the technologies and Internet websites participants used as part of their language learning activities, the range of methods they used, the transfer of practices between languages (e.g., from English to French) and the degree of autonomy participants displayed in the way they approached language learning, especially French learning.

4.6.5 Other modes of communication

I also kept records of exchanges with participants through mediated modes of communication (e.g., emails and WhatsApp, Facebook and Messenger messages).

4.6.6 Memoing and field notes

I also kept classroom observation notes when observing Candice's French university classes and collected materials from her, such as a self-learning diary, self-reflection report, and creative texts that Candice wrote as part of her French course at university. Memos and questions were written about the participants' postings on Facebook, with the aim of exploring their significance during the interviews (especially during the second interview, which was designed specifically to explore participants' perceptions of themselves and of Frenchness). I also wrote researcher's memos which consisted of thoughts I had around various topics such as, autonomy or identity (see Appendix 14).

Finally, a survey collecting general background information was given to each participant. It included questions about their studies and the schools they had attended, as well as information about the languages they and their parents knew (see Appendix 11).

4.6.7 Artifacts: objects, photographs, IG and FB accounts

Artifacts were collected from all the participants with the intention that they would help 'trigger the telling of stories' (Clandinin 2013, 46) as well as help in the reconstruction of the role of French in each participant's narrative. For the first interview, participants were asked to bring to the first interview photographs or objects which they associated with language learning in general and with French learning in particular. For the second interview, they were asked to select two or three FB postings which gave an idea of who they were or of what they wanted to do in their lives.

In October 2015, I created an Instagram account named @frenchinhk to help students in the French class I was observing. This IG account was also accessible to the former French students in my study. However, Candice and Nicole were the only two who communicated with me through this account. In particular, Candice exchanged with me often as a way to practice her French. I kept field notes of my exchanges with her until the account was closed in the summer of 2016.

I also created a closed Facebook group, which I named FRENCHINHK. This group account was opened in October 2015 and remained active until October 2016. Out of all the former French students I invited to join the group, forty-eight joined, among them the four participants in this study. The purpose of opening this FB group was three-fold: firstly, it created a channel of communication with the participants; secondly, it encouraged the exploration of their perceptions of French and French culture, which I called 'Frenchness' following Coffey (2010); thirdly, it was part of the process of 'co-constructing' the meaning of French in the study, a term referring to the collaboration between researcher and participants in working out the meaning of an experience (see Clandinin & Connelly 2000, 20). Similarly, Lenchuk and Swain (2010) used Richard Burton's poetry and films to stimulate conversations with their participant, Alise (pp. 20-21).

On 1 October 2015, I introduced the FRENCINHK closed group to its members in this way:

Bonjour everyone!

You remember that I am doing some research into French learning in HK for my PhD. I am interested in exploring what you think might signal "Frenchness" in HK. By "Frenchness" I mean any link with French culture or language or any perception about "Frenchness" (It does not have to be a real, concrete sign, image or word; it can just be an impression which instantly makes you think: "Oh, so French!" or "Oh, this is somewhat French!"). It could be an image, a scene you witness in a street, a piece of music... really ANYTHING.

Also, I am interested in your perceptions of each other's postings.

To recap, please feel free to 1) react/comment, 2) post pictures, 3) like, 4) invite other people whom you think might be interested in this group because they are or have been learning French in HK.

Merci beaucoup, beaucoup, beaucoup!

Figure 2: Introduction to the FRENCHINHK closed FB group

I then started to post visuals with questions or remarks regarding a potential link with Frenchness and encouraged participants to do the same in a process of exploring and co-constructing the notion of Frenchness with the participants. The two examples below show this process in operation. The first example is a chain of reactions following a post by Candice, which was seen by 25 people and liked by 6 people including myself. The post is a meme with an introductory comment by Candice, which reads as follows:

7 November 2015

I like this one. They are not going to do what you say😎 It's sexy, non?

LikeComment
Seen by 25

Me: Do you think it's a woman or a man who says "no"? In which case is it the sexiest? Pourquoi ? (don't need to answer in French :-))

Me: Who is "they" Candice?

Candice: French people! Many of them have their own characters. Besides I think it is a woman who says no. That's charming because the woman is able to say no to things they don't like. There are still many women who don't know that they can, might be because of the social norms, traditions or education level.

Me: And what do you think the woman is saying no to ?

Candice: She says no so to tell the person that she is not going to do as he/she say. She has the nerve to object people which may make the situation awkward and the person who is asking embarrassed. She may be regarded as rude. But I like the way that she is rebellious to the golden rule of socialization haha

Me: And do you think that the use of French is significant here? Why not another European language like "Nein" or "No"? Aren't women in other cultures confident to say NO? Why French ?

Candice: Because German or English is not a sexy language! And the people are not particularly known as sexy people. So the French word Non relates more to the question.

Me: smile emoticon

Me: define "sexy" please smile emoticon

Candice: sexy to me means more like having a character wink emoticon

Me: Like sticking to one's opinion even when criticised? Being confident?

Candice: perhaps confidence and tact too

Me: And you associate this especially with French women? Why is this? Where is this coming from?

Figure 3: Posting and interaction on the FRENCHINHK closed FB group – example 1

The second example is a visual post by me. It shows a street scene I photographed after Yasmina (one of the four participants in the study) had pointed it out to me, explaining that she thought it looked French. I decided to check with the members of the FRENCHINHK FB group what they thought of it. The post was seen by 27 people and liked by none. Two different members of the group interacted with me about this post, as follows:

18 October 2015

And how about this photo? A French connection?

LikeComment
Seen by 27

Member 1: Would it be something like: the rare street showcase of a musical performance in such an unexpected place as outside Festival Walk? France appears to me as a country treasuring culture and heritage to a better extent, while Hong Kong is generally perceived as a "cultural desert".

Me: Yes, Festival Walk. You're saying "rare". Can you explain then your views about "HK cultural desert"?

Member 1: People are saying Hong Kong citizens are deficient in the cultural sense. I beg to differ. My view is that a lot of city-dwellers possess the potential or talent to express their love for music, film and arts. Nevertheless, due to the inadequacy of public promotion (by the government) and owing to societal tendency towards money, citizens here become increasingly less indulged or even guilty if they're involved in a cultural or artistic career path, as it's

generally perceived as a "less financially rewarding" field. A very sad truth that prevails here.

Me: So when you see this scene, you think that it's not a typically HK scene but it could be one. So why do you perceive the French artistic scene as different? What makes you say this?

Member 2: I see " la vie en rose" haha

Me: smile emoticon Me too !

Me: Is this scene more French than Spanish or German? Or...? Would you have thought of "French" if I had not mentioned it?

Figure 4: Posting and interaction on the FRENCHINHK closed FB group – example 2

To reiterate, the participants' contributions on the FRENCHINHK FB group page were used to encourage reflection about perceptions of French language and/or culture.

Thirty-eight visuals were posted between October 2015 and October 2016. Thirty-one of these were posted by me (with three of these being reposts from participants) and seven visuals were posted by members of the group. The large number of views showed that the posts were at least seen even though they were not necessarily 'liked' (using the 'like' button) or commented on. I further explored the reflections the FRENCHINHK postings had triggered during the second interview, which took place between January and February 2016 (see Appendices 8a and 8b).

To conclude, a variety of field texts were collected during the data collection period between January 2015 and September 2017. Information about the different stages of field text collection is shown in Appendix 12 whilst details of the field notes collected during the inquiry are presented in Appendix 14.

4.7 The analytical procedure: from field texts to interim research texts to final research texts

The production of four final research texts (FRT) or narrative texts was the overall goal of the study and the outcome of the analytical procedure, in accordance with the narrative inquiry methodology. The aim of a study of this kind is to both 'reveal uniqueness of the individual case […] and provide an understanding of its idiosyncrasy and particular complexity' (Polkinghorne 1995, 15). As already mentioned (see section 4.2.3), the epistemological position of narrative inquiry is that narrative is an 'interpretive feat' (Bruner 2004, 692-693; see also Riessman, 1993), but one which requires narrative inquirers to make transparent the analytical process as much as possible (Clandinin and Rosiek 2007, pp. 6-7). The aim of this section is, thus, to provide precise details of each of the analytical stages in the study.

Before I do this, I would like to note that I did not rely on a computerized approach in organizing my data in this study, even though technology has progressed. This was, first, because the number of participants in this study was small and also because there were technical problems with accessing the NVivo software at my university. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) note that manual organization is possible as long as the 'total volume of field texts is not overwhelmingly huge' (p. 144). Charmaz (2000 in Shkedi 2005, 92) suggests that software analysis cannot attain a holistic view of the data and that only the researcher can.

4.7.1. Processes of co-construction and co-composition

The FRTs in this study came about in the manner of a 'recursive movement' (Polkinghorne 1995, 16; see also Clandinin 2013, 47-51) and involved processes of co-construction and co-composition. According to Etherington (2007), 'co-construction' refers to the fact that stories are inherently constructed as much by the tellers of stories as by the listeners:

> The researcher, as audience, may become actively involved in co-constructing previously untold stories by asking curious questions that help thicken and deepen existing stories and invite the teller into territory beyond what is already known to him or her. Even when we read stories, we might silently fill in the gaps with our own assumptions and beliefs. The stories that are told and received are therefore influenced and informed by what tellers as well as the audience bring to the relationship from their own lives and contexts. (Etherington 2007, 600)

In this way, the actions and reactions of the researcher (the moment the researcher presses the record button or responds to the participant with a smile, a clarification question or body language) are also part of the co-construction process. Clandinin and Connelly (2000, 94) note that:

> What may appear as an objective tape recording of a structured interview is already an interpretive and contextualized text: it is interpretive because it is shaped by the interpretive processes of researcher and participant and their relationship; and it is

> contextualized because of the particular circumstances of the interview's origins and setting. (Clandinin & Connelly 2000, 94)

In other words, any aspect of the relationship between the participant and the researcher 'embeds meaning and imposes form on the research text ultimately developed' (Clandinin and Connelly 2000, 94). To summarise, the process of co-construction in narrative inquiry reflects the fact that in narrative epistemology meaning is seen as intersubjective. As Charmaz (2000, 524) puts it, the observer 'is part of what is viewed rather than separate from it' (in Shkedi 2005, 5).

By the term 'co-composition', Clandinin (2013, 49) means that FRTs emerge after several stages, including the researcher composing interim research texts (IRTs) which are then discussed with the participants. This process further advances the reflection on and composition of the FRT. More information about the process of writing the IRTs and the FRTs will be given in section 4.8.

4.7.2 First phase of the analytical procedure: framing the research puzzle

At first, I found myself overwhelmed by the quantity of field texts I had collected (see Appendix 14) at the end of the data collection period and found it necessary to take time to re-read the literature regarding the analytical procedure in narrative inquiry. My primary aim was to reconsider what capturing the 'continuity and wholeness of an individual's life experience' (Clandinin & Connelly 2000, 17) implied with regard to the analytical phase of the study. Clandinin and Rosiek state the aim of narrative inquiry as follows:

> [T]he narrative inquirer seeks a knowledge of human experience that remains within the stream of human lives. In other words, narrative inquiry does not merely describe this or that feature of someone's experience. (Clandinin & Rosiek 2007, 12)

With this in mind, I went about reaching an understanding of each participant's experience in relation to my research question: '*What does it mean for the participants in the study to learn French?*

In narrative inquiry, Clandinin and Connelly explain that the inquiry is 'composed around a particular wonder, a research puzzle' (2000, 124; also Clandinin 2013, 42). Instead of 'wonder', de Villers and Joassart use the term 'enigma':

> [F]or a story to emerge, there must be an 'enigma' [« pour qu'il y ait un récit, il faut qu'il y ait une intrigue »] (de Villers & Joassart 2006, 216).

De Villers and Joassart (2006, 216) present narrative inquiry as 'a quest' [« une quête »], during which 'something connects' [« quelque chose [qui] se noue »]. Clandinin (2013, 42) describes narrative inquirers' task as framing a research puzzle rather than 'framing a research question with a precise definition or expectation of an answer'. In this inquiry, I started to 'frame the research puzzle' of the entire study by thinking about the role of languages in my life (see Chapter 1). In the next sections, I will describe how I went about continuing that process with the participants' stories.

4.7.2.1 Listening back to the interview recordings, reviewing transcripts and organizing field texts

I started the analytical procedure by actively listening back to the interview recordings (McCormack 2000a, 288) and checking the transcriptions against the recordings, an important step as 'a focus for analysis often emerges, or becomes clearer' as a result (Riessman 1993, 57-58).

During the procedure of reviewing transcripts, I located 'narrative segments' (Riessman 1993, 58) in the transcripts, highlighted them, copied them in a separate document and extracted a sentence or words to use as a title for that segment. For example, one of IC's stories about her university years was captured by the following sentence: *'the time to expose yourself more'* (IC INT1). During the final analytical phase, the segments and their titles became useful in constructing a narrative for each participant (see section 4.7.3.1 below).

Riessman conceives narrative segments as discrete stories within the overall story, differing from other segments such as 'question and answer exchanges, arguments, chronicles and other forms of discourse' (1993, 58). These segments are to be considered as 'individual and isolated text[s] with [their] own narrative qualities' (Clandinin & Connelly 2000, 139). What interested me in these segments was that they enriched the overall story and would be helpful in reconstructing the complexity of each of my participants' experiences.

The point of the 'listening-back' stage was to reacquaint myself with the data, but also to help to establish the 'three-dimensional inquiry space' in each story (see Clandinin & 2000; 54-57; Barkhuizen, 2016).

4.7.2.2 Establishing the three-dimensional inquiry space

Establishing this space in each of the participants' stories involved asking the following questions (Clandinin and Connelly 2000; 54-57):

- *Who* are the characters in the story?
- *What* are the main events, and *when* and *where* do they happen?

I worked with the field texts and went back to them many times to avoid excessive reliance on memory, as advised by Clandinin and Connelly (2000, 143), who consider that field texts are as much 'memory transformers' as 'memory signposts', meaning that they always carry the possibility to surprise the reader. In particular, I went back to the narrative segments I had located earlier (see section 4.7.2.1 above) and adopted a procedure similar to that used by Barkhuizen (2016) in his analysis of short stories in the Sela study.

For each segment, I looked for tentative answers to the *when, who, where* questions as well as at the participant's experience in relation to their context, following Barkhuizen's (2016) model (see section 4.3.2). This is to say that I looked at the social environment – including other people and their intentions, purposes, and points of view – surrounding the participant (i.e. the 'outward'

aspects of the 'sociality' dimension) as well as personal reactions to this changing environment (i.e. the 'inward' aspect of the 'sociality' dimension; see Clandinin & Connelly 2000, 50).

The usefulness of this analysis is linked to the post-structuralist perspective on identity whereby individuals' actions are always in tension and in interaction with the environment and therefore, always in tension with social structures of power and inequality (Blommaert 2010, 4; see also Chapter 3, section 3.3.1.4). During the interviews, I had noted that participants often broke into storytelling mode when they recalled feelings of being unjustly treated or wrongly perceived, or were relating their experiences of communication difficulties with colleagues or successes they had had in their lives. In other words, narrative segments often hinted at issues of power and inequality and gave indications of how the participants dealt with or wanted to be seen to have dealt with the issues. In Chapter 3 (section 3.5.1), I mentioned the potential use of rescaling strategies to 'jump' across contexts in an effort to contest or skirt power and regain a sense of control in a situation of inferiority (Blommaert 2010, 34). And thus, looking closely at narrative segments was a way to begin to observe these strategies in use, how they worked and what they revealed in terms of identity construction.

To record my answers to the questions *when, who, where (and what),* which define the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, I used a slightly adapted version of the table designed by Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002, 340). The table is shown below (Table 2):

Sociality/*who?*		Temporality/*when?*		Place/*where?/what?*	
Personal	Social	Past	Present	Future	Situation(s)/Place(s)
Look inward to internal conditions (i.e. feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, moral dispositions)	**Look outward** to existential conditions linked to the environment (i.e. other people, their intentions, purposes, assumptions and points of views	**Look backward** to remembered experiences, feelings, and stories from earlier times	**Look at current** experiences, feelings, and stories relating to actions of an event	**Look forward** to implied and imagined experiences and plot lines	**Look at where the experience is situated** i.e. physical landscape, topological and spatial boundaries

Table 2: The three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Ollerenshaw & Creswell 2002, 340)

At the same time as completing the table, I made notes of other clues and added these as complementary notes to the table. These clues included 'transition points', 'special moments' and language features in the stories, as I will explain in the sections below.

4.7.2.3. Transition points, language features and special moments during the telling of the stories

Also referred to as 'epiphanies' (McCormack 2000a, 294) or 'turning points' (Mishler 2006, 38), transition (or turning) points help in the reconstruction process of stories as they give an idea of how people patch up 'inconsistencies and conflict' in their lives (Adawu & Martin- Beltrán 2012, 396). Turning points also give clues on how narrators want to be perceived in the world (Coffey & Street 2008, 461) and how they position themselves in 'social worlds' (Mishler 2006, 38 & 41). Turning points can reveal a desire to be perceived in different ways, for example as an 'authoritative voice' or as a 'cultural mediator' (Coffey & Street 2008, 461).

Transition points are also important in narrative studies because they challenge the view that lives are coherent and linear. In effect, for Mishler (2006, 43), stories are not necessarily structured by a beginning, a middle and an end (e.g., Labov 1972, 1982; Cortazzi, 1994). Although every story has a beginning, it might not necessarily have a middle or an end, as when an individual (conveniently or unconsciously) forgets a major event, such as an illness (Mishler 2006, 44). This is to say that individuals might be in denial that certain events happened and choose to remain silent about them, illustrating that people's lives are often complicated, fractured and not easily transformed in a coherent story. Layder points out that critical events 'put into question the viability of the current view of self' (2004, 139) and thus, individuals' stories in narrative inquiry can only ever be 'partial' reconstructions (Clandinin & Rosiek 2007, 4).

Looking for transition (or turning) points in the lives of the participants across the interviews often involved highlighting language features such as adverbs or chunks of language (e.g., '*This was it*'; see Mishler 2006, 39; see also McCormack, 2000b). I also looked for other language features such as sudden changes in intonation or voice level as well as the use of repetitions and other features of language which seemed prominent in the stories. These included the frequent use of *'euh'* or '*hmmm*', indicating that thinking was taking place or suggesting an emotional response (e.g., embarrassment or uncertainty). I also noted down the use of direct questions. In addition, 'special moments' were introduced by the use of non-verbal devices such as, a sudden laugh (or cries), or the use of singing, humming or silence during the telling of the experience (see McCormack 2000a). These moments were often linked to the narrative segments I talked about earlier (see section 4.7.2.1 above). In other words, they were also sometimes

linked to issues of power and inequality. I had already mentally highlighted them and made further notes about them after the interviews.

The final stage of the analysis consisted of establishing tentative links between the various elements of the story. To do this, I organized events in a chronological order, characterised the context and possible consequences of these events. By linking these elements together, the process of defining the storyline (or 'plot'; see Polkinghorne 1995, 16) began, as I will further develop in the following section.

4.7.2.4 Organizing participants' story events in a chronological sequence

The idea of drawing a summary of events chronologically was inspired by Polkinghorne's view that the process of narrativisation is a 'cognitive process that organizes human experiences into temporally meaningful episodes' (1988, 1). The author notes:

> We are in the middle of our stories and cannot be sure how they will end; we are constantly having to revise the plots as new events are added to our lives. Self, then, is not a static thing nor a substance, but a configuring or personal events into a historical unity which includes not only what one has been but also anticipations of what one will be. (Polkinghorne 1988, 150)

Connelly and Clandinin (2006, 479) also note that events are to be considered from the point of view of their 'temporal transition' between past, present and future with past conveying significance, the present, value, and the future, intention (see Connelly & Clandinin 1990, 9).

My decision to organize my participants' narratives in this way was also based on Creswell's guidelines (2013, 259) as well as Clandinin's (2013, 118) own procedure for organising the story of Andrew, one of her participants in a large study about the experiences of early-school leavers. In her draft or interim research text (IRT), Clandinin presents major events in Andrew's life, such as 'belonging to a church', 'playing sports' or 'going to school'. She organizes these events in a way that gives an overall view of Andrew's story, but also tentatively suggests connections between the parts of his story.

Reflecting on both of these inputs, I went back to the field texts I had collected for each participant and organized events in a chronological sequence whilst adding details of contextual issues (middle column) and possible consequences (right column), a procedure inspired by Whiffin, Bailey, Ellis-Hill and Jarrett (2014, 23), who started to make sense of their medical data in this way. An example of this procedure as it was carried out in IC's case is shown in Appendix 15.

4.7.2.5 Summary of the first phase of the analytical procedure

To summarize, defining the three-dimensional inquiry space for each participant was the main focus of the analytical procedure in this study. This space provided information about individual experience across time (answering the question *why*), in relation to people and personal emotions (answering the question *who*) as well as in relation to the spaces and situations related to this experience (answering the questions *where* and *what*). I completed this analysis by filling up a table and at the same time looking at the data through 'multiple lenses' (McCormack 2000a), including looking for transition points, special moments (e.g., a change of rhythm or emotion in

the storytelling) and language features (e.g., repetitions), and also looking in depth at narrative segments to gain a finer understanding of the interaction between each individual and their context.

Looking at the field texts in multiple ways helped me grasp the complexity of each individuals' experiences and frame the puzzle of what it meant to learn French in their stories. From this, I was able to start writing what is known as an 'interim research text' (IRT; see Clandinin 2013, 47). The composition of the IRT represents the second phase of the analytical procedure in this study and is explained in section 4.7.3 below.

4.7.3 The second stage of the analytical procedure: writing Interim Research Texts

Clandinin (2013, 47) describes the process of moving from field texts to the composition of interim research texts (IRT) as a moment 'marked with tension and uncertainty'. Although interpretations of the experience under study naturally take place during the entire inquiry, this is the first time the inquirer is faced with the task of putting all the elements of the experience together in writing, and the first time that this is done in isolation from the participants.

4.7.3.1 Writing the IRT

Clandinin (2013) refers to IRTs as 'partial texts' (p. 47) to stress firstly that they are not the final outcome of the inquiry, and secondly that they are open for further discussion between the participants and the researcher, as explained in her quote below:

> Interim research texts are often partial texts that are open to allow participants and researchers opportunities to further co-compose storied interpretations and to negotiate the multiplicity of possible meanings. (Clandinin 2013, 47)

I wrote several versions of the IRT for each participant, but only shared one with my participants. Whilst writing the IRTs, I remained wary of presenting my participants' lives as 'smooth and narratively coherent' (Clandinin 2013, 48). Carr (1991) makes the remark that human lives don't 'hang together' well and even 'occasionally tend to fall apart' (p. 97; see also Mishler 2006, 44). This is why Clandinin (2013, 49) advises narrative inquirers to remain alert to 'unspoken' messages and accept that it might not be possible to produce a coherent text.

The IRT was organized under headings corresponding to major events or specific moments in the participants' lives and contained quotes from the participants (following Clandinin's model, as well as Lenchuk & Swain's (2010) use of headings to introduce aspects of their participant's narrative. In particular, the headings were inspired by some of the titles I had extracted from the narrative segments during the first phase of the analytical procedure (see section 4.7.2.1). An illustration of how the IRTs were organized is presented in Table 3 below, which shows the headings in IC's IRT:

1. IC and me
2. My meetings with IC
3. Learning English: creative games
4. Learning English at primary school
5. Secondary school
6. IC the-self-learner, the explorer
7. Uni and learning French: '*the time to expose yourself more*'
8. Knowing French is to know English better and it is to be '*more localized*'
9. French: '*it's like a secret code*'
10. What learning French means for IC: other reasons
11. Views of French language and culture
12. A sense of self
13. Gaining new perspectives through international exposure
14. Work: a further revelator of self
15. IC's attachment to HK
16. IC's concern about Hong Kong's future
17. Mainland China in IC's stories
18. Economic and social issues
19. The meaning of Cantonese in IC's life
20. IC's view regarding her identity

Table 3: Headings in IC's IRT (14 June 2017)

During the process of writing the IRTs, I did not attempt to create definite links between the different events in the story, and each paragraph read like a summary of each major temporal event in the life of the participants. There were several reasons for this: first, it reflected the fact that the text was 'in-the-making' (Clandinin 2013, 131); second, it was intended to encourage participants to think about and discuss connections. I wanted as much as possible to avoid imposing my own interpretations and influencing their reading of the IRT; even though we had begun sharing ideas about the 'enigma' surrounding the role of French in their lives during the three previous interviews, it was the first time they were seeing the pieces of the 'puzzle' put together in writing (see section 4.7.2 above). An example of a completed IRT is presented in Appendix 17 (along with my notes taken during and after the IRT meeting).

4.7.3.2 Organizing an IRT meeting

After working on the four IRTs from June to July 2017, I organized a meeting with each of the participants. The aim was to continue the process of co-constructing the meaning of the French experience in each participant's story (Clandinin 2013, 47). Clandinin notes that the dialogue with participants around their IRT can continue as long as necessary until coherence had emerged (Clandinin 2013, 48-49). As Connelly and Clandinin note, 'it is in the tellings and retellings that entanglements become acute' (1990, 4).

In this study, I only organized one formal IRT meeting with each participant. This reflected the terms I had negotiated with the participants at the start of the study, i.e. they had agreed to take part in three interviews and one post-data collection meeting, and I wanted to honour this commitment and the ethical line I had fixed for the inquiry. I gave the participants a couple of weeks to read their IRT and provided some instructions on what to do with the text. I encouraged them to read the IRT several times and to note down their reactions, pointing out that the IRT was not the final version of their story of learning French and that it was only an initial interpretation of their experience of learning languages; as such, they had to feel free to disagree with it, comment on it, argue with it and alter it as much as they wanted. These instructions were sent to them by email and via WhatsApp. The instructions I gave the participants are shown in Appendix 16.

4.7.3.3 The IRT meetings

The meetings (which I will henceforth refer to as 'IRT meetings' to differentiate them from the previous three interview meetings) took place in places of the participants' choosing (see Appendix 4). They gave the participants an opportunity to talk about the IRTs and the extent to which they represented their experiences of learning French. The IRT meetings lasted approximately two hours of recorded time for each participant and continued for approximately one more hour of informal conversation, which was not recorded.

The participants had all prepared for the meetings by making notes directly onto the text, whilst IC and Candice also came to the IRT meeting with drawings and/or a list of key words. During the first IRT meeting (with Candice), I initially followed the procedure described in Clandinin (2013, 130). I began by slowly reading each narrative, inviting Candice to stop me whenever she wanted. I paused the recording to note down points Candice raised as well as the correct factual errors. However, after about thirty minutes, I became aware that the procedure was contrived and did not encourage the free flow of ideas; it also contrasted too much with the flow of our usual conversations. Also, Candice had come to the meeting with notes and was eager to share them with me, but I was preventing her from doing so because of the procedure.

Upon realizing this, I changed my IRT meeting procedure and technique: to begin with, I invited participants to share with me everything they had prepared in order to catch the flow of initial impressions, and made notes directly onto my computer; then, I went back to each section of the IRT and read passages in each section of the IRT (see Table 3 above), privileging passages I had made notes about during the analytical procedure (e.g., transition points, special moments and

language features) hoping to stimulate discussion about their content. I proceeded slowly to give participants time to think, but did not try to coax reactions if there were none.

The long pauses in the recording (and in the meetings) made me decide not to transcribe these meetings. Instead, I made extensive notes immediately after the meetings covering everything that had passed between us as well as the participants' reactions to the puzzle of French learning I had began to lay down in the IRT.

Candice, Yasmina and IC had a lot to say about their IRT, which showed that they felt they could share their thoughts with me despite the inevitable power differentials in our relationship; I could not eliminate the fact that I was older, more experienced, their former teacher, a French native speaker (who was looking at the way they used French and at their view of French culture) as well as more generally, a white western woman. Nevertheless, I am confident that during the inquiry the effects of these power differentials were minimized. The participants were strong in the knowledge that by accepting to take part in the study, they had made the inquiry possible. Also, they realized that through sharing their story with me, their voices would be heard by others and that the process had been beneficial for them in some way (see section 4.4.4).

Candice and IC both came to their meetings with drawings, which they explained to me in great detail. These were useful in completing my interpretation of their story and in drawing my attention to aspects of their story I had misinterpreted or over-emphasized. Nicole's reaction to her IRT was a little different. She started by saying that she was very 'comfortable' with the text and had not much to add to it, in a similar way to Andrew's reaction in Clandinin's study (2013, 131). Yet, as we went through the text together, I began to see that I had by-passed the

importance of art in her story. As we discussed this aspect further, a new version of the IRT for Nicole emerged.

The IRT meetings took place two years after the start of the inquiry. By that time, the participants and I had learned a lot about each other and had furthered our relation of trust. This strengthened relationship gave the IRT meetings a particular flavor and significance as we engaged in finalizing the story of what French learning had meant in their life. The co-construction and co-composition process continued as before but it had reached a new intensity. One reason for this seemed to be that the participants seemed to have found a purpose of their own in the inquiry, as I have already mentioned (see section 4.4.3).

4.8 Composing the final research texts (FRT)

Barkhuizen (2011) reminds us that the purpose of constructing narratives for narrators (including me as an analyst) is to 'make sense of their lived experience' and to 'understand it, give it coherence, make connections, and unravel its complexity' (p. 393). The process of writing a final research text (FRT) is also complex. Despite its name, it does not offer 'final answers', since narrative inquirers do not come with questions (as remarked by Clandinin 2013, 51). Clandinin (2013, 49) describes this stage only as a further stage of unraveling the puzzle in the inquiry. Nevertheless, it represents the stage at which the researcher is forced to commit the stories to writing in order to disseminate his or her findings.

4.8.1 Reflecting upon the IRT meeting

As already mentioned, I took extensive notes immediately after each IRT meeting (see Appendix 17 for an example). These notes were useful in noting changes in the participants' points of views and connections with French learning and Frenchness, as well as with other aspects of their lives, illustrating the fluidity of experience. In section 4.7.3.3 above, I already talked about how my understanding of Nicole's story of learning French had been modified during my discussion with her about the IRT, partly as a result of the process of self-reflection deepening during the inquiry, but also because of the passage of time during which views and opinions were constantly modified.

Indeed, during the two years of the inquiry all four participants went through many professional and personal changes, but during that time, changes also occurred in the wider sociopolitical landscape of Hong Kong (see Chapter 5, section 5.3). As an expression of time passing, Nicole remarked that the IRT represented an 'older' version of herself (see section 4.4.3). One effect of time was that the participants' relationship with French learning was becoming more distant, either because they were struggling to find time to continue studying it due to busy professional schedules (e.g., Yasmina) or because French was losing its immediate relevance in terms of travel or employment prospects (e.g., Candice, IC, Nicole).

In this way, Clandinin & Rosiek (2017, 13) remark that narrative inquirers must proceed 'with an attitude of knowing that other possibilities, interpretations, and ways of explaining things are possible'. Equally, Connelly and Clandinin (1995, 9) remark that producing a narrative research

account (such as the FRT) is a 'continual unfolding' process since like life itself, 'the narrative insights of today are the chronological events of tomorrow'.

The concept of *plausibility* provides overall guidance in the narrative writing process, as will be explained below. Finally, writing a final narrative inquiry research text is to engage in a process of *restorying* and *burrowing*, as will also be explained below.

4.8.2. Plausibility

Based on Bruner's (1990, 2004) point about truth in narratives being a different kind of truth (see section 4.2.3), Denzin (1989a) underlines the difference in evaluating a piece of narrative research as opposed to other pieces of research, and this also applies to the kind of study carried out here:

> The lived experiences of interacting individuals are the proper subject matter of sociology. The meanings of these experiences are best given by the persons who experience them; thus, a preoccupation with method, validation, reliability, generalizability, and theoretical relevance of the biographical method must be set aside in favour of a concern for meaning and interpretation. (Denzin 1989a, in Creswell 2013, 258).

Instead of the usual criteria of evaluation, Denzin (1989b) identifies 'criteria of interpretation' as the standard by which narrative accounts should be judged (in Creswell 2013, 258). These criteria include 'respecting the researcher's perspective' and 'thick description'. In other words,

the validity of a narrative account depends on the 'ability of the researcher to illuminate the phenomenon in a thickly contextualised manner (i.e., thick description of developed context) so as to reveal the historical, processual and interactional features of the experience' (Maxwell 2013, 258).

This is to say that narrative researchers have a different way of addressing issues of validity. For Connelly and Clandinin (1990) plausibility is what guides narrative inquirers. A plausible account is one that 'tends to ring true' and one of which 'one might say "I can see that happening"' (Connelly & Clandinin 1990, 8). The authors describe this task as a 'dialectical balancing act' (Connelly & Clandinin 1990, 8) consisting of connecting elements within the story as well as drawing from the resonance of the inquirer's own experience (see Clandinin 2013, 43; see also Creswell 2013, 259). More specifically, the achievement of plausibility in a narrative account is guided by two elements. The first one is whether or not readers validate the account when asked to read it. Polkinghorne (1995) explains this aspect of plausibility as follows:

> The explanation needs to satisfy the subjective needs of the reader of the report to understand how the occurrence could have come about. The story has to appeal to the readers' experienced general sense of why humans respond and act […] It needs to be compatible with the reader's background knowledge or beliefs in characteristic behaviour of people or nature in order for the reader to accept the explanation as possible. (Polkinghorne 1995, 19)

Thus, the second element in achieving plausibility is the development of a plausible story line or plot, as explained by Polkinghorne (1995):

> This final guideline concerns the need for the researcher to provide a story line or plot that serves to configure or compose the disparate data elements into a meaningful explanation of the protagonist's responses and actions. (Polkinghorne 1995, 18)

Guidelines on how to develop a story line are presented in the section below.

4.8.3 The process of constructing the final research text: A process of *restorying* and *burrowing*

Restorying is 'the process of gathering stories, analyzing them for key elements of the story (e.g., time, place, plot, and scene), and then rewriting the story to place it within a chronological sequence' (Ollerenshaw & Creswell 2002, 332; see also Polkinghorne 1995, 18). More simply, restorying is the process of reconstructing the research participants' stories along a storyline, which McCormack (2004) refers to the process of 'storying stories'. Polkinghorne (1995) remarks that narrative inquiry involves 'the advancement of a plot' (p. 16) and in this way, final research texts can be described as 'emplotted' narratives (p. 15; see also Clandinin & Connelly 2000, 165). The crucial navigational aid in this process is supplied by the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. The writer must 'compose a text that at once looks backward and forward, looks inward and outward, and situates the experiences within place' (Clandinin and Connelly 2000, 139-140).

I have already explained the thinking behind the three-dimensional space (see this chapter, section 4.3), and here I will further explain its application to the process of writing the FRT. First, the writer defines place, which is also referred to as setting 'the scene' (Connelly & Clandinin 1990, 8). As already mentioned in section 4.3, '[p]lace is where the action occurs, where characters are formed and live out their stories and where cultural and social context play constraining and enabling roles' (Connelly & Clandinin 1990, 8). In this exercise of setting the scene, I focused on all the topographical and physical places as well as on the people appearing in the stories. I particularly looked at those who appeared often and observed how narrators referred to these people. This indicated how the narrators responded to a particular environment. For example, the narrators might convey a feeling of frustration in relation to certain people or places. In this way, I addressed both the 'space' and 'sociality' dimensions of the inquiry space. As already noted, stories do not happen in a vacuum (Riessman 2008, 105).

Then I defined the plot, which was done by looking for 'connections of cause and influence among the events' (Polkinghorne 1995, 18) and selecting data events giving an answer to the initial question (i.e. *What does it mean to learn French for the participants in this study?*). As Polkinghorne notes (1995, 18), an 'algorithmic solution' does not exist to produce an outcome in this kind of study, but the writer is guided in this work by two questions:

> How is it that this outcome came about; what events and actions contributed to this solution? (Polkinghorne 1995, 18)

Yet, as already mentioned, the task is not simple because stories are embedded within several layers of context. Polkinghorne's (1995) guideline is to look at '*combinations and accumulations*

of events that influence a response or provide sufficient reason for an action' (p. 18; italics in the original). This involves looking at temporal markers i.e. past, present, and future, as each temporal marker gives different information: 'the past conveys significance, the present conveys value, and the future conveys intention' (Connelly & Clandinin 1990, 9; see also Mishler 2006). With regard to the research puzzle in this study, I began to construct each plot by asking myself the following questions:

- What was significant in the participants' lives that might be linked to the decision to learn an additional language, such as French?
- How do participants view French language and culture, and perceived French values and how does this relate to other aspects of their lives?
- What are their intentions for the future, and what relation might this have with additional language/French learning?

Also, in this process, I was guided by Giddens' idea of 'biographical continuity' (1991, 54 in Cameron 2000, 4-5), which is that individuals have the propensity to 'integrate the diversity of experience into a satisfying narrative' (Cameron 2000, 5). Cameron notes that this process is crucial to make oneself 'intelligible' to oneself as well as others (Cameron 2000, 6). In this study, during the process of defining the plot, I thus primarily focused on the logic of the storyline from the participants' point of view instead of my own, adopting a process known as *burrowing.*

Burrowing is described as the process of reconstructing the stories 'from the point of view of the person at the time the event occurred' (Connelly & Clandinin 1990, 11). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) note:

> We focus on the event's emotional, moral, and aesthetic qualities. We then ask why the event is associated with these feelings and what their origin might be. (Connelly & Clandinin 1990, 11)

During this process, I looked at the information gathered during the analytical work of the smaller narrative segments (see section 4.7.2.1), at my notes on 'special moments' and devices such as laughs, silences, hesitations and repetitions (see section 4.7.2.3) because they provided information on the way each individual perceived or was affected by a particular moment. These emotional responses alerted me more keenly to the message the participant wanted to convey, which is to say I was more able to reproduce each individual voice.

The participants' reactions during the IRT meetings also became useful at this stage because they gave me an indication as to whether or not I had reproduced that voice clearly. For example, IC sent me the following email upon receiving her IRT signaling that it mainly reflected her own view of her experience:

> Bonjour Lorraine! Thank you for the attachment and it is such a GREAT piece for my reading! When I was reading it I felt like it is my autobiography and I will treasure it a lot! I have jotted down some comments by last weekend and I have added some of my thoughts as I went through my words, as well as some clarification needed on the time sequence (may not be a matter on the analysis but important to get it right! (IC email 14 Aug. 2017)

4.8.4 Form

Clandinin and Connelly (2000, 149) identify some of the considerations that apply to the form of narrative research texts such as, FRTs. The authors note that the question of form for a narrative inquirer is there 'from the outset of an inquiry' since as we begin to think about the inquiry, there is always 'a tentative sense of plot' (Clandinin & Connelly 2000, 165). In my study, I was from the onset curious as to whether or not the participants would have experienced the same power issues as I had during my secondary school years, and whether they established a link between this and their involvement with language learning. Although I was mindful of not imposing my own story onto them (see Clandinin & Connelly 2000, 141), this inevitability influenced my identification and investigation of possible causal relationships.

4.9 Summary of the methodological approach and analytical procedure in this study

Conducting this narrative inquiry was a process of thinking narratively about the lived experience of learning French of my four participants; this process was realized in close collaboration between the participant and myself. It ended when an acceptable level of plausibility and coherence was achieved, according to the criteria explained above (see section 4.8.2).

To summarize, the table below details the stages of the analytical procedure:

	Summary of the analytical procedure
May to Jul. 2017	1. Making sense of field texts and field notes including: reading and re-reading transcripts in their entirety, comments on Facebook and Instagram accounts, emails, Messenger & WhatsApp messages, notes made along the study, researcher's memos, photos collected during the study
	2. Looking at data with my chosen analytical framework and applying the analytical procedure for each participant
	3. Making sense of the research puzzle in each participant's stories, reconstructing the narrative for a tentative storyline and producing an interim research text (IRT)
Beginning of Aug. 2017	4. Sending each participant an IRT for reading
End of Aug/Sep. 2017	5. Meeting each participant to discuss the IRT (i.e. IRT meeting) and continuing the process of reconstructing the participants' experience and co-composing a coherent text on what it means to learn French for each of them
Sep. 2017	6. Writing further field texts after the IRT meetings, incorporating my discussions with the participants about the role of French in their lives. This also led me to participate in a conference in November 2017 and work on an article presenting my analysis of one of the participants, as an intermediary step before composing the four final research texts.
Apr/May/Jun. 2018	7. Writing a final research text (FRT) for each participant which offered a perspective on the research puzzle: ***What does it mean to learn French for the participants in this study?***
Jul. 2018	8. Looking across the four experiences to gain another understanding of the phenomena under study and developing a discussion about the meaning of French learning in the lives of the four participants as well as about the meaning of learning a 'minor' additional languages such as French in Hong Kong.
End of the research project	9. Sharing the FRTs with an audience

Table 4: Summary of the analytical procedure

Chapter 5 The Hong Kong context

5.1 A multilingual city and territory

In this chapter, I will illustrate certain aspects of the Hong Kong context, which permeates the four individuals' lives and stories in this study and plays a role in processes of identity construction.

Hong Kong's history is marked by its colonial past. English was the only official language for over a hundred years, from the ceding of Hong Kong to Britain in 1842 until Cantonese became Hong Kong's second official language in 1974. This was despite Cantonese being the language 'most commonly used by Hong Kong's indigenous Chinese on political, social and cultural occasions' (Gu & Tong 2012, 502). After Hong Kong's sovereignty was returned to China in 1997, China's national language (Putonghua/Mandarin) entered the school curriculum, and the official language policy in Hong Kong is that citizens should be trilingual in Cantonese, Putonghua and English, and biliterate in Standard Chinese (written in traditional – as opposed to simplified – Chinese characters) and English (Li, D. 2009, 76-77).

In official terms, according to the 2007 census, Hong Kong's population is described as approximately 95% ethnically Chinese (Li, D. 2009, 72), with Cantonese being the vernacular language for over 90% of the population (Li, D. 2009, 74). Li, D. (2009) notes that by contrast the non-Chinese population has 'rarely exceeded 5%' (p. 74). But to see Hong Kong as a monolingual society has been called the 'monolingual myth' by Bolton (2000; see also Bacon-Shone & Bolton 2008). In fact, there is pervasive multilingualism in Hong Kong. Bacon-Shone

and Bolton (2008, 44) found that the 'Cantonese monolingual' grouping had declined from 30% of the population in 1983 to only 9% by 2003. The largest grouping in 2003 was 'Cantonese-English-Putonghua trilinguals' at 63% of the population followed by 'Cantonese-Putonghua bilinguals' at 17% (Bacon-Shone & Bolton 2008, 44). Over this period, knowledge of English increased considerably, with the proportion claiming to know it 'quite well' increasing from 5% to 31% (Bacon-Shone and Bolton 2008, 37). In recent years, the proportion of people who speak Putonghua has also significantly increased (see Li, E. 2015, 115). Li, D. indeed notes (2009, 76) that Putonghua/Mandarin is expanding in the world due to 'China's expanding sociopolitical influence internationally' and that speaking Putonghua is fast becoming 'a must' for an international professional career (Li, D. 2009, 78).

Beyond these familiar patterns, there are also many variations in Hongkongers' early experiences of language. For example, the Hong Kong people may spend their early years in China with the Mainland Chinese side of their family, where they become familiar with either a local dialect and/or the national language of China (i.e. Putonghua/Mandarin) before being exposed to Cantonese. Li, E. (2015, 115) notes that 'many Hong Kong people speak more than one Chinese dialect', such as Hakka, Fukien or Shanghainese (see also Bacon-Shone & Bolton 2008, 2011, 35). Regarding English, it is not rare for Hong Kong families to send their children to study in Britain or Australia at primary and/or secondary level. These children often come back to Hong Kong with native-like fluency and/or accents, and there is a considerable range in the kind of English people use. It is not unheard of, for example, to unexpectedly hear Manchester or Geordie accents in family shops in the New Territories, and Canadian accents are frequently heard in broadcasting. In conclusion, Li, E. (2015) notes that the increase in international experiences tends to make Hong Kong 'increasingly multilingual and multicultural'.

Another multilingual phenomenon in Hong Kong is that of code-mixing, whereby local Hongkongers mix English words with Cantonese. A number of authors (e.g., Ho, 2008; Li, E. 2015) note that intra-sentential code-mixing, involving English words in a Cantonese matrix, is common in Hong Kong and is used for a wide range of reasons.

Hong Kong's multilingualism reflects the fact that it is at the crossroads of several worlds and communities. Li, D. (2009, 78) remarks upon Hong Kong's 'success story', its transformation from a 'sleepy fishing village' in the 1840s to an 'international metropolis cum global financial centre' today. There is considerable mobility, both in terms of actual migration (e.g., overseas exchanges) and of the migration of ideas via new technologies (e.g., Hong Kong has one of the highest rates of smartphone use; The Asian mobile consumer decoded, 15 Jan. 2014). As a paradigm case of globalisation, Hong Kong shows, some of the multiple possibilities for identity opened up by prosperity and mobility, including imaginative possibilities opened up by the Internet.

Within the complex language environment, a particularly important and relevant aspect of language policy is that which applies to the educational system. In section 5.2 below, I will explore in more detail these policies at primary, secondary and tertiary educational levels, in order to explore the background of the participants in this study.

5.2. Language and education in Hong Kong

As already noted, Hong Kong has a unique linguistic matrix with Cantonese, Putonghua and English playing different roles. These languages are in competition, to some extent, and in the

education system policies are made and unmade regarding which language should be the medium of instruction. It is in this context that additional languages, such as French, carve a space, and this section will attempt to position French in the Hong Kong linguistic and educational landscape.

5.2.1 The characteristics of the Hong Kong educational context

At primary level, the medium of instruction (MOI) debate has focused on the increasing presence of Putonghua. Wang and Kirkpatrick (2013) found that Putonghua was 'commonly' used to teach Chinese, with Cantonese being 'predominant' in other subjects. The increasing use of Putonghua has led some parents to complain that it is difficult to find kindergartens using Cantonese (Yau, 2014 Sep. 2). The MOI issue immediately raises questions of identity, with Yau (2014 Sep. 2) claiming that 'some residents fear that Hong Kong's identity may be lost as the special administrative region is integrated into mainland systems'.

Until the academic year 2010-2011, Hong Kong secondary schools were classified into either Chinese Medium of Instruction (CMI) or English Medium of Instruction (EMI) categories. Since September 2010, the CMI and EMI labels have been abandoned to diminish the polarization that they brought. The new 'dual-medium-of-instruction' (Li, D. 2009, 79) or 'fine-tuned medium of instruction framework' (Li, E. 2015, 194) means greater scope and flexibility for ex-CMI schools to introduce EMI in their curriculum, based on their professional judgments, circumstances and needs (Gu & Tong 2012, 502).

Although the ‘fine-tuned’ policy was partly intended to encourage mother-tongue (Cantonese) teaching, what can be said at this stage that is that it is not clear how schools are implementing the policy. Li, E. (2015, 194) claims that the policy has actually given English more prominence because English continues to be in high demand in Hong Kong (see also Humphreys & Spratt 2008, 325). The ‘strong public demand’ for EMI in Hong Kong is linked to English being considered ‘a path to success’ (Gu & Tong 2012, 502; see also Li, D. 2009, 78).

In tertiary education, the medium of instruction dilemma does not exist since English is the only medium of instruction (except for Chinese topics). Over the past few years, universities have started to internationalize, following a decision by the Hong Kong government to position Hong Kong as a regional ‘education hub’ in Asia (Yu & Zhang 2016, 1) on top of its self-proclaimed title as ‘Asia’s World City’. The two key measures in the government plan are to attract foreign students to Hong Kong campuses (see Cheong Cheng, Cheung, & Yeun, 2011) and increase exchanges internationally with partner institutions. According to a government website, there were ‘about 5,600 incoming and 6,200 outgoing students on exchange’ in 2014-15, bringing the number of Hong Kong students who exchanged abroad to ‘one out of four’ students (‘The Policy of "Developing Hong Kong’s status as a Regional Education Hub", 2017).

Among the population of non-local students in Hong Kong university campuses, it is worth noting that there is a ‘steady rise’ of Putonghua-speaking graduate students coming from Mainland China (Yu & Zhang 2016, 2). Statistics released by the University Grants Committee (UGC) - the funding body of Hong Kong state universities - reports that the number of Mainland Chinese students had tripled in the past eleven years, going from 3,319 in 2004-2005 to 11,548

in 2014-2015 (Yu & Zhang 2016, 2). Students from Mainland China makes up 'the biggest group after locals' (Matthews, 2016 Sep. 20).

In addition to the language-in-education policy, which as Li, D. (2009, 76) points out has been 'a source of tremendous social tension in the last two decades', the situation has become 'more complicated' after the return of sovereignty to Mainland China in 1997 (Li, D. 2009, 76). Aspects of this complexity will be presented in the following section about trilingualism on Hong Kong university campuses.

5.2.2. Trilingualism in practice on Hong Kong university campuses

The three dominant languages of Hong Kong (i.e. English, Cantonese and Putonghua/Mandarin) perform distinct and separate functions for the two main groups of Hong Kong university students, who are the Hong Kong and the Mainland Chinese groups.

For Hong Kong students, Cantonese is 'the most commonly-used language for out-of-class activities and communication' whilst English is 'less frequently used for out-of-classroom social purposes' and is mainly used for academic purposes (Gu & Tong 2012, 502; Li, D. 2009, 74). Li, E. (2015, 123) notes that in Hong Kong, 'the role of English at the personal level is rather limited' and that English is 'a psychologically "detached" language in the life of most Hong Kong Chinese'. On the other hand, local students are used to mixing English with Cantonese in their daily use of language (see section 5.1 above about 'code-mixing' in Hong Kong). There are both linguistic factors (e.g., the availability of terms) and sociolinguistic factors (e.g., signaling one's identity as an educated, English-knowing bilingual) which explain this. In addition, this

kind of hybridity is a common feature of language use under conditions of globalization (see, e.g., Jacquemet 2005). Regarding Putonghua, Humphreys and Spratt (2008, 316) note that the motivation to learn Putonghua is 'mainly' instrumental and attitudes towards Putonghua 'tend to be negative'. However, Li, D. (2009) also makes the point that Putonghua is increasingly seen as a passport to success in Hong Kong, in much the same way as English is (pp. 78 & 80).

As for Mainland Chinese students, Putonghua is used when communicating between themselves and 'occasionally when communicating with local Hong Kong students' (Gu & Tong 2012, 502; see also Yu & Zhang, 2016). For these students, Hong Kong Cantonese is a new language even when they already know the variety of Cantonese spoken in Guangdong province. Between English and Cantonese, Mainland Chinese students often concentrate on English because it is considered more useful for the future (Yu & Zhang 2016, 13). Finally, English is privileged because Mainland Chinese students need to adjust to the EMI system at tertiary level, which is a new experience to them (Yu & Zhang 2016, 7). Yu and Zhang (2016, 13) also note that Cantonese is often considered an 'inferior' 'dialect' by Mainland students in comparison to China's official national language, Putonghua/Mandarin.

The trilingual situation at university can thus be described as tense. Communication problems are sometimes the source of misunderstandings and tensions, but are complicated by a clash of 'opposing ideologies' between the two groups (Yu & Zhang 2016, 8). One Mainland Chinese participant in Yu and Zhang's study (2016) of Mainland students' experiences in Hong Kong universities remarked that Hong Kong felt 'more foreign than a foreign country' (p. 8). Tensions have in fact steadily risen between Hong Kong people and Mainland Chinese visitors since the

handover in 1997. As Yu and Zhang (2016) remark, Hong Kong has become a 'highly politicalized city' (p. 8).

In the next section, I will look in more detail at Hong Kong's recent history, highlighting social change in Hong Kong as well as raising the question of Hong Kong's identity, which has relevance in understanding the participants' stories in this context.

5.3. Social change and the question of Hong Kong's identity

In this section, I will look at key recent landmark events in Hong Kong in order to further frame the sociohistorical context in which the participants in this study live. Studying the history of protest movements in Hong Kong, as Dapiran (2017) does in *City of Protest*, is a way to explore competing senses of Hong Kong's identity, and illustrate the differences between older and younger generations of Hongkongers.

In 2014, students occupied the central districts of Hong Kong for about four months in an unprecedented show of defiance and dissatisfaction. The so-called Umbrella Movement is particularly significant because it coincided with the start of my research project and with the beginning of my meetings with the four participants in this study. However, according to Dapiran (2017, 51), the Umbrella Movement should be seen as a continuation of a long history of protests in Hong Kong. In these protests, Dapiran (20. 17, 51) perceives that Hongkongers have gradually moved away from the 'borrowed time, borrowed space' frame of mind of the pre-handover colonial era to a new 'sense of local identity' with a new catchphrase: this is 'our time, our space' (Dapiran 2017, 51).

5.3.1. Recent events and protests in Hong Kong

The Umbrella Movement was a widespread popular movement led by students in the autumn of 2014. The central demand of this protest was for Hong Kong people to have a greater say in the election of the region's chief executive. Dapiran (2017, 95) sees the cause of the Umbrella movement as a problem of 'disequilibrium', noting that on the one hand, Hong Kong enjoys 'a high level of freedom' while on the other hand having 'a low level of representative democracy' (Dapiran 2017, 95). For Dapiran (2017), the Umbrella Movement revealed a turning-point in Hong Kong's history:

> [T]he imbalance has shown itself to be increasingly unsustainable, and Hong Kong has seen mounting pressure to right it. (Dapiran 2017, 95)

And Dapiran (2017) also links the Umbrella Movement to the thorny question of Hong Kong's identity:

> The Umbrella Movement and all the protest movements that came before it were never just about the immediate issue at hand – whether the universal suffrage or the protection of heritage buildings or support for democracy in Mainland China. These protests have always had at their core anxiety about Hong Kong's identity. (Dapiran 2017, 108)

The Umbrella Movement therefore clearly revealed tensions and divisions, most obviously in society as a whole (as in the encounters between "Yellow' (pro-democracy) and "Blue' (pro-Beijing) camps), and in the fact that the protesters belonged, on the whole, to the so-called 'post-

80s generation'. The students' democratic stand was denounced as unpatriotic by a portion of society, whilst the others saw it as a source of renewal in the political arena. What the movement succeeded in triggering, however, was a collective questioning regarding Hong Kong's identity. Many articles in the local press have since debated this issue. For example, Blundy (2016 Nov. 12) reports on the findings of recent opinion polls, noting that 'most [Hong Kong people] identified themselves as Hongkongers rather than Chinese'. A discussion on ChinaFile (a project of the Center on U.S.-China Relations at Asia Society) exposes two different views regarding the process by which Hongkongers approach the question of local identity. For some, a 'local identity' is seen in mainly negative terms, defining Hong Kong's identity as being 'not Mainland China' (see Schlesinger in Schlesinger *et al.,* 2016 Sep. 7). By contrast, others describe the Hongkongers's self-identification process as engaged and deterministic (see Ilaria Maria Sala in Schlesinger *et al*., 2016 Sep. 7). Sala explains that young Hongkongers affirm their identity by looking for solutions to their constraints and by making constructive propositions (ibid.). For example, they have proposed 'a fairer system of government and representation' and have articulated ideas regarding the Hong Kong urban space and environment (ibid.).

A consideration of these factors is relevant to this study because taking an identity-based perspective means considering the interactions between different elements of context with individual stories, such as the four stories in this study. Hennig (2010a, 314), for example, notes that 'the learners seemed to have drawn parallels between Germany's reunification in 1990 and Hong Kong's return to Mainland China in 1997', showing that perceptions of additional languages are formed in relational terms within a wider sociopolitical environment. More insights of this kind are needed if we are to understand more about why and how people study additional languages.

5.4. The presence of French in Hong Kong

The comments made in Chapter 2 regarding the interplay between fixity and fluidity also apply to one of the most important 'characters' in this study, the French language. It is of course important to avoid conceptualizing 'the language' as a fixed set of language structures (e.g., Makoni & Pennycook, 2007; Blommaert, 2010; see also Chapter 2, section 2.2.4). Narrative accounts of learning French, and investigations of what it means to study French, must take account of the myriad ways in which elements of French appear in the local context, and the ways in which these linguistic phenomena are perceived by local people. As Sergeant (2009) and Blommaert (2010) observe, linguistic resources are often used for their symbolic meaning in the contemporary world. Many of the visible uses of 'French' in Hong Kong, for example in advertising or signage, may not even be recognized or accepted as French by native speakers of the language.

However, though languages may be increasingly cut off from their origins (e.g., Jacquemet, 2005; Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008; see also Chapter 2, section 2.3.3), they are also perceived as languages in the relatively fixed, conventional sense by a wide range of actors.

Accordingly, in this section I will outline some of the conventional ways in which French may be said to have a 'presence' in the local environment, starting with the existence of a French-speaking community and with the local institutional contexts in which French is learned, before describing the more fluid presence of French and Frenchness through commercial and other visuals.

5.4.1. The French community in Hong Kong

According to the latest census, Hong Kong has a population of approximately seven million people (Census, 16 Nov. 2018) with 60% of this population being born in Hong Kong (Population By-census, 2016). Among this population, there are approximately 25 000 French nationals living in Hong Kong, compared with 4000 German nationals and 2000 Italian nationals (Panorama of the French Community in Hong Kong, 31 Mar. 2016) with an estimated increase of 5% every year (Keegan, 2017 Dec. 28).

However, 25, 000 people out of 7 million is not many in percentage terms, and although the community is growing there are of course other ways in which French is present in Hong Kong. I will consider these in the following section, starting with the opportunities for studying French in Hong Kong.

5.4.2. Learning French in Hong Kong

The French language is taught in several different types of educational institution, including the 'Lycée français international' (i.e. French International School), local institutions at primary, secondary and tertiary level, and various private language schools of which Alliance Française (AF) Hong Kong is the most well-known.

The French International School (FIS) has been delivering the French national curriculum to the French expatriate community of Hong Kong since 1963 and also opened an international stream about thirty years ago. According to the FIS website, about 2,000 students from Reception to

Year 13 were enrolled in the French Stream in the year 2017-2018[3] whilst during the same period the international stream enrolled 642 students from thirty different nationalities. However, the number of students is very small in relation to Hong Kong's population and as with the other international schools in Hong Kong, FIS is an expensive, elite option for those who wish their children to learn French.

Other educational institutions provide a range of additional language courses, including French, to Hong Kong students. At secondary level, French can be taken as a public examination known as the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) at the end of the secondary cycle as part of Category C subjects, which also include Japanese, German, Spanish, Hindi and Urdu.

Yet, one point of importance is that Category C subjects are mostly available at HKDSE for students whose mother tongue is not Chinese and who need to replace Chinese with another language for university admission. As a result, there are few Hong Kong students who take French at HKDSE. According to the HKEAA website, only a handful of pupils take French at the HKDSE examination (for example, see Press Release 2016 Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination [4]). Despite this, some Hong Kong primary and secondary schools offer additional language courses as part of their curriculum or as extra-curricular activities to boost their profile and help them stand out from other schools, but they are likely to be elite schools such as Grant Schools (schools initially created by missionaries and churches in the 19th century), English Schools Foundation (ESF) schools which are partly funded by the government, and international schools.

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[3] French International School in Hong Kong: https://www.fis.edu.hk/en/french-stream (Accessed on 22 Nov. 2018)
[4] PRESS RELEASE2016 Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination, Catégorie C subjects results released: http://cfswahyan.weebly.com/uploads/3/8/5/4/38548659/20160712_hkdse_full_results_eng.pdf (Accessed on 22 Nov. 2018)

At university level, among the eight government-funded universities in Hong Kong, only two offer either a major or minor programmes in French whilst the others offer a selection of credit-bearing or non-credit bearing courses at different proficiency levels. Baptist University offers a BSocSc (Hons) in European Studies in French, which requires students to study in France for one year in their partner institutions. Over the past few years, the universities have stepped up their efforts to create partnerships abroad as a way to provide students with study destinations abroad; France is among the possible destinations, especially as courses with English as medium of instruction are increasingly offered there.

French courses are also offered by the Continuing Education sector and institutions such as Open University and HKU Space, which offer a selection of graduate and post-graduate programmes and courses for adults. Private companies may also offer French courses internally as a training option to their staff. Statistics are difficult to obtain, but according to the Consulate General of France in Hong Kong and Macau, there are an estimated 50,000 people who occasionally practice French, while '2% of Hong Kong's total population of 7 million have studied the language' (French Language in Hong Kong, 18 Sep. 2014). In relation to this, according to the online magazine of the French Chamber of Commerce, 800 French companies were registered in Hong Kong in 2016 (Panorama of the French Community in Hong Kong, 31 Mar. 2016).

Commercial schools such as the Hong Kong Institute of Languages offer extra-curricular French classes to Hong Kong children, whose parents are often anxious to give them a head start in a very competitive educational and professional environment. In Hong Kong, it is not rare for children to attend extra-curricular classes in the evenings or at the weekends in order to boost

their chances of being accepted in the top schools and universities. In the private sector, the Alliance Française (AF) is the most well-known option.

AF is an international organization created in 1883 for the propagation of the national language. In Hong Kong, an AF institution has existed since 1953. It now has three sites across the city, including language classrooms, a multimedia library (La Médiathèque) and a digital library (Culturethèque) situated in well-chosen spots in the city, and enrolls approximately 6,000 students every year. AF is known as the main commercial provider of French courses for adults, teenagers and children as well as being the official organiser of French diplomas such as DELF, DALF and TCF – which are popular with Hong Kong's exam-obsessed population – and as a training centre for teachers of French as a Foreign Language (FLE). AF is also associated with opportunities to experience French culture, and AF centres regularly organize cultural activities such as wine tasting evenings, film shows and cookery classes. AF also works in partnership with the French Consulate for the organization of French cultural events across the city throughout the year, as explained further in the following section.

5.4.3. French cultural events in Hong Kong

There are several institutions, organizations, and associations which contribute to the visibility of French in the city by organizing events. The main one is the French Consulate of Hong Kong and Macao, which through its dedicated services (for example, the 'Service de Coopération et d'Action Culturelle' i.e. Cultural and Cooperation Services), organizes major cultural and education-related events in support of or in tandem with local French partners. Amongst these partners are the Hong-Kong and Macao Alliance Française (AF), the Lycée français

international, the French Alumni Association, the 'Centre d'Études Français sur la Chine contemporaine' (the French Centre for Research on Contemporary China, funded by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Centre for Scientific Research or CNRS) and the Association of French Teachers in Hong Kong and Macau (AFLE).

The main cultural events organized by or in coordination with the French Consulate in Hong Kong include:

- 'Le French May' Arts Festival, created in 1993, promotes cultural exchanges between Hong Kong and France by organizing over a two-month period a large variety of events, such as exhibitions, performances, cinema screenings and gastronomic events. According to the French Consulate website, these events attract about two million participants every year[5].
- The 'Festival de la Francophonie', which runs worldwide during March every year, involves a number of language and education-related activities aimed at raising awareness of the French language as well as encouraging local French learners to participate in a series of French-language related events and give them credit for their French learning efforts (see Destination Hong Kong, 4 Apr. 2015[6]).
- The French Cinépanorama (or the Hong Kong French Film Festival), which includes special 'French Nights' where French directors are invited to talk about their films. Retrospectives of French directors are also shown (for example, a retrospective of French director Benoît Jacquot was scheduled in various cinemas of the city between 6 and 25 Jan. 2017).

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[5] See 'Le French May' on Consulat Général de France à Hong Kong & Macao website: https://hongkong.consulfrance.org/Le-French-May,6862 (Accessed on 23 Nov. 2018).

[6] Destination Hong Kong. (2015, Apr. 4). [Television series episode and podcast]. In Destination Francophonie, *TV5 Monde*. Retrieved from http://apprendre.tv5monde.com/fr/apprendre-francais/destination-hong-kong-0 (Accessed on 23 Nov. 2018)

In addition to these festivals, there are a number of other cultural events, including conferences and literary events. There are also a number of French-language publications, including *Paroles*[7] and *Trait d'Union*[8].

To conclude, a lot of work is done in Hong Kong by French institutions and/or private associations to position French language and French culture from the perspective of a relatively fixed language and culture belonging to a nation state. But the presence of French presence is also felt in other ways, as explained below.

5.4.4 French in the global context

Moving beyond the local level and considering the global factors that contribute to the presence of French in Hong Kong, there are two main influences to take into account. One is the French's government policy of promoting French and increasing the number of French speakers worldwide, known as 'la Francophonie' (with a capital 'F' to refer to the institution as a whole), and the other is the strong commercial (and thus visual) presence of French language and culture.

5.4.4.1 Francophonie

Although French is still an official working language of the UN, NATO, UNESCO, the International Olympic Committee, the European Union and the International Red Cross, its position is seen as fragile in the face of the development of English in the world. A recent report by the French Assemblée Nationale reaffirmed the place of French language in the world as a

[7] See Alliance Française Hong Kong: https://afhongkong.org/paroles/about-paroles (Accessed on 23 Nov. 2018)
[8] See Trait d'Union website: http://www.traitdunionmag.com (Accessed on 23 Nov. 2018)

'major component of worldwide pluriligualism' ['une composante majeure du plurilinguisme mondial'] noting that the role of French in the world should therefore be boosted (Rapport d'information sur la Francophonie 22 janvier 2014, p.7). The notion of 'plurilinguisme' (or *plurilingualism)* has been the centre of discussion in Europe for many years, and refers to the perceived need to increase bridges and links between languages and cultures as well as nurture the idea of pluralism in societies (see Moore & Gajo 2009). Although the mission of plurilingualism often devolves to education (see Macaire 2008, 11), it is also relayed by organizations such as 'la Francophonie' through a variety of actions.

The concept of 'la Francophonie' appeared at the end of the 19th century to designate all the countries and people who used French as their lingua franca. Today, Francophonie is an international organization, which also includes countries where a proportion of the population speak French as well as countries which declare an affiliation with francophone cultures or with the French language, resulting in a loose grouping of countries which have certain cultural and educational interests in common. 84 countries are currently members of Francophonie (having satisfied a list of criteria), which represents 274 million people or 4% of the world population according to Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (see OIF website [9]).
Amongst Asian countries, Laos is on the list of full members of Francophonie whilst South Korea and Thailand possess a Francophonie observer status. In a 2014 Assemblée Nationale report on Francophonie, Asia is also mentioned as one of the regions with the largest increase of French speakers in the world (Rapport d'information sur la Francophonie 22 janvier 2014, p. 36). China is estimated to have 100 000 French learners, whilst in Japan, this number is 200,000 (Rapport d'information sur la Francophonie 22 janvier 2014, p. 36). According to this report, the

[9] Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF): https://www.francophonie.org

motivation for studying French in Japan is linked to wanting to compete with China in francophone African countries (Rapport d'information sur la Francophonie 22 janvier 2014, p. 38), where the number of French speakers has been predicted to rise. The report also suggests that 85 % of the predicted 500 to 700 million French speakers in 2050 will be in Africa (Rapport d'information sur la Francophonie 22 janvier 2014, p. 17).

In other words, the French government can be said to be quite active in promoting a certain image of French language and culture in the world. Actions such as those coordinated by 'la Francophonie' are also targeting non-francophone countries (such as Hong Kong) to make French culture look desirable, and the French language appear useful and meaningful (see for example, Willsher, 2017 Nov. 6). It should be noted, however, that the role of OIF is seen by some as a way of 'sustaining French imperialism' (see for example, Chrisafis, 2018 Feb. 19).

5.4.4.2 The commercial and visual presence of French in the urban landscape

The intention behind the cultural events organised by the French Consulate (e.g., the French May festival or the Festival de la Francophonie) is to disseminate a controlled and specific image of France, usually as a dynamic, refined and powerful culture. For example, as part of the French May festival, the French Consulate in Hong Kong and Macau started a campaign in 2015 to promote a new image of French culture as technologically advanced and innovative, with the slogan *'So Innovative, So French'* (e.g., Le French May, 2018[10]). These representations of the 'French brand' are also exploited – in different ways – by a range of commercial actors and organizations.

[10] Le French May 2018: http://frenchmay.com/en/events/so-french-so-innovative/ (Accessed on 26 Nov. 2018)

There is a ubiquitous commercial and visual presence of French luxury brands and luxury products in the most affluent districts of Hong Kong, most obviously visible in huge and colourful advertisements and shop fronts. No knowledge of French is needed for most people to recognize that the advertised products are French, since they now belong to a common globalised bank of images which circulate freely throughout the world (e.g., the Dior and Chanel logos). The three brands and logos presented below (see Figure 5) are all well known to Hongkongers, according to my acquaintances and my own knowledge of the city. They are seen across the city on large billboards, in magazines, in the streets and in large shopping malls, particularly in the central districts of Hong Kong Island where there is the greatest concentration of wealth and wealthy shoppers; the advertisements target both local and international (especially Mainland Chinese) customers, whose number has increased over the past few years.

Figure 5: French brands in Hong Kong

Apart from signs such as these, there are also signs advertising smaller businesses (e.g., fashion boutiques, toy or accessory shops, restaurants or bars, bakeries or delis), as shown below in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Uses of 'French' in Hong Kong

What is interesting about these signs is their playful usage of or reference to the French language or French culture. It is uncertain whether they originate from French businesses or that they have any connection to anything French. The use of French words here is therefore of a different nature and for a different purpose. Among the four signs, the sign 'La Terrasse' is the only one that is semantically and grammatically correct, the restaurant being positioned at the top of steep stairs. The other three signs are coinages ('visionaire') or have incorrect accents ('pe:tite' or 'amelie'), but all can be said to exploit images of Frenchness. The sign 'amelie & tulips' is an allusion to the French film character, Amélie Poulain, which is known to many young people in Hong Kong.

In showing these examples, I want to suggest that the presence of French in Hong Kong is also symbolic and evokes emotions, feelings and impressions which are context-specific and de-territorialised. In other words, these examples probably appear very different to a French national. In seeing the sign 'visionaire', for example, my immediate reaction was to think that the word was incorrectly spelled or that the creator of the sign hesitated between 'visionnaire' (French) and 'visionary' (English) and could not decide. With the sign 'Amélie & tulips', I wondered why the author could not give 'tulip' an '*e*' ('tulip*e*') to continue the French theme, assuming from the start that 'Amelie' (without an accent) referred to 'Am*é*lie Poulain', the

French movie character because of having heard it mentioned so often by my students. In other words, although the French words in these signs are apparently meaningless, they communicate something important to particular people in this particular context. Interest in new communicative practices such as, translanguaging, metrolingualism or polylanguaging are showing that 'disorderly recombinations' (Jacquemet 2005, 274) have significant meanings and play an important role in providing people with a way to position themselves in their own society (see Chapter 2, section 2.3.3).

In his book about English in Japan, Sergeant (2009, 1) draws attention to the 'symbolic meaning' of English in Japanese society, noting that English is 'displayed as part of a far wider field of semiotic practice'. For example, Sergeant (2009) explains that the use of English in Japan is linked to emotions, lifestyles and dreams (p. 106), which is far removed from the traditional idea of language use being motivated by 'mutual intelligibility (ibid., 167). Sergeant notes:

> The language is still signifying… both in an aesthetic *and* broadly symbolic way, but it does not do so as a communicative code for the expression of denotational meaning in the manner privileged by formal linguists (Sergeant 2009, 145)

Similarly, Blommaert (2010, 29-30) observes regarding the name *Nina's Derrière* (which can be translated as 'Nina's bum') given to a chocolate bar in Japan, that this sign is detached from linguistic practice and is not targeting customers with linguistic competence in French. Instead, this sign has an 'emblematic function' (Blommaert 2010, 30). Blommaert also draws attention to the fact that a language draws on 'a complex of associative meanings' (2010, 29). In the case of French, associations might be made, for example, with 'high culture and civilization' (see Coffey

2010, 122) or to romance (see Hennig 2010a, 312; also Dreyer 2009, 34) with variations according to different cultures. For example, as already noted (see Chapter 2, section 2.4.3.1), French is perceived as romantic in China and Taiwan, but not in Japan. In other words, a language is also 'constructed by the voices *and* actions of the society' (Sergeant 2009, 2; italics in the original).

5.5 Conclusion about the local context

To conclude, France's 'soft power', or the ways France asserts its presence and exerts influence through cultural and diplomatic efforts, is palpable in Hong Kong. Apart from in education, French also manifests itself via a busy calendar of cultural and educational activities, which have become annual fixtures in the Hong Kong cultural landscape. Some of these cultural events are organized in relation to globally coordinated efforts by the French Government to promote the French language. Other aspects of Frenchness, such as those appearing in the discourses of advertising and cultural products such as films, are arguably less fixed, but both fixed and fluid aspects form part of globally-circulating discourses of French and Frenchness and contribute to the stereotypes (or social representations) which circulate through Hong Kong. However, and perhaps especially in the case of the more fluid elements, the available meanings of Frenchness are not fixed but can be reinterpreted and combined with other semiotic resources, opening the door to more personal interpretations and motivations to learn the language.

To conclude, France's 'soft power', or the ways France asserts its presence and exerts influence through cultural and diplomatic efforts, is palpable in Hong Kong. Apart from in education, French presence also manifests itself via a busy calendar of cultural and educational activities,

which have become annual fixtures in the Hong Kong cultural landscape. Some of these cultural events are organized in relation to globally coordinated efforts by the French Government to promote the French language. These initiatives can explain the kind of globally-shared stereotypes (or fixed discourses) which circulate about Frenchness in Hong Kong.

However, other elements such as creative visual displays transcend the semiotic meaning of French and can contribute to the dissemination of another kind of image of Frenchness in Hong Kong, opening the door to more personal interpretations and motivations to learn the language.

5.6 Introduction to the case chapters

It is at a time when Hong Kong's collective identity is itself being contested (see section 5.3. above) that the inquiry into the stories of learning French in Hong Kong for Candice, Yasmina, IC and Nicole took place. The aim as stated from the beginning of the study is to understand what learning French in Hong Kong means for the participants at this particular moment in time :

> *What does it mean to learn French in Hong Kong, i.e. in what ways does the learning of French as an additional language contribute to processes of identity formation?*

The narratives presented in these chapters are reconstructions of the participants' stories of learning French after a two-year inquiry. These narratives are based on data collected from the participants in writing (e.g., in LLHs, in TLRs, from postings on IG or FB and from email messages as well as messages on Messenger or WhatsApp) or orally (during interviews and informal conversations) and are the result of a joint reflective exploration process, guided by the

three-dimensional narrative space and the notion of emplotment. The production of a plotline focused not only on the participant but also on the entity 'French' and on the sociopolitical context in which the stories evolved. The overall aim was to characterize the role played by conceptions and experiences of French (as well as of other additional languages) in the participants' journeys of language learning, and to understand why the participants' stories of language learning had unfolded as they did in the context where they live.

Each narrative contains excerpts of the participants' voices as well as excerpts of actual conversations during interviews (including during the IRT meeting, when each participant discussed the plausibility of their narrative with me) and during other exchanges (for example, on Messenger and by email) to give the reader a sense of the co-construction process which took place throughout the inquiry.

Each narrative is organized in three parts. The first part is descriptive and includes details of the participant's relationship with me and information about their background. This is followed by the stories they told about their past, present and future, including stories related to their perception of French and Frenchness. The third part is exploratory (see Polkinghorne 1998, 161), which is to say that links are established between the three dimensions of their story (i.e. the temporal, spatial and social), as well as with their notions of French in order to arrive at an interpretation of what it means to learn French for each participant at this particular moment in time.

Chapter 6 Candice

6.1 Candice and I

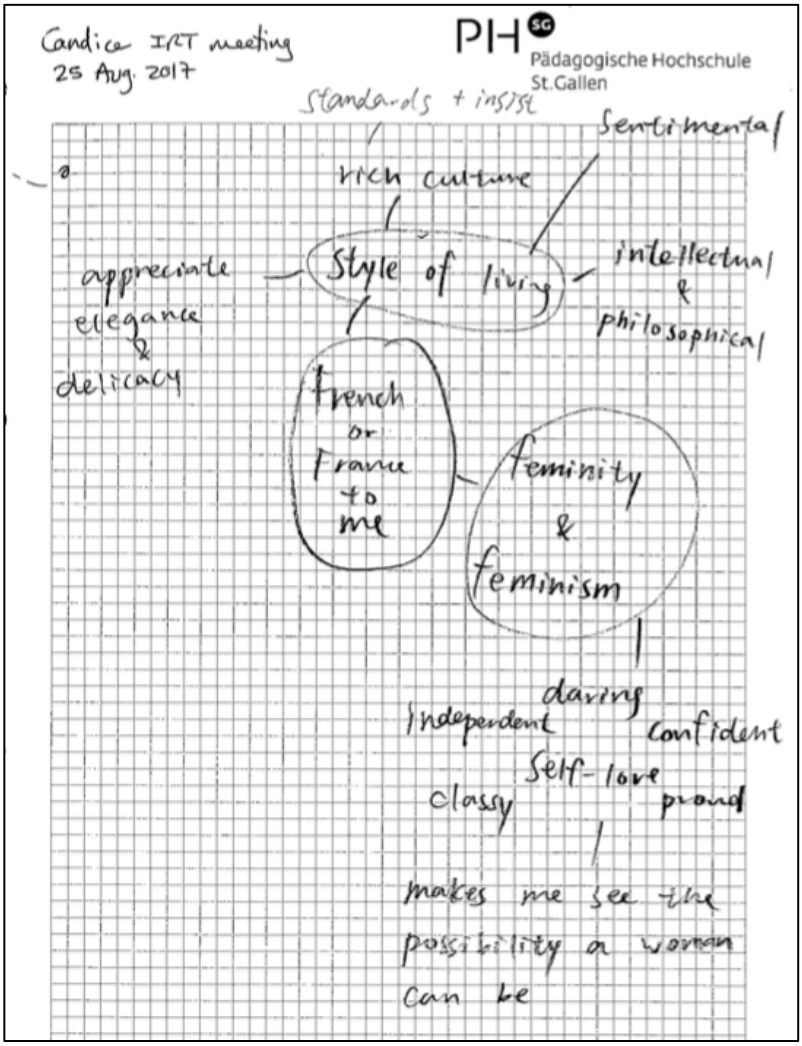

Figure 7: Candice's notes for the IRT meeting (2) (25 Aug. 2017)

Candice was 20 years old at the start of the inquiry. She is the youngest of the four participants and the only one who was still at university during the inquiry. My first encounter with her was

in a French beginner class in the first semester of her four-year postgraduate degree in Chinese Studies. I met her while I was assisting the French teacher in the first year of my PhD studies.

From the beginning of Candice telling me about herself, I was struck by the variety of interests she had. She described them as 'really weird things' (INT1). For example, she was interested in spirituality (such as New Age spiritual beliefs and practices, including 'the meditation thing and the raw, vegan eating style', INT1), and in Chinese traditions of palmistry and face reading. After coming back from a semester abroad in Taiwan at the end of her fourth year at university, she had become interested in organic food and environmental protection (IRT meeting) after taking part in 'well-being classes', which she described as 'learning about oneself through movement' (IRT meeting). In her LLH, Candice also mentioned her interest in languages. Beside French and Japanese, she said she knew some Korean, German and Italian as well as Hakkanese, a southern Chinese language spoken in her mother's family.

Although Candice and I did not know each other prior to the inquiry, our relationship developed quickly. Candice often sought my advice during the French class as I moved around to offer my help. She had many questions about language use as well as about aspects of French culture and between classes, she also regularly sent me SMS messages to clarify some language points. She was also communicated with me via the two social media platforms I had created for the inquiry (i.e. Instagram @frenchinhk and the FRENCHINHK FB accounts; see Chapter 4, section 4.6.7). On these platforms, the two of us had long exchanges which informed some of our discussions during the interviews.

The first interview with Candice was on 7 November 2015 in a quiet room at university. It lasted for one hour and a half and continued over lunch, during which Candice started a discussion about religion and told me about her father's beliefs. Thus, we began entering the process of narrative inquiry, of sharing our lives with each other.

Our second interview was on 28 January 2016 and lasted a little more than two hours. It took place at university again. I noted the mood during the interview as being relaxed, perhaps because we stopped half way through to look at my recent holiday pictures from Japan. After the second interview, we continued to talk about our holidays over lunch. Candice talked about her Christmas holiday in China when she visited the Yao ethnic minority with other university students. In her story, this experience is described as an important moment for her: 'I learned to open myself more to others and I find the result is good' (INT2).

The third interview was on 17 May 2016. This time I invited Candice to my home. During our exchange, which lasted approximately one hour, we made ourselves confortable, sitting on the floor with homemade muffins and tea. During this interview Candice said she posted on the Instagram account @frenchinhk to get an opportunity to exchange with me, so another reason for taking part in the study for Candice was to gather more knowledge about French language and culture.

After the interview, I took Candice to a nearby market. As we walked, she told me about her plan to go on exchange in Taiwan the following semester.

After Candice's return from Taiwan (where she exchanged for a semester in a Buddhist university) and during the writing of her IRT, Candice and I met socially a few more times. We first used Facebook and then, WhatsApp and Messenger to keep in touch. All of our interactions are in English with some reference to French when discussing Frenchness during the inquiry.

6.2 Candice's stories: childhood, secondary school and university

Family

In the survey, Candice described Cantonese as her mother tongue and the language she speaks at home. Her parents also speak Putonghua and English (her dad is 'fairly fluent' in English) and her mother speaks Hakkanese, the language of the Hakka Southern China community.

Candice mentioned her father as a special influence on her thoughts and behaviour. Many of her eclectic taste and interest in 'weird things' (INT1) such as New Age, palmistry and face reading were inspired by him. Her father also influenced Candice in other ways. Candice mentioned his interest in alternative ideas ('he doesn't like to go with the mainstream', INT1) and his taste for contradiction: 'he like[s] to confront with people about all the things' (INT1). In relation to her father's position regarding religions, Candice mentioned her disagreement about the way the Catholic Church positioned itself towards many issues (for example, homosexuality) adding that she was interested in the 'values of religion', but did not like the rules dictated by religions (informal conversation after INT1, 7 November 2015).

Thus, throughout the inquiry a picture emerged of a person who did not like to follow the crowd. Like her father, Candice seemed to prefer to explore things in her own unformatted way:

> I was really interested and attend some classes [about New Age philosophy] in Hong Kong […] The things they taught me I couldn't find in any textbook, in a school and it makes me curious to know about the unknown (INT1)

The following excerpt further emphasizes the connectedness between Candice and her father:

> And I think my father is also really proud of me because ((silent chuckle)) I share the same interest with him ((laugh)) […] it [is] really specific but very minority thing and I was influenced by my father (INT1)

Beside her father, Candice mentioned the rest of her family in loving terms. She described how both her parents gave her and her little brother freedom of choice and supported their decisions:

> I have a little brother and he has a very bad result at school, not that he didn't try, he tried so hard but he just couldn't understand the lessons and my parents are all fine about that and they said if you want to study overseas or go to Tibet to be a monk, I'll come with you right (INT1)

> They [parents] support my choice, whatever I choose they just support my choice because my parents give… they're the parents who give much freedom to the child (INT1)

Candice's story is thus situated in a family context where individual differences are both accepted and encouraged. Candice's school years continued to brush the portrait of a confident individual who knows her own mind, for example regarding the most effective way to learn languages.

Learning languages at school

Candice started to learn English at primary school. In her LLH, she described having a higher proficiency level than her classmates as well as a natural ability in picking up this language:

> I can naturally spot out the grammar mistakes made by other classmates. I scored very high for the English tests even though I didn't spend much time revising. (LLH)

During these primary school years, she also studied Japanese in ‘a small shop nearby home’ (LLH) for half a year, a decision she made on her own.

At secondary level, Candice attended a public EMI school recognized for its academic achievements (‘it has a good reputation’, INT1) although she did not like the methods of teaching and learning languages. In the excerpt below, she shares her frustration with a system where the development of language speaking skills is minimal (‘more on reading and writing skills, while less on listening and speaking skills’; LLH) and is also mainly associated with class presentations. What Candice would have preferred was to prepare for real life interactions so as to develop her confidence:

> I think I am just too shy for human interaction. It is the same when I speak Cantonese. Besides I can do really well in class presentations in either Chinese or English. Therefore the language itself is fine, just the culture I live in matters. (LLH)

Despite Candice’s negative feelings towards the way she was taught English, her results were good. Her story suggested that she maintained her motivation through her own sense of worth and confidence in her own abilities. For example, Candice talked about her oral imitation skills which helped her ‘pick up English really quick’:

> I also noticed that I couldn't understand nor memorize any of the terms such as "transitive verbs", "third person singular" etc. This didn't disturb my English learning though. I think one of the reasons that I can pick up English really quick is I can imitate the way people talk without effort. (LLH)

During her secondary school years, Candice also decided to learn Japanese and French. She studied Japanese for three consecutive years at a local private institute. In her LLH, she described her level in Japanese in terms of being able to read and understand '30% of Japanese dramas with only Japanese subtitles' as well as say 'simple sentences'. Despite this achievement, Candice gradually lost interest in learning Japanese because of the way it was taught at the institute:

> I performed well at the beginning of the course but couldn't catch up later on because of the numerous vocabularies. (LLH)

In her LLH, Candice explained that the reason she gradually lost motivation was linked to too much emphasis on grammar and vocabulary:

> For me, it is always fine to learn the basics of a language first but I become more passive when it comes to grammars and vocabularies that I don't think I would use them during a casual conversation. (LLH)

As for French, she studied it at Alliance Française (AF) Hong Kong for about half a year, but ended up giving it up for the same reason she had given up Japanese:

> I have attended course at the Alliance Francaise before. However I gave up because of the conjugations and the division of masculinity and femininity words. (LLH)

But the reason Candice abandoned French was also linked to her lack of interest in French culture at the time:

> Because maybe it's because I don't know a lot about the French culture when I was younger. When I'm not attracted to the culture, the French is linked simply like a language and it's not that interesting (INT1)

A major theme in Candice's story of learning languages is that interest in the culture of a language is essential for interest in learning the language to be sustained. In the following comment, she described language learning as a 'by-product' of increasing cultural knowledge:

> I think when I am in love with the culture, language learning becomes a lot easier, just like a by-product. (LLH)

This point that languages are picked up automatically just from learning about the culture was further illustrated with a reference to the French film 'L'Auberge Espagnole' (directed by French director Cédric Klapisch), in which international exchange students pick up Spanish just by being immersed in the culture:

> This [movie] I associate with the language learning because you've to be with the people from different countries and to be in a new environment and you learn a language really fast! Because yeah it's in the air. You couldn't use your mother tongue anymore but and there're a lot of new things you could explore in a new environment (INT1)

What is interesting in Candice's story is the way her interest in French culture and language was (re)ignited. At university, Candice chose to go on exchange in the German-speaking part of Switzerland for a summer programme. There, she met a female French-Congolese student with whom she became close friends. This experience was a re-entry point into French culture and influenced her later decision to take up French at university. The trip to Switzerland also happened in the context of personal difficulties during her university years.

University

When I asked Candice about her university experience, she mentioned an 'identity crisis' in the first two years of her undergraduate degree in Chinese Studies. The crisis seemed to have originated from a feeling of disappointment towards herself for not scoring high enough in the university entrance examination. As a consequence, she was not eligible to study Chinese medicine, which was her primary choice:

> I think I was quite DEPRESSED (stressed word) because I expect my DSE results to be 2 or 3 scores higher and I was confident that I can get into the Chinese medicine programme so I was disappointed (INT1)

But not only did she take this as a personal failure, she also keenly felt she had failed other people's expectations as she came from one of Hong Kong's most well-known schools and should have obtained better academic results: 'When I say that I'm from xxx and the people would "Oh! You're from xxxx!"… Yeah, that kind of school!' (INT1).

The consequence of her lower than expected results meant that she reluctantly chose Chinese Studies as her major. Although she had enjoyed her Chinese lessons at secondary school, after two years in her undergraduate degree she realized that she had made her choice for the wrong reason: 'I realized that I liked the Chinese teacher [rather] than the Chinese [subject]' (INT1). In particular, she was disappointed because there was little emphasis on creative writing, which she had hoped for:

> In my mind, before I enter university, I thought I'm going to learn how to write beautiful and how to write poems and a lot of creative work but I find that more, the majority of the Chinese lessons are about linguistics which I'm not good at it, I don't understand the theory and it makes it hard to learn and the creative parts of the style lessons are so little (INT1)

During the IRT meeting, Candice explained that during this time she was in a state of denial, which had effects on her life and wellbeing. In the interviews, she talked about a feeling of isolation from her classmates. In her descriptions, her classmates seemed perplexed and unwilling to interact with her:

> My friends in HK, some of them see me as like spirit living in a cave of a mountain, some see me as a master something because I was speaking a lot about philosophy things lately so they all call me master but they don't really quite involve in my philosophy talking (INT1)

The source of her classmates' unwillingness to communicate with her seemed also to be linked to Candice' own unwillingness to share discussions around the usual topics expected by classmates:

> We don't have common topic. They always chat about little things, small talk and maybe because there are mostly student girls studying here, they chat about make-up, the boyfriends and gossiping euh this was my impression of most students here (INT2)

In other words, Candice seemed to have resisted the usual socialization pathways amongst peers in these early university years of university life, partly as a reaction to her disappointment with her exam results but more generally due to a general feeling of unease about herself, which she described as an 'identity crisis' (INT1).

Study-abroad in Switzerland

Candice went to Switzerland in her third year at university as part of a study-abroad programme and her mood started to change. She described the trip as one of the things – along with the discovery of the New Age philosophies – that ended her 'identity crisis': 'So last two years of study, I wasn't happy at all until I went to Switzerland' (INT1). In her descriptions of the trip,

‘fun’ occurs frequently and there is an emphasis on the process of discovering herself, which is typical of many study-abroad experiences:

> When I went to Switzerland I thought I would miss my parents, my family, but I didn’t at all because it was so much fun in a new environment, it’s like to become a new self […] in Switzerland you can be whatever you like (INT1)

Switzerland was also presented in her story as her first encounter with French culture although she was in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. The link with French culture was gained through her acquaintance with a French-speaking student (called S in this story), who was born in Congo but brought up in France (‘she moved to Paris when she was 7’, LLH). Although her friend ‘talked more about Congo than France’ (INT1), Candice perceived her as representative of French culture:

> There’s a thing she [her friend S] said to me like the croissant (French pronunciation), croissant in Switzerland is far different from the croissants in Paris (laugh)! And I think that is a very French thing to say (INT2)

Thus, S was described as the source of Candice’s reignited interest in French learning:

> I pick it [French] up again at the university because I have made a French friend this year (LLH)

Apart from this, S was generally described as a source of inspiration in Candice’s story. First, Candice realized from chatting to S that her ideas and opinions could be of interest to other people, which came as a total surprise since in Hong Kong she had mostly ‘one-way’ discussions with her classmates:

> I can talk the philosophy things and euh and some maybe regarded as crazy things like euh reincarnations and she's really interested in this and she told me what she thinks too, like we have euh sharing ideas but to my HK friends it's like ONE WAY! (stressed words) (INT1)

Candice was also inspired by the way her friend S projected herself confidently in life:

> She [referring to S]'s not afraid to express herself (INT 1)

This again contrasted with the way Candice felt she had to behave in Hong Kong around other people, especially her classmates:

> Maybe it's better for me to not to talk so much about THIS (stressed word)! (INT1).

Switzerland in itself was a source of new discoveries. For example, Candice experienced new ways of learning and new teaching methods. She observed in particular how varied the classroom activities were:

> The host school office and international class include lessons like culture lessons, excursions and English lessons, art, sports. It's a very flexible and casually, <u>not</u> (emphasized) very academic, they're more like to exchange ideas between people from different countries and I <u>like</u> (emphasized) this atmosphere A LOT (stressed word) (INT1)

Again, for Candice, this compared positively with a typical Hong Kong lesson and its focus on 'standards' and 'rules' rather than on creativity and innovation (INT1). Candice remarked that in the Hong Kong educational system students' potential was not developed, noting that she would prefer an education system less focused on 'measurements' and more on making children 'creative' (INT1). The excerpt below summarises her views:

> Hong Kong, the lessons are planned in a way that we all follow the standards and the rules, we lack the creative and the innovative part like to bring the potential out of the students, we're lacking of this (INT1)

Another aspect of her sojourn in Switzerland was that it gave Candice a perspective on how people in other cultures lived, as she shared a room with an Italian girl and lived in the house of a Swiss family. Her descriptions of her Swiss host mother's habits and lifestyle particularly stood out because of the striking contrast they offered with Candice's perception of the lives of Hong Kong women of a similar age:

> I stayed in a host family and the host is I think 50 or 60 years old but she doesn't look like <u>that</u> (emphasized) old! She's like 40 something. She likes to hike, she likes to go to gym and cook and she has <u>so many hobbies</u> (emphasized)! She knows like six languages and she... a teacher… She's all really energetic and it's really different to what I have seen in HK and in China and I admire this a lot because we're too family-oriented and we couldn't find… I mean the old generation couldn't find… euh beside the family, to do! (INT1)

From her observations, Candice projected herself to an imagined far future. She imagined herself as a 'really free' grandmother who would give her grandchildren some space 'to do their own things'. Most importantly, she would not forget to satisfy her own needs:

> I hope I have a big family (laugh) but I would be a grandma that is really free and I may take care of the grandchildren some time but I'd leave them alone to do their own things and I'm doing my own euh… things yeah… so maybe I would travel or talk to friends… yes (INT1)

Return to Hong Kong after study-abroad in Switzerland

On her return to Hong Kong, Candice joined a winter immersion trip to China with a group of fellow university students. During that trip, she realized that she had changed, that she had become more socially engaged and accepting of others:

> I learned to open myself more to others and I find the result is good […] Because I made friends and I give the opportunity to others to understand myself… me a bit […] It just happened naturally! (INT2)

For the first time in her life, she found the confidence to express her thoughts in front of a group of peers and realized that in Hong Kong too, she could find like-minded people:

> The people there are really… encouraging and heart-warming. They're kind, they encouraged me to express my feels and they don't criticize that easily yes […] I feel encouraged (INT2)

Another aspect of change after Switzerland was that she was less afraid to reveal her differences vis-a-vis others. For example, she now found pleasure in being alone and sitting away from other classmates in class:

> Sometimes especially when I was in Year 1 and Year 2 [she felt lonely] but after some time I particularly enjoyed being alone and I feel confident … I feel confident for being alone, sitting alone in the class (INT2)

In other words, after her trip to Switzerland Candice gained confidence even though she also pointed out that coming back to Hong Kong was reverting to 'an older version' of herself:

> Because when I was in another country and a different environment… there's a feeling that I can do everything I want and I can express myself more freely than when I was in HK […] it's like I have to become the older version of me <u>again</u> (emphasized) (INT2)

Perhaps in order to maintain the 'new self' she had discovered in Switzerland, Candice decided to take French classes on her return to her Hong Kong university. In her story, Candice' experience of learning French at university was described with enthusiasm. She wrote her

appreciation in French in her end of year reflective essay: '*Je n'oublierai pas ces leçons de français*!' (I will not/never forget these French lessons).

Her enthusiasm for French learning appeared to be linked to the drama teaching methods, songs and creative writing activities used by her French teacher. She mentioned in particular the opportunity to create her own mini dialogues in French as well as to learn French through songs. Songs enabled her to get 'a glimpse of the abstract culture/ living style of France' (Reflective essay, Dec. 2015) and through singing songs, she had the feeling she was learning the language without realizing it, which echoed her comment that learning a language is a 'by-product' of learning about the culture (see section about learning languages above):

> This element of the class makes the language more dynamic and vivid. I find myself humming the songs randomly when I am in the streets. Then when I realize it I start to sing out the lyrics. This is uplifting. (Reflective essay, Dec. 2015)

I will describe these learning activities in more detail in the section about the meaning of learning French for Candice (section 6.4 below).

6.3 Candice's perceptions of France, French and Frenchness

In the second interview, Candice chose the words 'dignity', 'no regret', 'courageous' and 'wise' to describe French culture. She explained her choice as follows:

> They [French people] respect their own choice, they know what they're doing and they will not be regret, they just do it! And if it fails, it's OK they accept! […] they're courageous! They just go! If they think this is right or if they want to do this, they just go […] unlike many some people who think too much and maybe procrastinate (INT2)

In this description, French people are seen as adventurous and daring whilst in another description, they are associated with the notion of refinement and enviable lifestyle:

> I think maybe French people like any elements of the life to be the best like the bakery, they use really good ingredients… they enjoy life! And for other people we don't mind what the croissant tastes like normally (INT1)

These views of French culture can be said to be borrowed from widely circulating images of French culture in the world, but the inquiry revealed that Candice constructed her own images of French culture from French songs she listened to, including those used in her French class (she mentioned Edith Piaf and Yves Montand, which she described as 'really French') as well as from watching French films:

> I have watched some French films and I think they're really interesting, IT'S REALLY FRENCH TO ME! (stressed phrase) (INT1)

She described how through French films she was able to sense something of the values of French culture:

> I think French people values the thinking of a person a lot and the feminity in the French movies, it's really beautiful and attractive! (INT1)

More precisely, Candice talked about four French films she had enjoyed: '*Amélie Poulain', 'Les Intouchables', 'Les Choristes' and 'Mood Indigo'*. She referred to the film '*Les Choristes'* (which tells the story of a popular and empathetic teacher in an orphanage during the second world war) to illustrate her point that 'French people values the thinking of a person a lot', noting that the teaching methods of the teacher - who knew 'each student in person'- brought the best out of everyone in the class:

> He brings out the potential of his students and he know[s] each student in person… […] and he developed a teaching method that suits every (emphasised) students and it's really touching! (INT1)

The film '*Mood Indigo*' by French director Michel Gondry (known for his inventive visual style and surrealist atmospheres) was used to illustrate Candice's general perception that French people are 'romantic', following the widely held image of French culture in Asia:

> There's a scene of the two main characters getting married and they were under the water! I don't know why! It's really (emphasized) romantic I think and they kiss under the water with the dresses and this really eye-opening, breath-taking… yes! (INT1)

Another point that Candice made in relation to the French films she had seen was that French people have 'humour about life' (INT1). When I asked her what she meant by 'humour', she said that it was 'abstract' but that it was related to how sexuality was expressed freely in French films:

> French humour is really abstract to me because I see in every French movies and it's really fun to watch! They make fun of sex like… I don't know! (INT1)

In an exchange on the FRENCHINHK FB group, this idea was repeated:

> Unlike other culture, French people see sex as a natural and an enjoyable thing. It is not a taboo or a big deal or a special thing (FRENCHINHK FB posting dated 10 Nov. 2015)

The film '*Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain*' and its female character, Amélie, came back often in our conversations about Candice's impressions of French culture and more particularly of French women. When I asked Candice to tell me what she liked about the character Amélie, she mentioned her confidence and sense of self. Candice had used the adjective 'weird' several

times during the interview to describe herself. In her story, it seemed that Candice made a connection between Amélie's character and her own character in that regard, as well as between Amélie's confidence and Candice's need to grow into a more confident self. The following exchange illustrates these points:

> Me: So just to summarise about Amélie… so she's weird (emphasized)… but she's listened to? She's appreciated? She's a place in society? Is that what you see in her character?
> C: And she's really confident (emphasized)!
> Me: Confident. Hmmm
> C: And I think she (emphasized) doesn't focus too much on "Oh, I'm weird!" She just DO (stressed word) herself, to be herself! And really happy!
> Me: Hmmm… so and how does that compare to you as a person? Do you see yourself as different… weird as well?
> C: Yeah! Because I like things that my friends you know… don't really understand I think (said in a very low voice) and although I was really unhappy because I couldn't find anyone to talk about interest but now (emphasized) I start to enjoy my euh life (said very quickly and low) and I and to like my weirdness… yeah! (INT1)

In other words, Candice seemed to have found, through the fictional character Amélie Poulain, a way to deal with what she called her 'weirdness'. More generally, her perceptions of French women helped her develop her own sense of femininity. In the quotes below, Candice contrasts appreciations of beauty in French and Asian cultures, suggesting that she finds French standards preferable to Asian ones:

> The French women gave me an impression that they're confident and they're charming and I couldn't find well maybe some of the Chinese but generally the atmosphere or the women in China or HK is very different from French women (INT2)

> They [French women] don't need plastic surgery, they just bring themselves up… I mean women in France… and they're really confident and it's really charming not like… maybe… Korea! They [Korean women] do a lot of things on outside of the body or make-up, and they're still really not confident about themselves. And also a lot of skinship [plastic surgery?] and and sex! In France I think they see it [sex] as a beautiful thing that we need to treasure or… but sex is more like a taboo in Asia (INT1)

From comments such as these in the inquiry, I began to develop an understanding of the role of French in Candice's life, as I will develop in the next section.

6.4 Exploring the meaning of French with Candice

As mentioned above, Candice's story suggests that one of the main roles played by French is to assist her in discovering a sense of her own version of feminine identity by comparing her perceptions of 'feminine' roles in different cultures. Yet, French also performed other roles in her life at the time of the inquiry, as I will explain in the following paragraphs.

6.4.1 Learning French to gain inspiration and to appropriate perceived French cultural values

In her descriptions of language learning, Candice had repeated many times throughout the inquiry that her prime motivation was to learn about a culture; language learning only happened almost by accident, as a 'by-product' of learning about the culture.

The idea that studying French is to 'get a glimpse of a different culture and style of living' is expressed in the first document she brought to the IRT meeting as shown in Figure 8 below:

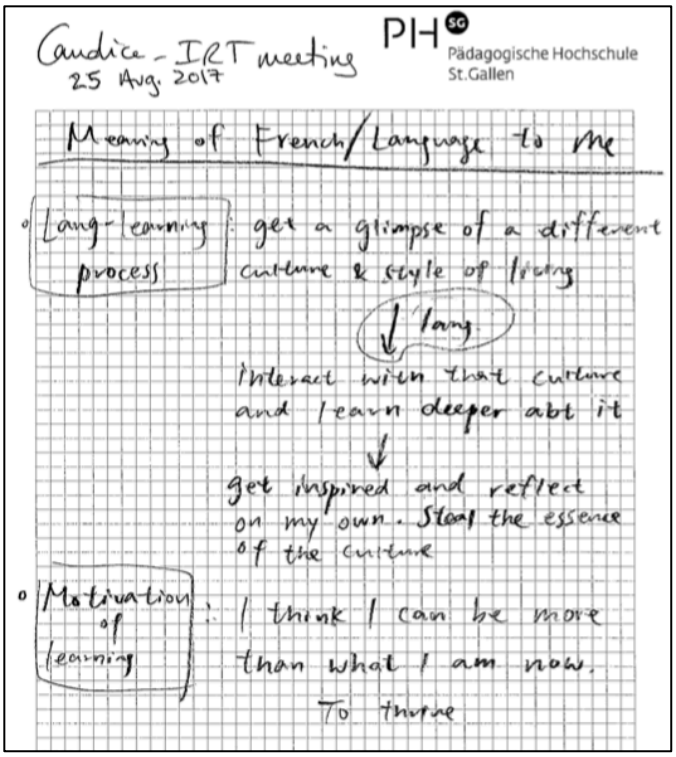

Figure 8: Candice's notes for the IRT meeting (1) (25 Aug. 2017)

As already mentioned, Candice discovered aspects of French culture through meeting people (for example, her Franco-Congolese friend S) or by watching films (for example, Amélie Poulain). Through these activities, Candice gradually constructed her own images of French culture, which also matched what was important to her in her life at the time, as she expressed in the following excerpt:

> Maybe there's a list of what I like and taking the French course adds something to this list (INT2)

The type of values which matter to Candice and which she sees as being embodied by French culture are detailed in the second document she brought to the IRT meeting (see Figure 7, p. 181). First of all, Candice mentions the 'French style of living' and the perception that French

culture is 'rich' with 'sentimental, intellectual, philosophical' values she identifies with. Candice explained her view of the 'French style of living' during the second interview as follows:

> Why I'm interested in French culture maybe… I think there are two points, one is that French people know how to live a life, they put themselves into the life, enjoying the life… and they know how to eat, to dress, like they have a lot of attention or they put a lot of thinking into this… how to live a life issue (INT2)

What she meant by 'French people know how to live a life' was further developed in a posting in the FRENCHINHK FB group after the Charlie Hebdo killings in Paris on 7 January 2015. In this posting, cartoons by the French comics artist, Joann Sfar, represent (ironically or not) much fantasized aspects of French culture, including its romantic aspect (with the caption: "La France est un vieux pays où les amoureux s'embrassent librement" [France is an old country where lovers embrace freely]) or its hedonistic aspect (with the caption: "Paris est notre capital. Nous aimons la musique l'ivresse, la joie" [Paris is our capital. We love music, drunkenness, joy]). In our discussion of these captions, Candice said that the cartoons made her think that French people always 'find the beauty in things around them' (INT2) and she expressed her motivation to incorporate such attributes in her own life.

Thus, the point of learning a language in Candice's view is to find in it something that builds on her existing values while adding something new to them. In the first document she brought to the IRT meeting (see Figure 8, p. 203), Candice explained that learning a language was to 'steal the essence of the culture' and that the point of doing this was to 'get inspired' with the hope or intention that she will 'thrive' from it. In the excerpt below, the link between Candice's perceived Frenchness and her own desired identity are again made clear:

> I learned from it [French culture] that I have to be serious or sincere in every little things in my life (INT2)

In other words, the roles of French in Candice's life at the time of the inquiry involve addressing both a search for inspiration and a desire for appropriation, in order to become more than what she is now. More specifically, the data showed that Candice 'stole' from French culture ideas about how to deal with her gendered self, as developed in the next paragraph.

6.4.2 Using perceptions of French women to construct her gendered self

As already mentioned, my meetings and discussions with Candice quickly highlighted the centrality of gender issues in her story. For example, in our discussion about what kind of people she was attracted to, Candice mentioned 'confidence' ('I'm really attracted to confident females or daring, brave or intellect or tender yes', INT2), but it was an unexpected comment she made in relation to her friend S which further drew my attention to these issues. The comment was:

> I've something to add… the French thing I find in S [her friend S], she told me that the little black marks they… French people consider them as a beauty… what are they? (INT1)

After a few seconds working out what she meant, I realized that Candice was talking about beauty spots [grains de beauté]. When I told her what they were called in French, she commented:

> C: Because euh they… (laughs)... it gives me the impression of French people that they're… they're proud of all the things… of themselves! And also like… the teeth if they're not euh…
> Me: Straight?

> C: Straight or white… it's fine euh… to French people… I think! That's because most people in the world, they think they have to go to the dentist to make euh beautiful euh teeth… so I think that's really good (laugh)! (INT1)

During this exchange, I noted again the 'fantasy' aspect of French culture in Candice's stories (a point which will be developed in sections 6.5.3 and 6.5.4 below), but I also sensed that something significant had been said. In relation to telling me what she appreciated in French culture, Candice was telling me about her own physical appearance. This made me interested so I asked her if having a 'couple of beauty spots' made her feel uncomfortable. She answered that it did because they were considered 'not beautiful' and 'bad luck' in Chinese culture:

> When I was young and… many… not many but… my family particularly, grandma, my grandma said that I had to remove the spots because in… China they think the spots mean …like euh… it's not beautiful and may bring you bad luck (INT1)

Another aspect of Candice's frustration with the way women were portrayed in her society was displayed in her comments about a post which circulated widely on the Internet at the time of the inquiry and where women were likened to 'goddesses' (which Candice explained meant 'ideal') if they could meet certain male-determined standards of femininity:

> I recently received a picture through Whatsapp. The picture was sent to a group chat and the sender meant to initiate a funny discussion on the content of the picture. But I can't help being a bit offended by this. The pic is a list of "qualities/characteristics of a 'goddess'". (In case you are wondering what does "goddess" referring to, it means a girl who is being admired and worshiped like an idol. It is a culture of my generation.) The list includes "pretty", "long hair", "doesn't go to clubs", "doesn't drink and smoke", "knows how to cook", "knows how to do chores" and anything that sums up a "good girl" and "pretty girl". The picture is quite popular i guess. (Messenger, 11 Apr. 2016)

In this excerpt, Candice was offended that women in Hong Kong should be talked about in such a conformist and male-dominated way, especially since the comments were made by young

males of her own generation. Sharing this post with me was a way to show me that she rejected being labelled in this way. In the next quote, Candice talked more explicitly about her dislike of the 'herd' mentality and her concern about how such circulating opinions about women in society affected her directly:

> I found that there are still many peers around my age living on labels and conformity. The reason behind is fear, of being isolated, of themselves. It is probably the society and the herd who feeds this fear. I am sometimes upset because this situations affects me in certain ways. (Messenger, 11 Apr. 2016)

Her concern regarding society's expectations of women was repeated several times during the inquiry. In particular, she talked about how Chinese women's lives seemed to revolve around the family. In the excerpt below, although Candice reflected about her grandmother's life, I sensed that she was also indirectly thinking of her future life:

> …. in China the older generation… they think that particularly the grandmothers, the grandmothers they see life as take caring of the children or the grandchildren and … they don't know how to find another hobby or things to do for the leisure time so when the child or grandchildren grow up and they don't know the life purpose, they lost the life purpose and they become really not energetic so… because my grandma is like this… (INT2)

Thus, Candice's concerns about women in her own society fed into her narratives of French women, who in comparison appeared to her confident in themselves, proud of who they were and free to act as they pleased. An illustration of this is contained in Candice's post of a popular meme at the time of the inquiry on the FB FRENCHINHK thread (consisting of a two-line dialogue: 'Say something sexy in French' 'Non!') followed by a caption:

> I like this one. They are not going to do what you say. It's sexy, non? (FRENCHINHK FB posting dated 7 Nov. 2015)

In the long exchange that this post triggered between the two of us, she explained that the person saying ‘non’ in the meme was a woman and ‘they’ referred to ‘French people’. She added that the woman said ‘non’ because ‘she [was] not going to do’ what other people asked her to do following her perception that French women are not afraid to speak their mind:

> She [the French woman] has the nerve to object people which may make the situation awkward and the person who is asking embarrassed. She may be regarded as rude. But I like the way that she is rebellious to the golden rule of socialization haha (FRENCHINHK FB posting dated 7 Nov. 2015)

Other interpretations of the meme are of course possible, demonstrating how identity positions are constructed in narrative by foregrounding certain issues. In another exchange on the FRENCHINHK FB group, Candice added that women in general needed to learn to be ‘proud’ of themselves in their mind:

> I think one of the best ways to improve this situation [sexual harassment] is to be proud of ourselves, not because others say so, but because we know it ourselves. (FRENCHINHK FB group, 12 Nov. 2015)

She further reflected that women were quickly prone to assume the role of victims:

> I do think that many of us [women in general] have been putting ourselves in the "victim" position (FRENCHINHK FB group, 12 Nov. 2015)

In the IRT meeting, I discussed with Candice the link between her investment in learning French and her developing notions of feminine identity, and she showed me a document (see Figure 7, p. 181), where she links French or France with the words ‘femininity and feminism’, adding that she had reflected about this link long before the inquiry. She went on to explain that, in her mind, French women were associated with the adjectives ‘daring, independent, confident, self-love,

classy, proud' (see Figure 7) and that it was these ideas that had started to make her 'see the possibility of what a woman can be' (see Figure 7). This included starting to see her beauty spots and unaligned teeth as part of who she was instead of wanting them removed. She added that she now loved these unique marks because they embodied her uniqueness as a person and were an integral part of who she is:

> Now I love them [her beauty spots]… I'm loving myself… that's who I am… not to conform [to beauty standards] is OK (IRT meeting)

Perhaps another consequence of her perception of French women is that she began to have more confidence in the way she was with people in society. Although in the past there had been moments when she felt lonely amongst her peers, she suggested that she now felt less affected by other people's opinions:

> I learn to not care that much and I enjoy staying in my own position! Well… my own way of doing things […] I 'won't be influenced that much' in future by other people (INT3)

However, Candice underlined that these changes were also linked to her readings about feminist issues as well as New Age philosophical thought, which had also contributed to a change in the way she saw herself during her last two years at university.

To conclude, by gaining knowledge about French culture, Candice developed a perception of how women in another culture behaved. From this, she developed alternative notions of femininity. These in turn affected her self-image, giving her the courage to accept the way she looked and to appreciate her own uniqueness as an individual. Although these notions were developed in relational sense vis-à-vis her own culture, this is not to say that she is averse to her

society's points of view. Instead, she has gained a more critical perspective on whether or not to conform to particular norms:

> I won't use the word "fit in"… I will try but if I don't like it then I won't do it so… I've a strong opinion I think so (INT3)

6.4.3 French as a way to offset the cultural norms in her environment by adding a 'little bit of sentiment'

An exchange Candice and I had on Messenger on 11 April 2006 helped me further understand Candice's relationship with her societal norms. The exchange followed a posting on Instagram about the French singer Yves Montand and one of his most famous songs 'Les Feuilles Mortes', which I introduced to Candice to encourage her in her French learning efforts. I commented that the singer had a nice voice as well as a lot of charm ['Il a une belle voix et beaucoup de charme'] adding that charm was an important quality for French people ['Le charme est une qualité très importante pour les français, je crois'].

Reflecting on what I had written, Candice said that the notion of 'charm' corresponded exactly to her perception of French people and culture, which was that in French culture, every unique aspect of the individual was valued (perhaps in relation to her initial discovery that beauty spots were considered charming in French culture):

> I sort of understand what u mean:) u mentioned que le charme est une qualité très important pour les français ['charm is an important quality for French people']. That's also one of the image France gives me. "Individualism/ uniqueness in everybody" has its place in western societies.' (IG posting, 2016)

She added that she was drawn to such a culture:

> That is a culture that i yearn for, though I dont know if this is a real case in french. I hope a culture like this could be more developed in hong kong. (IG posting, 2016)

In a follow-up Messenger message about this posting, Candice further reflected that the notion of 'charm' symbolized for her a positive treatment of others. She wrote:

> The culture of "finding the charm in others"' which we had discussed previously is fascinating. This adds a little bit of sentiment element when we appreciate each other. When we find the charm in someone, in some ways we also love this person. This is also the image of France to me. That little bit of sentiment. (Messenger, 11 Apr. 2016)

She went on saying that she wished for a society where people would be appreciated 'for who they are':

> Understanding that each of us is different and unique, at the same time knowing that we are all the same and that we should treat each other equally and fair (Messenger, 11 Apr. 2016)

Candice's comments suggested that she did not think Hong Kong valued individuality or gave individuals the chance to 'thrive' as an individual (Messenger, 11 Apr. 2016). In fact, the portrait she brushed of her society was scathing. She described Hong Kong culture as not interested in individual values and as never offering praise, an observation she made partly in contrast to Switzerland where she perceived the opposite was true:

> We don't give a lot of praise or … appreciation so we don't know first… how does that person see me? And second, what is the good of me? So when I was in Switzerland I hear a lot of appreciation from my classmates and I was really happy because I see… how good I am at doing certain things and they can see each person's uniqueness… Candice is

> like this and maybe (name of classmate) she is like this… but we just accept! It's euh… him or her! (INT3)

In the IRT meeting, Candice further explained that there was 'a lot of fear' of standing out in HK society, making a contrast with French society in which people seemed to be proud of their authentic self and uniqueness:

> They [French people] are proud of their authenticity… in HK, people are striving not to be singled out (IRT meeting)

Yet, at the same time, Candice exonerated her Hong Kong compatriots for being the way they were, blaming the Hong Kong environment for infusing stress and making people keep 'things inside', which ended up in 'low self-esteem' (INT3). The excerpt below describes a stressful environment in which there seems to be no energy left to enjoy life:

> HK is you know really stressful and really fast, really… we like to focus on the efficiency and… we have less time to put… for leisure or to enjoying my things! (INT2)

Thus, another role of French in Candice's life is to provide her with a way to reclaim a sense of personal value in an environment which does not praise easily and where individuality seems to be repressed. Candice enjoyed the French learning activities in her class at university precisely because they offered her an opportunity to express her uniqueness, as well as her emotions and feelings.

6.4.4 French as a way to express her inner emotions and feelings

One of Candice's mini dialogues (see Figure 9 below) gives an example of how Candice expresses her uniqueness through her inner feelings. This dialogue is an imagined conversation between a dog (Rex) and a door ('La Porte'). In this short story, the dog decides to leave the flat where he lives because he wants to explore his life more ('la belle vie de moi') and because staying in the flat makes him feel sad ('triste'). The door plays the role of revelator of the dog's feelings.

A = Rex B = La Porte

B: Qu'est-ce qu'il y a?

A: Je suis triste.

B: Mais pourquoi?

A: Parce qu'il n'est pas de vie que je veux. Je veux quitter l'appartement.

B: Pauvre petit chien. Mais tu ne peux pas quitter...

A: S'il vous plaît! Il y a longtemps que je trouve la belle vie de moi...

B: Je regarde...(La porte s'ouvre) Maintenant ou jamais!

Rex: Woof!!

La Porte: Bonne chance mon petit chéri!

Rex: Woof woof woof!!! (aller)

Figure 9: Candice's creative writing in the French class at university (15 Nov. 2015)

Candice hinted that writing these short pieces in French was a way to release emotions and feelings through the fictional characters she created, which is to say express more clearly who she is:

> When I write these passages I put a lot of LOVE (stressed word spoken very softly) and real feeling into this writ[ing]… I think it's really romantic (INT2)

> I like imagining characters and have empathy with them. In some way they express who I am because I put a bit of my feeling and identity in them. Therefore the more I build something out of French, the more the language have meaning to me. (Reflective essay, Dec. 2015)

And in these moments of emotional transport, grammar all of sudden becomes less important than the process of expressing what she wants to say:

> Conjugation is one of the things I hate when learning a language. However, it turns out to be fun when I use them to create my own dialogues. (Reflective essay, Dec. 2015)

Candice liked learning through songs for the same reasons. In an extract from the musical 'Les Misérables' introduced in the French class, she recalled how as she visualized the homeless ['les sans-papiers'] and the refugees ['les étrangers'] in the song, she felt as if she experienced their plight:

> And I really really like the feeling to be a refugee, it's really dramatic and I imagined myself in this situation and I… and I just sing in this situation and it's really touching! Yes! (INT1)

The interesting aspect of these learning activities is the minimal vocabulary Candice possessed to express complicated feelings or emotions. Yet, this did not impede the expression of her feelings. Candice suggested that the reason she was able to go so deeply and so meaningfully into her feelings was because of the intrinsic characteristics of the French language, which differed from

other languages she knew. In the inquiry, she had mentioned that she liked French films such as 'Mood Indigo' (see section 6.3 above) because of its mystery and fantasy. She also mentioned that in French, animals and things seemed to be able to talk, which in her perception increased the expression of personal feelings:

> Yes! Personification. Maybe a rock may be a bird! And some romance or sentiment element in it, which makes it oh really touching! (INT3)

When I asked her why she could not express herself in the same way with Chinese and English ('I don't think I could do the same effect using Chinese or English', INT2), she also suggested that this was due to her lack of vocabulary in French; because of her limited vocabulary, she was forced to dig deeply and summon her whole self (including her emotions) to compensate for this lack: 'you could put all of myself into the exercise', as follows:

> Because I know more words in English and Chinese, I couldn't find the perfect word … and also French is a new language you could put all yourself into this and not many people that know me can understand what I wrote … and because the vocabularies of French that I know is really little and I can examine each word carefully and pick the right word (INT2)

This excerpt also suggested the possibility of feeling more able to experiment with emotional expression in French because it is a less well-known language in Hong Kong. This would reduce the possibility of being criticized:

> When you use French to express yourself… because this is a new language, people won't criticize you (INT2)

In other words, in Candice's story, one of the advantages of French was that it provided a means to skirt disapproval or criticism. This is important because she had repeatedly described herself

as ‘weird’ in the inquiry. For example, she mentioned finding it difficult to communicate with her classmates at university because of her ‘weird’ ideas: ‘I was speaking a lot about philosophy things lately so they all call me master but they don’t really quite involve in my philosophy talking’ (INT1).

These aspects of Candice’s narrative show that one of the roles of French is to provide a way to express her uniqueness in a creative way in response to the constraints of her culture. Although Candice described Cantonese as ‘playful’ (INT2) and full of possibilities for expressing the self (for example, she talked about Cantonese’s potential for meanness: ‘Really hurtful (laugh)! Like I threw you a punch!’, INT2), it seemed that French enabled her to express other emotions and feelings and through this, she could become ‘more’ than what she is now, as she expressed in of the documents she brought to the IRT meeting: ‘[With French] I think I can be more than what I am now’ (see Figure 8, p. 203).

6.4.5 French in Candice’s life: a temporary meaning

However, despite the role French seemed to play in Candice’s story, she did not seem particularly concerned about the possibility of continuing to learn it. In the excerpt below, Candice suggested that even though she had a positive experience learning French at university, there was no immediate plan to continue:

> I’m (cough)… there was not a plan! I… I will continue reading about the Instagram posts, about French grammar, phrases and… there was not particularly a plan (INT2)

In other words, although French seemed to be playing an important role at this stage of Candice's life, it is also remarkable for its temporary usefulness. This suggests the importance of considering additional language learning from the point of view of identity development with the ever-changeable character of the identity construction process. There is no evidence that the kinds of inspiration noted above led to long-lasting or permanent change and of course, French in Candice's life is not a closed chapter either.

Candice's story also draws attention to the fact that French is only one of the many resources she takes to construct her identity. In the inquiry, the New Age movement also appeared prominently, particularly during her 'identity crisis' just before going to Switzerland. In the first interview, she described the 'New Age stuff' as helping her to 'connect back' to herself (INT1). In the second interview, New Age ideas were also credited for helping her to be 'more confident and brave' in herself and to be less concerned about what others thought of her:

> I think it [New Age] played a lot… a big impact on me… I'm more confident and brave and to be myself and not to care that much of how other people think of me or see me and just to be myself (INT2)

Candice captured the interconnectedness of French and her other interests with the metaphor of a 'pie chart':

> If I see myself as a pie chart, a part of it is Japanese and a part of it is French… I mean the element of what I see… what I see from these cultures … maybe French is more focusing to the moment of now […] each different cultures' elements put together maybe and becomes me (INT2)

In this quote, Candice highlighted the idea that individuality is at once singular in its uniqueness and authenticity, but also changeable. In this, any labeling of her identity would be limiting (or imprisoning), as she expressed below:

> I don't want to say HK people! I don't want to say [the name of her university] student. I don't want to say I'm a female, 21 years old […] because the labels of identities limit myself (INT3)

6.5 The meaning of French in Candice's story

In conclusion, from the inquiry, French can be seen to have played a significant role in Candice's life because it gave her ideas and inspiration for other ways of living her life (for example, she perceived the French lifestyle as inspiring) and to express her individuality. She described French learning as a way 'to thrive' and 'to be more than what [she was] now'.

In particular, French seemed to have helped her construct her own sense of gender identity in relation to prevailing discourses of femininity in her own culture. From her representations of female identities in French cultural products (such as in the film '*Amélie Poulain'*) as well as from encounters with people whom she associates with Frenchness (such as her friend S), Candice found resources to accept her 'weirdness' (i.e. her differences) including those aspects related to her physical appearance.

Also, it seemed that Candice was able to express herself in French in a way she did not in other languages. She could get in touch with a deeper emotional space within herself and she was able to express her creativity.

In other words, through French, Candice found a way to express her individuality in the cultural context of Hong Kong, which Candice perceived as lacking interest in individual potential, creativity and difference. In this way, the role of French in Candice's story is that it helps her expand the range of her identity potentials within the constraints of her society.

Chapter 7 Yasmina

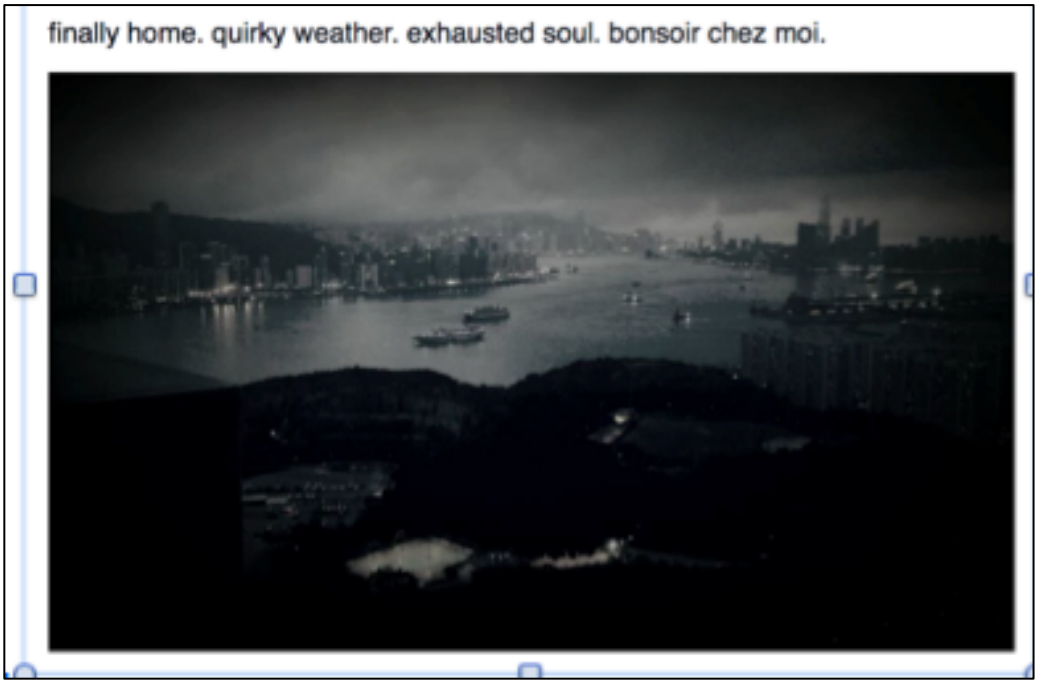

Figure 10: Yasmina's own photography with caption posted on FB (23 May 2013)

7.1 Yasmina and I

Yasmina was 24 at the start of the inquiry. We met for the first time during the two 2012-2013 semesters when she enrolled in my beginner French classes at a Hong Kong university. She was then in her final year of a B.A. in Cultural Studies at the same university.

Since her graduation, Yasmina and I have regularly kept in touch, at first mainly through Facebook and Messenger and more recently on WhatsApp. When I contacted her about this study, Yasmina immediately answered positively. We held three interviews and also met informally during the inquiry. In our meetings, we always spoke in English.

During the time she was in my French classes at university, I came to know that Yasmina liked photography and loved the cinema. Perhaps for that reason, I felt that she had a certain flair in the way she presented herself (for example, in the way she dressed). She seemed confident in herself, and the other students seemed to look up to her. Once, she suggested that everyone should bring food to one of our classes, and everyone shared an informal moment of togetherness.

During the study, I found that Yasmina also had an introspective side, and I discovered someone who liked discussing ideas. Her keen interest in all forms of art, and more specifically in film and photography, also came across strongly. She mentioned liking films that enabled her to look for deeper meanings, such as art-house cinema, and talked about her avid interest in photography, which she shares with a group of close friends. Like her, they are particular about the types of photographic film they use and develop their own photographs to get the results they want. For her trip to France, Yasmina took several rolls of film carefully selected for their quality of grain and intended effects during the development process. When she shared her European pictures in a dedicated album on Facebook, I thought that the result looked distinctively different to those of the four other students who had accompanied her to France. She entitled this album 'A _ C R O S S'. In the interviews, she explained that she devotes a lot of attention to aesthetic details such as what title to give to her FB photo albums and how to present them. So for example, the two 'Ls' in the album « S M A [] H A P P I N E S S !» are inverted to 'resemble a photo [frame] (demonstrating a frame with her hands)' (INT2).

My first meeting with Yasmina for the research took place on 2 April 2015. We talked for two hours. Yasmina had suggested a place to meet, but it was closed. She remembered a nearby

Agnes b. café and we settled with tea and cakes and made ourselves comfortable. Yasmina dived into our conversation with eagerness. In all the interviews we had together, it felt as if she had a need to speak.

Our second meeting on 12 February 2016 lasted two and a-quarter hours and took place on the terrace of an outdoor café. Once again, we made ourselves comfortable with tea and cakes and started the interview. In the course of that conversation, Yasmina spoke of herself as someone quite intense, serious and perfectionist who likes her own company and does not enjoy groups. Yet, at the same time, she finds it hard to deal with how other people see her: 'Sometimes they [people at work] think I am too serious on certain things or some topics […] I guess, sometimes when you have to be serious like at work, I would be so serious because I want to attain certain kind of perfections' (INT2).

Perhaps, to counterbalance this perception other people may have of her, Yasmina spoke to me about another side of her personality. For the second interview, she chose a photo of two friends draped in flowery bed sheets being silly on the small balcony of a hotel room in Taiwan, to express that she could also be silly. The choice of photo also illustrated that she likes experimenting and exploring things:

> To do crazy things and I [do] not care about what people think about these crazy things, sometimes you would find funny sides in it and you'll discover the wonderful… like you're doing some experiments! Sometimes I think how you develop the photos, you don't know how do your photos look like unless you develop them. Sometimes it's a process of waiting, plenty of wait and the pleasure of waiting (INT2)

Yasmina repeated the words ‘explore’ and ‘exploration’ several times during the inquiry. This partly explained why she was interested in taking part in a research study on identity. It was also an opportunity for her ‘to recall and to remind’ herself why she was learning French (INT2).

Our last interview was on 16 May 2016. After a meal in the vegetarian restaurant of a local university familiar to Yasmina, we sat outside in a campus corner and talked for an hour and a half. Yasmina looked thin and tired on that meeting. She was experiencing a lot of stress at work and was not eating properly. She had a day off the next day to compensate for long working hours over the previous weeks.

7.2 Yasmina’s stories: childhood, secondary school, university and work

Childhood

Yasmina’s father came to Hong Kong from China during the 1970s because of ‘the deficient living condition’ in China then, and her mother took refuge in Hong Kong in the 1980s (email, 5 Apr. 2015).

When Yasmina was born, since her father was travelling a lot for work and her mum was also working, Yasmina was taken care of by her mother’s family in South China. She recalled spending her early childhood in a place where a local dialect known as Zhangjiang (described by Yasmina as ‘a mix of Leizhou Min and Hakka, with little Cantonese’) was spoken. Thus, in her survey, Yasmina indicated that both Cantonese and this southern Chinese dialect were her mother tongues. Cantonese is the main language spoken in Yasmina’s home today, although Mandarin and the southern dialect are also used by her parents.

In her LLH, Yasmina recalled that when she arrived from China at the age of three to join her parents, she did not know Cantonese and her parents found it difficult to enroll her in a Hong Kong kindergarten. This was the first important transition point in her life:

> The worst memory evoked is the entrance examination and interview in many Kindergartens. As I could not understand and answer the questions, most of the schools that my parents applied had rejected my submission. (LLH)

As a result of this experience, she remembered having to spend a lot of time catching up with her Cantonese. But she also wrote that this experience planted in her 'the seed of interest in language learning' as well as giving her an 'eagerness of self-learning' (LLH).

In her family, Yasmina is the only one who speaks English well although her father speaks it a little. She learned English mainly from her Filipina maid, who also spoke to her in Tagalog. Her perception of that period is that she lived in a 'multi-linguistic childhood' (LLH), which was enjoyable and gave her a good start at school in English: 'I don't find particular difficulties in having any of the English exams when I was in kindergarten' (LLH).

Later on, however, English became a less enjoyable learning experience.

Secondary school

Yasmina began her secondary school years in a CMI secondary school, where she felt she was better than average in English. Following her mother's wish, she then joined a well-known high-ranking Catholic EMI secondary school where the English standard was much higher. This was recalled as a painful realization by Yasmina:

> When enrolled at my EMI secondary school, the whole situation twisted. Because, because they are brought up in a really English-speaking world. Some of my classmates they read Harry Potter in a really early age, like in Primary three to four they already reading English, English versions of Harry Potter. I had really huge difficulties in catching up with their standards (INT3)

In Yasmina's description of this experience, there was also a feeling of injustice. Not only did she feel that she could not compete with her classmates, whom she described as being 'really elite' (INT3), but she also suffered from being labelled by her teachers:

> I was in the left behind group among different classes because my class was characterized as the bad class (INT1)

> We were black-listed actually we are not naughty we just think it's a bit dull and boring life, we just need some kind of experience but we were just trying to see which rule we can break and which we cannot… we were just testing the lines and we were just testing how far we can reach (INT1)

In effect, she and other students whose English results were lower than average had to take part in speech competitions to improve their English. This perhaps explains why Yasmina described English as a 'burden-like language' in her LLH and why she perceived herself as not good in academic subjects, in comparison to visual arts where she was successful:

> When I received my results in the HKCEE public examinations, my classmates around me they are 26 to 29 and even 30 points out of 30 points […] I'm just 17 something points over 30 and even a great portion of the points that I got was not from the usual subjects. It didn't come from the core subjects, it's come from just art… visual arts (INT3)

In this context, Yasmina began her involvement with Japanese language and culture. She discovered the Japanese pop singer Sheena Ringo and her pop-rock band, Tokyo Jihen, through a

friend and found in the lyrics and the singer's attitude a rich ground from which to explore new ideas and expand her horizon. Her descriptions suggest a personal breakthrough:

> I just think that I was quite a good kid because I was told every thing that the adults asked me to and I didn't really listen to my own self […] she [Sheena Ringo] looked in different topics of so called taboo, taboo topics and have different perspective and encourage me to think […] it impressed me, it kind of surprise me because I never think that some of the issues can be discussed in this way […] you were told good and bad values very clearly, you would know what [it] is according to the Bible, you have do what… you have a clear taboo and straight instructions to do everything (INT1)

For example, Yasmina's recalled how the song 'Kabukichou no Joou' which portrays society's outsiders, made her think more deeply about attitudes towards these people:

> I was very surprised by how […] things could be perceived in childhood in this way and… actually she looks in different kinds of issues like religion and also most of songs are about sex and even about drugs […] she gives me a different perspective to think at least in that early age of teenage life (INT1)

After her discovery of Sheena Ringo, Yasmina decided to study Japanese by herself. She described this as 'an intense learning process' (LLH), which led her to level 3 in Japanese on an official scale of 1 to 5. Her connection with Japanese remains strong and she has been to Japan several times. She continues to take a lesson with a private tutor every Saturday, although she said she studies Japanese less intensively than before: 'in a really casual way! I'm no longer focusing myself on studying the grammar thing' (INT3).

Yasmina's experience at the Catholic school ended with Form 5 because she did not meet the school requirements. She had to find a new school again, and was enrolled by a CMI school. She stayed there until the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE) before university. During that time, she was introduced to Chinese literature and to political issues in Hong Kong

by one of her teachers, who made a strong impression on her. With him, she learned about the preservation of cultural heritage sites in Hong Kong (linked to the 2008 protests against the destruction of Central Pier) and about the controversy around the construction of the Pearl River Delta Highway. She also volunteered for an NGO distributing badges during the 4 June 1989 Tiananmen Movement commemorations, which was a new experience for her because such issues were never discussed with her parents.

In the end, Yasmina decided to abandon her initial plan to study visual communication or fashion design at university and to pursue a B.A. in cultural studies. She attributes this decision to the literature teacher because he opened her eyes to political issues although she felt ambivalent about abandoning more creativity-oriented studies at the time.

University

During our discussion in the IRT meeting, Yasmina talked about the importance of her undergraduate programme in cultural studies in further developing her critical judgment, but also remarked that this specialization could not easily lead to a job in Hong Kong: '[it] could not get you into society'.

Despite enjoying her undergraduate courses (including a course entitled 'Film and Cinema Studies'), Yasmina described painful moments of inhibition in her relationships with her classmates and teachers during her university years:

> When I was in college I gone through a very (emphasised word) difficult period to deal with my… actually it's not shame to talk to anybody that I got some kind of depression (INT1)

In class, she said that she would feel 'really nervous' (an adjective which often reappeared in her overall story) when dealing with people and when the teacher asked her questions: 'I don't know why I really can't control it and I wouldn't like to speak any word, I just keep silent' (INT1). Yasmina described her problems as 'socialistic problems' because she was 'afraid being surrounded by people' and had 'strange reactions' around people (for example, her hands would start shaking; INT1). This nervousness around people came as a surprise to Yasmina because it was a departure from the way she had perceived herself in childhood:

> I remember when I was in a kindergarten I was a very talkative girl, I was really a really a proactive kid compared to the personality that I have right now (INT1)

Although she had taken a short introductory course in secondary school, it is during these postgraduate years that Yasmina started to study French by enrolling in French beginner classes mainly because she wanted to join a follow-up three-week summer programme at a partner university in France. She said she wanted to grasp a last opportunity to go abroad before graduating, and also she wanted to travel across Europe.

Her early memories of French are linked to French films: 'the aesthetic things, the colour combination in French [films]' (INT2). One of the first meanings of learning French for Yasmina is thus the link with her interest in the arts and more specifically, in films. Another meaning, which regularly appears in the study, is her desire to go beyond the usual stereotypes in exploring French culture:

> I want to explore more in French […] is it the same as what I explored right now or are there other possibilities in this language? Because…I think for most of people they learn French because it's so poetic, it sounds so elegant […] but is it romantic the only thing in French? […] Why not political and philosophical? There're a lot of different kinds of elements in French, this language (INT2)

Work

On her return to Hong Kong, Yasmina began looking for work and signed a two-year contract as a trainee in an arts venue in Hong Kong. After this two-year contract Yasmina changed job three times, but mostly remained in arts-related employment.

When describing her work experience, Yasmina incorporated many stories within the bigger story, frequently using direct questions, changes of intonation and lightly sarcastic laughs as she was reliving striking moments at work. The vignettes she provided brushed a complex portrait of her work environment. In effect, it was the most consuming experience in her life at the time of the inquiry, since as a young trainee and new employee, there was a lot to take in and to get used to. Yasmina repeatedly described a constraining environment, where she felt stressed and where her ideas and opinions were mostly ignored. She used words such as 'stereotyped thoughts', 'stress' or 'oppression' to describe her experience of her work environment:

> They've [colleagues] really strong and concrete stereotyped thoughts and they won't let any others to have different kinds of opinions (INT1)

> I always feel kind of stressed and oppression because they have a lot of expectations on you (INT1)

Being a trainee was an added stress because she was a lot less experienced and less knowledgeable than her colleagues. She hinted at being acutely aware that in comparison to them, she was 'really new and fresh to this industry' (INT2). She recalled a scene when her

hands were shaking whilst in charge of pouring tea to her colleagues at a meeting: 'my hands were shaking…so I make excuse to my colleagues "Actually, I drank coffee this morning!"' (INT1).

The fact that her colleagues were older than her also played a role in her feeling oppressed and lacking in self-confidence. She described a conversation at lunch between her colleagues at the time of the Hong Kong student protests in the autumn of 2014. During this conversation, Yasmina said she had to remain silent because she 'would definitely have a hard time afterwards' (INT1). But having to be silent made her feel 'lonely' and 'ashamed' (INT1). She described her frustration as well as the 'generation gap' (INT3) that existed at work:

> My colleagues are [about] 40 something, that's why they have good living with sufficient materialistic support […] they just think that "Why do the students have to do this?" [As] a young person in the society, we have another interpretation and we want another life. It's not because we don't have much as they [do], it's what we think is important is different in comparison to them (INT1)

In her stories of work, Yasmina also seemed to experience some of the same socializing difficulties that she had faced during her university years. Her story about interacting online with her colleagues on WhatsApp illustrates her general uneasiness and lack of confidence when communicating with them; Yasmina expressed the feeling that it was because of her – because of her interacting inappropriately – that her colleagues stopped exchanging with her:

> Sometimes I don't know how to respond to my colleagues when they're just chit chatting, I feel so strange to bump into their discussions. I'm not sure my reaction [is] appropriate or will I just END (stressed word) … the discussions accidentally? (INT3)

Yet despite these doubts, Yasmina also described her work experience as being beneficial. She gave the impression that the problems she encountered were an opportunity for her to improve her work performance:

> It's really beneficial because I wasn't a person that capable of following step by step and execute or exercise the standards without flaws. I'm not that kind of person. But I'm trying my best because I see how my limitations extends and I think it's what the job's about in these two years (INT3)

The need for a 'step-by-step' approach is a recurring theme in Yasmina's stories of work; she described it as 'being passive' but remaining 'proactively in control':

> I think sometimes being self-controllable you can see a lot of things …it's a process of making observations. It's not being passive but you proactively control yourself […] I can observe …because when you observe and you're not proactively expressing yourselves you can see a lot more things sometimes (INT3)

In other words, Yasmina's strategy at work is to be patient and observe the situation, which seems to suggest she is someone who usually knows what she wants and who has a strategy to get it, instead of passively suffering in a difficult situation.

The next section presents Yasmina's ideas about Frenchness, which feed into understanding the meaning of French for her.

7.3 Yasmina's perceptions of France, French and Frenchness

Yasmina's perceptions of Frenchness seemed to largely derive from globally circulating images and discourses, and made reference to cultural products such as films as well as images from her experiences of visiting France.

A first perception which stands out in her story is the association of French culture with the notions of 'relaxed' and 'free', the two adjectives she chose to describe French culture in the second interview. The 'relaxed' notion appears in her choice of a photograph from the FRENCHINHK FB thread to explain how she perceives Frenchness. The scene is a café in Hong Kong where two people are seen sitting on a small outdoor terrace next to the pavement, waiting to be served food or drinks (see Figure 11 below).

18 January at 17:00 · Hong Kong
Café comme les Françaises

Figure 11: Posting in the FRENCHINHK FB group (18 Jan. 2016)

Yasmina first explained that this scene could not be in Hong Kong because it was not a Hong Kong thing to sit outdoors to relax, but she said it was how she perceived French people:

> For most HK yes they won't pick the outdoor to feel so relaxed! […] But in this kind of atmosphere, they [French people] show that they're SO (emphasized) relaxed with their cup of coffee or they chit chat with friends in an outdoor restaurant, like outdoor café … it's how French or French people they have in their life, everyday life. For example no matter what age the French is, you can see all walks of people they're having coffee outside the café, no matter gender, the age and they're showing, I think they're showing a kind of lifestyle, take it easy (INT2)

From this, another perception is that French culture involves being true to oneself or 'free' to be oneself. Her story of observing of French waiters whilst in France illustrates this:

> I had a really really strong (laugh) strong impression on the waiter in France. If they wanted to give you bitch face, they would really give you the bitch face. It's kind of « I don't really want to do it, but I have to do it so I give it to you ! » showing their real own self (INT2)

In Yasmina's reading of this experience, the French waiters do not care what their clients think about their behaviour and are simply behaving according to their moods – they are 'relaxed' even during their professional duty:

> Sometimes what I observe from the scenes in France is [that] you can't really stressed on everybody [anyone] to serve you and that's why people, everybody lives so relaxed in their way […] at least during my journey, I don't see people stressing on each other, to force each other to do something that they don't want to do and that's a kind of relaxedness, the origin of the relaxed atmosphere comes from (INT2)

For Yasmina then, being relaxed also means being free to be oneself. This idea was further illustrated in her choice of posting in the FRENCHINHK FB group. She chose an Internet meme

in both French and English picturing a dialogue between two people ('Say something sexy in French' 'Non!'; see Chapter 4, section 4.6.7) as another example of Frenchness for her:

> « Can you speak something sexy in French ? » and then the reply is « Non !», it sounds very French […] Yeah ! Like you're expressing something relax and yet you're relaxed and you're confirmed with what you're saying (INT2)

To further explain this perception that French people are true to themselves, Yasmina talked about two cultures she knows well: Hong Kong and Japanese cultures. In Hong Kong, she said that waiters behaved in a polite manner towards their customers even though they might not feel like it:

> But in HK, most of people, even if you don't want it, their common idea of how to deal with this kind of forced order, they would just smile and « yes, sure! (high-pitched voice) I can give it to you the next day » for example, to the boss (tone goes down) but after that, their real face (laugh) just pops up (laugh) yeah! (INT2)

Similarly, Yasmina said that in Japanese culture people needed to keep a tight control over their behaviour and described Japanese culture as 'stressful':

> It would be so stressful and very intense that life, if you are always thinking what others are expecting you to do or you're following the order so well, the social order so well (INT1)

As expected, Yasmina's perceptions of Frenchness also come from its association with art. Yasmina talked about French Nouvelle Vague film directors such as Jean-Luc Godard, Louis Malle, Jacques Demy and Francois Truffaut, explaining that what she liked in them was the new perspectives they offered, an idea reminiscent of her interest in the Japanese singer, Sheena Ringo. She mentioned how Malle's film 'Le Souffle au Coeur' ('Murmur of the Heart') inspired

her to consider mother-son relationships differently. Yasmina's impressions of Frenchness and French culture were also linked to the visual aspects of French movies:

> For Jean-Luc Godard, I always recall the seaside, I don't know why, the French coastline, it feels so relaxed and I don't know if it's one of the elements in Frenchness: the sea!... And very colourful from a film of Louis Malle… films like Playtime or The young girls from Rochefort […] and Zazie dans le Métro (laugh) very colourful film, very bright (INT2)

Further related impressions of French culture were developed during Yasmina's stay in France whilst studying French for three weeks in Nancy. When retelling her experience there, Yasmina recalled feelings of comfort and coziness as well as of peace and relaxation:

> I think in general, France this country provided a shelter to me, it makes me feel so (emphasised word) comfortable, so (emphasised word) peaceful and so (emphasised word) cozy and even [though] I had to follow the schedule assigned by the school I can still manage it and because I feel so relaxed I gained weight in France, just three weeks and [I] gained three pounds already (INT2)

This contrasted with some of her friends' experiences in France. For Yasmina, the experience was enjoyable because of the people she met and the relationship she felt she was having with French people:

> I don't know why (laugh) I think the French treat me very well in France… […] I don't know why French [are] really helpful… in my own experience compared to others people because other friends of mine will say some of the French experience of them, they think French are really arrogant and really ego-centered (INT1)

Although lacking proficiency in French and considering French a 'difficult' language (she described it as 'a kind of obstruction for people from other cultures'; INT2), this did not seem to affect her overall positive feeling towards France and French culture. The following excerpt

where she compares her experiences in France and Japan also suggests that she felt 'at ease' in France:

> I felt rather at ease in France by comparing to the experience in Japan […] Japan is really in good order, you live at ease because of the good order but in France, you live at ease because other people think about you (INT1)

To conclude, Yasmina's perceptions of French culture and of Frenchness were built mainly from circulating images of French culture (e.g., of a certain lifestyle, of a connection with the arts) as well as from her own experience and observations of French culture when she was in France. These perceptions were also built alongside other cultures in a relational manner.

Yasmina's relationship with French is further interpreted in the sections below.

7.4 Exploring the meaning of French with Yasmina

The general meaning of French for Yasmina is that her initial interest in learning languages (and French in particular) comes from an interest in exploring and understanding a culture in depth, as suggested in the excerpt below:

> Sometimes I think people just trying to stereotype the French elements […] … not talking in depth about Frenchness itself. I think it's somehow about how people respond or behave in the public area, how their activities and behaviours represent the Frenchness instead (INT2)

But Yasmina's story of learning French can also be interpreted as a process of identity construction, as presented in the sub-sections below.

7.4.1 Using French to assert her identity as an aesthetically and creatively- minded person

As already mentioned, Yasmina's interest in French appears in the study as being linked to her interest in aesthetics and the arts, although this interest is not limited to French arts. In the inquiry, the subject of art came back often. She talked about photography and cinema, museum visits in Kyoto and Paris, and a dance class in Taipei, as well as her intention to pursue museum studies in future.

Learning French presents a possibility for Yasmina to develop her sense of identity as an artistically-minded person because of the association – whether real or perceived – between French culture, creativity and aesthetics. In the interviews, Yasmina made reference to directors associated with the French Nouvelle Vague such as Jean-Luc Godard or François Truffaut. On the other hand, they are some of the best-known French cinematographers in the world so it is not surprising that Yasmina would have known about them after her course on cinema at university. However, mentioning these particular directors draws attention to something else which is important in Yasmina's story. These artists campaigned in the 1960s to redefine the film-making process as an art-making process, in contrast with the prevailing formulaic type of film-making practiced by studio-style Hollywood directors. In other words, they argued for films to be seen as works of art, and for film making to celebrate the creative voice of a director.

In drawing attention to these directors, Yasmina thus draws attention to the importance of individual artistic voices as well as to unique personalities. In music, Yasmina equally referred to French musicians who are well known for the strength and uniqueness of their artistic creations such as Serge Gainsbourg and Françoise Hardy. In Japanese music, Yasmina said she was

attracted to the singer Sheena Ringo because of her strong and independent artistic stance. Talking of Sheena Ringo's influence on her, Yasmina said that she was impressed by the way Ringo dared stand for what she believed in:

> You still need to have your own voice and it's not really shameful… to stand up for your own stand and I think that changes me (INT1)

7.4.2. Understanding her environment in the process of learning French and Japanese

As mentioned above, Yasmina finds in studying artists from French and Japanese cultures a path to explore and strengthen her own ideas and values. What the excerpt below also suggests is that understanding a culture is not helped by looking at the culture in isolation, but rather by looking at it in contrast to other cultures:

> Through learning [an] additional language like French or Japanese… I think (pause) it's a process like finding (pause) differences and similarities (INT1)

And this process of drawing 'differences and similarities' between cultures (between French and Japanese cultures in this case) also enables Yasmina to understand her own culture better, as expressed in the two excerpts below:

> Because actually when we are learning additional languages like French, actually we are not learning the language itself, we learn the history and their people […] they have their own philosophy, they'll have their own beliefs, and their thoughts actually provide another perspective that may be in contrast to your own life or similar to your own life (INT1)

> The similarities are that these two cultures [Japanese and French], they really treat art as national pride… I don't think that we [HK people] treat art really well […] I wonder why

> HK people didn't treat their own creativity so well… why didn't they value themselves but instead of looking to others and also state that others are better? (INT1)

The belief that Hong Kong people 'didn't treat their own creativity so well' surfaced in different ways in her stories. For example, Yasmina talked about her perception that Hong Kong undervalues its natural beauty. Although she said that Hong Kong had 'a lot of rare species of plants and flowers in the country parks' (INT1), it ignored them and preferred to copy or import natural beauties from other cultures. So although orchid trees (known as bauhinias) grow naturally in Hong Kong, the authorities prefer to plant mountain cherries (sakura in Japanese) to emulate the popular pink blossom scenes in Japan during springtime. To Yasmina, this lack of self-appreciation is a problem in Hong Kong culture:

> Why don't they treasure what they have? Instead of artificially planting… mountain cherries […] That makes me so curious: Why are you not treasuring what you have but instead you're just following and… I'm quite puzzled about this logic! (INT1)

In other words, through learning about other cultures and languages (including French), Yasmina gathers a better understanding of her own culture and of her own positioning within it. For example, Hong Kong is described as a place where people seem less free to express themselves in comparison with people in French culture, as expressed in the following excerpt:

> I think it's easier to express yourself in a free culture. Actually in HK, it seems so free! It seems so flexible for you to speak about anything, but in the end it's not the same (laugh), not this kind of free, there are a lot of hidden agendas, a lot of restrictions that you might not notice from… the first impressions but after that when you live into a group or you fit in into a working group or in a group of friends, you'll find the hidden code immediately (INT2)

In this way, Yasmina's interest in learning languages seems to be inextricable from how she feels about her own culture. The next paragraph highlights further how constricted she feels in her own culture and how better able to express herself she feels when using foreign languages.

7.4.3 Learning French and Japanese in response to the constraints of her environment

When we discussed differences and similitudes between Hong Kong and French cultures, Yasmina described her difficulties in the Hong Kong environment, as follows:

> Me: So you're saying fast… changing [the Hong Kong environment]
> Y: Yeah, you can't [take] everything so seriously.
> Me: So how do you fit in that?
> Y: It's hard.
> Me: Yeah? Why is it hard?
> Y: Because I'm not a really quick-paced person. But you have to adapt with this kind of working environment this kind of attitude otherwise you…I'm not saying that you'll get bullied, but you'll be considered as an outcast in this society, or in the working environment. And you will have more difficulties to work with people.
> Me: So if I asked you what <u>does</u> (emphasized) bother you the most? What bothers you the <u>most</u> (emphasized) in Hong Kong culture? What would you say?
> Y: <u>Double standard</u> (emphasized)
> Me: Double standard? Can you explain that?
> Y: They're praising personality but actually they're not. People are praising for unique personality, but actually…while you're working they don't praise for that. They don't really value on unique personality.
> Me: You mean people who don't fit the mold, who are a bit different?
> Y: Yes
> Me: More creative perhaps?
> Y: Yes.
> Me: So they say they value those people? But in reality…
> Y: They aren't. Sometimes the standard are created for people to follow […] people are following that standard, people blame each other for following that standard, blaming that people are not creative enough. Like the Hong Kong parents they're forcing their kids to learn a lot of things to learn a lot of extracurricular activities like drawing, dancing in ballet, play instruments, learning drawing lessons […] they wanted their kids to be multifaceted, they wanted them to have more bargaining power or challenge or to be more competitive. But actually, they don't really they don't really have interest on these [creative] activities (INT3)

In this exchange – in which Yasmina seemed to be mainly referring to her work environment – there is a clear sense that she experiences difficulties in fitting into the Hong Kong environment. This seems to be because Yasmina cannot express herself creatively in this culture and because she is alienated by the pressure to conform. During the inquiry, she referred several times to how conformist and suspicious of different behaviours, her Hong Kong colleagues were:

> That senior manager on first day of my job, she emphasized mainly on common sense… this word… which makes me rethink, what is common sense? […] If your behaviour's out of their expectations they think you are out of the box of common sense so they might discriminate you (INT3)

> Me: So what you're saying is that not everybody has the same common sense?
> Y: Of course I don't think so! (INT3)

Her description of the Hong Kong environment also contained stories about her communication problems with people in the workplace. Yasmina suggested that the pressure to conform in Hong Kong society was a major reason for her difficulties in socializing with her colleagues:

> When you live into a group or you fit in into a working group or in a group of friends, you'll find the hidden code immediately (small laugh) ! When you speak of something they thought « Oh it's so awkward ! » or « We don't say this, we won't say that ! » and we try to not, to talk about some sensible euh sensitive, sensitive political issues for example. […] and I feel so so so (laugh) awkward and then I… OK I just don't talk about these issues anymore, and euh it's not free to speak about it (INT2)

Her feeling of unease was so strong that she even felt inadequate when using her own language, Cantonese, especially with her seniors at work:

> Me: [but] you're fluent in Cantonese?
>
> Y: Yes… I don't think so! Even in workplace, I sometimes I can't restructure Cantonese. I have problems (laugh) in speaking (laugh) ... in reporting the issue to my boss in Cantonese […] sometimes I blame myself for being so nervous, speak to a senior grade. Sometimes (emphasized) (INT3)

In the excerpts below, Yasmina further described her communication in Cantonese as 'robot-recording like', contrasting this with moments when she felt more relaxed and more lively using English:

> It's like a robot…when you're repeating that Cantonese phrase. "請進,euh 拎左 ((Cantonese phrase))" […] but in English I don't know why I spoke it more differently and confidently […] It's…more lively, rather than a really robot recording-like announcements (INT3)

> When I speak in English, the whole person is different… from me speaking Cantonese, it's totally different! […] I think when I speak English I would be more and more relaxed […] I think I get this job in because I did the English interview well instead of getting (laugh) … yeah because I would be very very nervous in speaking Cantonese, I don't know why (INT2)

Thus, part of the appeal of a foreign language is that there is less pressure to conform and more scope to express her views freely, as suggested in this excerpt:

> Sometimes I can make friends with people from different cultures but not from really local HK […] Sometimes they think I'm too serious on certain kind of things or some topics but I think I can make fun of some issues or speak or to make some jokes but not every moment I guess […] Because they think you don't want to be in a group, they think that you're over independent and not fit in their world (INT3)

Also, in a foreign language Yasmina feels on an equal footing with other Hong Kong people. For example, English is described as the key for Yasmina's success in getting her job: 'I think I get this job because I did the English interview well' (INT2).

The same feelings of ease of communication were described in relation to French. For example, Yasmina described her use of French in France as unproblematic as well as enjoyable, even though in conventional terms she is a beginner:

> Throughout the summer exchange programme in Nancy, I could make good use of vocabularies in daily lives that acquired from the semester course, from taking basic meal orders in restaurant to asking fare in transportation and travelling directions… Despite an unobvious improvement in French, my confidence to speak in a French environment was strengthen even there is room for mastering the language fluently. (LLH)

The same liberating effect was further illustrated in her interpretation of the 'bitch-faced' French waiter scene mentioned above in section 7.3. For Yasmina, this was an expression of carefree attitudes of honesty and truth to self, which made her reflect that it would be easier to express a 'kind of truth' about herself and be more 'honest' to herself in French:

> Me: So is this something that you that you find attractive in life [to be like the bitch-faced waiter]?
>
> Y: Yeah a kind of carefree in life because you're really speaking about yourself, because at that moment you don't want to do something you just speak directly and « I don't want to do that thing» and it's kind of truth and it's representing your own self. But in HK, most of people, even if you don't want it, their common idea of how to deal with this kind of forced order, they would just smile and « yes, sure! (high pitched voice) I can give it… to you… the next day » for example, to the boss (tone goes down) but after that, their real face (laugh) just pops up (laugh) yeah!
>
> Me: Ok. Would you like to be like this more? Would you like to live like this in this carefree manner more?
>
> Y: At least to be honest I guess (INT2)

Thus, part of the appeal of French in Yasmina's story is linked to the pressure to conform in Hong Kong as well as a sense of failure (and fear) in expressing her ideas and opinions directly in her own culture. By contrast, Yasmina feels able to create spaces for carefree expression in

foreign languages (including in French). It seems that she makes a connection between her difficulties in expressing herself correctly in Cantonese and her early childhood memories, when she was rejected by several kindergartens because she could not pass the entrance test in this language. She wrote in her LLH about this experience:

> The fear of not speaking my mind in concrete expression lies under failures of communication in a young age. (LLH)

However, in the inquiry, I also developed the sense that Yasmina's concern about expressing herself directly was linked to what was happening in Hong Kong at the wider sociopolitical level. She referred to how she had felt voiceless and useless at a luncheon where her colleagues discussed the 2014 student political movement (see section 7.2 above). She also mentioned the Cantonese forum HKGolden as something Hong Kong people used to express their views freely through language play:

> It's really local, it's full of foul language but they have a filtered version, they filtered every four letter word or the foul language into some kinds of phrase… which is nonsense… this would be a really lively example like for example, pardon my language, « fuck your mother! »… in HK, in Cantonese say « …. » (Cantonese words spoken in a low voice), it becomes « Hi aunty! » (INT2)

In the next paragraph, I will look in more detail at Yasmina's practices of French, further illustrating how she finds meaning in using French even at a beginner level.

7.4.4 Performing her identity with the help of French online

In her TLR, Yasmina said she used French rarely, but nonetheless reported having written 'quite a few posts with French words' on social media. Several Facebook postings were captured in her

TLR to illustrate her use of French, with explanations as to how and why she was using French in these instances.

First, Yasmina explained that the use of images and words in combination (such as the one shown in Figure 10, p. 223) could create 'another possibility for the language itself' (INT2). In effect, the meaning of the familiar phrases *bonsoir* and *chez moi,* combined with English words, striking imagery and visual devices such as the use of lower-case letters, seems to take on a different meaning. They also become a personalized and individual creation. Yasmina said that it was through this creation that she chose to share the idea of Frenchness with her friends so that they could also experience it for themselves:

> I think it actually creates another possibility of the language itself… because every time you express it in a foreign language, you're representing a facet of the language and the culture itself […] actually it's creating a possibility to understand French […] to show them [her Facebook friends] or display a facet of the language and the French culture (INT2)

And as Yasmina also explained, the aim is not to 'understand' French in the caption, but to let readers be carried by the instinctive experience of Frenchness she is providing to them through her association of visuals, colours (black and white here as shown in Figure 10, p. 223) and carefully-chosen words, which somewhat seem to recreate the characteristics of a zen moment. In the IRT meeting, Yasmina suggested that when she used French on social media she was using it in a similar way to an artist ('similar to put paint on a canvas'; IRT meeting). Presumably, too, 'bonsoir' and 'chez moi' are widely circulated images of French and might be known by the readers of the posting anyway. But in the inquiry, Yasmina also suggested that people did not need to know foreign languages since with Google Translate at the ready when using social media, there was no need. In her TLR, Yasmina mentioned a Facebook posting in

which she introduced a song video (entitled 'Quiet Night Of Quiet Stars') in Chinese, English and French (*Merci mon ami, beaucoup beaucoup.*). She explained that she communicated with a friend via Google Translate underneath the post because he did not know any French. In other words, the French words were irrelevant, but were still meaningful in that they succeeded in conveying an emotion, with an attitude, to a select audience.

Yasmina sees in additional languages a way to express herself playfully and creatively. She thinks of language in terms of atmospheres, feelings, visuals and actions more than in terms of textual meaning:

> So I think sometimes the word itself is associated with the atmosphere, the feeling and also including some kind of actions (INT2)

In addition, Yasmina found in French 'a mystery key' (INT2). She mentioned that posting status updates in a lesser-known language enabled her to hide (or make less accessible) the full meaning of what she was trying to communicate:

> Sometimes knowing a language that is hard to translate is somehow beneficial in keeping secrets (TLR)

Also, French was used as a code for mutual recognition amongst members of a group. In the excerpt below, a semi-private communication space seems to be created between the classmates who shared the French learning experience in Nancy:

> It creates a private space to me and a particular group of people especially the with the French classmates or the friends at [university], we learned French together, we can recall some kinds of memories and some of the others won't know it […] it creates a certain kind of privacy or a private corner amongst friends (INT2)

In addition, it seems that learning or using French gives Yasmina the possibility to express her artistically and aesthetically-minded sense of self in a way that was different from other languages. In the excerpt below, she suggested that it was easier to free her imagination in French and English because they were associated with colourful images and poetry, compared with Mandarin Chinese or Cantonese which conveyed more 'simple' images as well as being linked to different kinds of atmospheres:

> Me: How is that different to Cantonese or English because there is poetry as well in English words, Cantonese or Chinese? Why not? What is different about using French? Why would it be more poetic?
>
> Y: Because as I studied Chinese literature in secondary [school] I think… it's from a different kind of atmosphere. For English I think it's really imaginative, very colourful, when you write the poetry in English, it's full of pictures, it's really colourful but for Chinese it's kind of like a Chinese painting very simplified […] for French it's poetic, it's somehow associated with the pronunciations and how when you speak [and] when you read poetry in English, the accents create a kind of atmosphere, and imaginative idea… imagination or a space to the audience but for French I think the pronunciations or the… the linkage between the words…
>
> Me : Yeah but when you write on Facebook, there is no sound
>
> Y : Yes. But people can still pronounce it… if if the audience or the reader, they understand English somehow they can still pronounce it … although it's not really a formal way but I think they can still pronounce it….because I write really simple French and it's a really genuine French and I think, most of them, if you Google Translate it you would get the meaning.' (INT2)

This also suggests Yasmina's appreciation of the expressive and semiotic potential of different languages, even if they are not well known by her.

To conclude, Yasmina's practices of learning and using French can be described as a form of self-expression as well as a response to the limitations of her environment, for example in terms of creativity. In the following excerpt, Yasmina refers to her need to explore her 'sensibility',

which I interpreted as referring to her deeper (and possibly hidden) personal thoughts and emotions:

> To learn various languages to understand how to express as much as a way to explore the sentimentality in myself. (LLH)

However, Yasmina's narrative also suggested that French and other foreign languages are not merely learned and used as a reaction against the constraints of the Hong Kong context. Her stories suggested a more complex interpretation, as I will explain in the next section.

7.4.5 Learning foreign languages as a way to reconcile with the local environment

It would be an oversimplification to conclude that foreign language learning – such as French learning – was mainly driven by struggle with the environment in Yasmina's story. When I asked Yasmina if she used foreign language learning as a way to escape her environment, she found this interpretation too simplistic. From her comments and our discussions another story emerged. This new story includes the notion that Yasmina finds in language learning a way to step back from her environment before going back to it with new ideas and a conciliatory mindset:

> Y: … I don't know is learning another additional language as a way to escape from the current culture that I am living with (pause) […] when I don't understand the mother tongue or the language that I use every day which means I don't understand cultures I have been living with, I am finding some other perspectives or some other alternatives of living through learning languages…'
> Me: So to summarize… it helps you… maybe decode your own culture by understanding another culture? It helps you understand your own culture?
> Y: Yes, you may say so.
> Me: And another point perhaps, it helps you to have a voice?
> Y: To speak up my mind […] and at the same time, I am not standing against… […] because I just want to speak my voice… but I don't want to… […] to have your own

> opinions but you are not violating others' beliefs […] both parties are really communicating and try to understand each other (INT1)

In this exchange, Yasmina suggested her ever-present intention to go back to her environment with the intention to find a way to deal with it. Her comments show that even if she wants to learn to 'speak up her own mind' (or express herself better, as highlighted in section 7.4.3) in her environment, she also wants to try to keep a harmonious relationship with it. For example, if her Hong Kong colleagues had a certain idea of what 'common sense' should be, Yasmina did not mean to impose her own version of common sense onto them; what she hoped for instead was for a dialogue to be established between them and her in which both parties' ideas could be heard and respected (not 'violating others' beliefs'). In other words, Yasmina simultaneously hopes to make peace with her environment (for example with her colleagues) and increase her ability to make her voice heard by others.

At this point, French seemed quite distant in her story. During the inquiry, Yasmina had first described the significance of her French trip in terms of being able to 'explore some possibilities of new self', even though she also suggested that the effects might be short-lived:

> I think in France… I think in the journey, sometimes I explored some possibilities of new self in me but of course a short-term one or a temporary one but you would be surprised that actually you would have this side in your personality which you didn't expect and I think that's how the journey meant to me ok always explore the possibilities on myself (INT2)

In the IRT meeting, she further explained that although she did not deny that France and Europe had an impact on her ('impact happened'), it was 'hard to change the long-term self because after all it's about how a person evolves in society' (IRT meeting). This seemed to suggest that she

felt there was no escape from the constraints of her own environment: ‘like a Japanese, I follow the rules’ (IRT meeting).

Yet being engaged in finding her place in her society did not preclude the possibility of change. Another meaning of learning languages in her story is that it maintains the imaginative possibility of a different self in the future, a point I will develop in the next section.

7.4.6 Maintaining the possibility of a different self in the future

In the IRT meeting, Yasmina said that some things had changed since her return from Europe:

> I brought this short-term self to Hong Kong […] [The trip] influenced me and encouraged me to keep myself (IRT meeting)

By ‘keeping herself’, Yasmina suggests a desire to keep in touch with her new self in an environment where she might lose track of it because of constraints and impositions. For example, in the IRT meeting, Yasmina talked about having to keep ‘a balance between two mindsets’: the mindset she was obliged to espouse at work and the mindset she could nurture outside work:

> I mentioned before that I am learning to pick up some obligations and responsibilities and I wouldn’t mind… I would like to try some new experience in future because I think I don’t want to be stuck… in this kind of work situation or in this kind of living situations… (INT1)

Although this excerpt refers to constraints, it also refers to the possibility of change in the expression ‘I don’t want to be stuck’. In a comment Yasmina made in relation to Japanese

culture, she expressed her worries about how conformity might remove any possibility of making changes by exhausting the courage needed to effect change:

> If you are always thinking what others are expecting you to do or you're following the order so well the social order so well, you won't find a way to change something if you want to change something because you're discouraged by others, you're even discouraged by yourself… you don't believe you can make change (INT1)

In comparison with Japanese culture, French culture was perceived as more free and less conformist. In the IRT meeting Yasmina said that what she liked most about the bitch-faced waiter (see sections 7.3 and 7.4.3 above) was his 'confidence'. The following excerpt suggests that she found in her perceptions of Frenchness the inspiration to shake off conformity and to be a more truthful version of herself:

> Me: […] if you could speak French fluently, how would it change your life?
> Y: (pause) euh…
> Me: have you thought about that?
> Y: to be more bitch-faced.
> Me: (laugh)
> […]
> Me: hmmm. So in other words knowing French would allow you to…to be… euh…
> Y: true…. to be more natural or truly to myself.
> Me: hmmm
> Y: I don't have to always keep smiling actually it's quite tiring (laugh)! (INT3)

In other words, perceptions of Frenchness can be seen as a way to expand the possibilities of self while remaining connected with her environment. In the excerpt below, she described her self as living 'in the middle' of French and Japanese cultures, but also as someone fully aware of her own needs and desires:

> Me: So which societies could you see yourself living in?
>
> Y: I think I am living really in the middle [of Japanese and French cultures] […] Yeah, I always go between extremes and at the current stage, I'm in the middle because I'm sort of learning how to deal with the institution but at the same time I really care about people and also myself' (INT1)

This notion of taking care of her own needs and desires was also present in Yasmina's description of her identity:

> My identity! (pause) Because… my parents had a really extraordinary life, former life, so I don't think my identity be refrained from geography, not being restrained by culture… by what culture I mean (pause) I think my identity is formed through how I express myself indeed […] I prefer to identify myself as an art lover, a person who's passionate in learning languages I think this kind of traits are more significant in explaining identity because it's after all about yourself, about your interest, your attitude maybe! It's about culture but it's not refrained from cultures. And that's what I mean because I don't want to limit the identification of a self being limited by just nationality for example I gotta be a BNO passport, or I gotta be a HKSAR passport, it's not just (pause) about these physical things! (INT3)

In this description, Yasmina again suggests the idea that she does not want to be trapped ('refrained') by the impositions of a societal system or of national identity. She wants to be free to explore and exploit her interests and her inspirations from many sources, including from other cultures. Her interest in languages is long lasting because of the doors they open to other possibilities of self. When I asked Yasmina if she thought she might eventually give up learning some of her languages, she answered that she would not:

> I have never thought of giving up learning a language, to be honest (INT2)
> Me: is it possible that you might give up on French?
> Y: NO! (stressed word)
> Me: No?
> Y: I don't know why I have that certainty, like study Japanese (laugh) I never gave up […] and I'm going to have my Japanese lesson on Saturday again (INT3)

7.5. The meaning of French in Yasmina's story

Yasmina's story of learning French revealed several aspects. First, French could be seen as a way to express her identity as an artistically and aesthetically-minded creative person. Then, French learning enabled her to express her own ideas and compensate for the feeling of not being able to do so easily in Cantonese, particularly in the workplace among her peers. The study also suggested that Yasmina's perceptions of Frenchness helped her identify what mattered to her (she did not want to get trapped in her culture) and how she would like to be as a person (for example, 'more bitch-faced' i.e. more assertive and less dependent on conventions and norms).

Also, in Yasmina's narrative, learning French is not about acculturation in the sense of trying to make herself more French. Learning and using French serves to create some distance from her own culture, but these new perspectives enable her to find ways to deal with her own environment. In her case, this meant finding a way to make her voice count at work, but in a conciliatory and non-threatening way.

Chapter 8 IC

Figure 12: IC's posting in the FRENCHINHK FB group (4 October 2015)

Figure 13: IC's posting in the FRENCHINHK FB group (31 October 2015)

8.1 IC and I

IC was 27 years old at the start of the inquiry. I met IC for the first time in the academic year of 2006-2007 when she enrolled in my French beginner classes during the second year of an undergraduate degree in English at a local university.

My first meeting with IC for the inquiry was on 16 May 2015. We had not seen each other for a long time, but had been keeping in touch via Facebook. I knew, for example, that she had recently been to Italy on holiday and to London for work. I had commented a couple of times on her FB postings, and she had responded from time to time. IC had chosen to meet in one of the shops of the company she worked for, but we then moved to an outdoor area which was quieter. Sitting down with refreshments, we talked for one and a half hours without further interruption. Before starting the interview, we exchanged news about her former university. IC was keeping in touch with a retired professor there and knew about the latest news.

On seeing the way she addressed the staff at the shop, my first impression of IC after having seen her only once since she graduated from university in 2008 was how much she had matured and developed her professional self. She seemed outgoing and confident, and our conversation developed easily. At the end of the interview, during the debriefing when I asked her about her experience of the interview, she said that it was very interesting for her because I was asking her questions (such as "Where do you see yourself in 10 years' time?") which she now asks others when she recruits staff for her company. She also commented that it was interesting to look back at events in her life and to realize how much she had accomplished.

Our second meeting was on 20 February 2016 and lasted for more than two hours, which was longer than I had planned. IC said she did not mind, that her whole afternoon was free and that she was happy to see me. Chinese New Year celebrations were still going on, and IC was going to a big family gathering after the interview, hoping to receive some more lai see (traditional money gifts presented in red packets). We met in the lobby of a hotel I had suggested, and over tea and cakes I caught up with her work news and learned how busy she was. She was about to travel to the U.K. for a period of training and was then planning to visit Iceland with a friend to see the northern lights. Also, on her agenda was Shanghai in May. She said she was happy about these plans. It was clear that she was feeling professionally fulfilled in her job and that she was happy with her progression in the company.

Our third interview was on 29 May 2016 and lasted a little more than one hour around brunch in a café called "Câfé Causette", known for its French pâtisseries. The venue was IC's suggestion this time. Before settling for the interview, we talked about her dad's health and then about her job. She had been away from Hong Kong for about a month, first to London for a week's training in April, then to Rome, Denmark and Iceland for leisure, and had also spent time in Shanghai training the company's staff there. During this conversation, I once more noted IC's interest in the study. At the end of our interviews, she would ask about the progress of the research and about my findings. She said that she was interested to see where the research would lead and what it might reveal, and that she was happy to help me with it.

8.2 IC's stories: childhood, secondary school, university and work

Family

IC was born in Hong Kong in a Cantonese-speaking family. I initially had the impression that her parents had been born in Hong Kong, probably because Hong Kong was a recurring theme in IC's story, but in an email she told me that her father had migrated to Hong Kong from Guangdong province when he was young, after the Chinese civil war. Like many Chinese immigrants who arrived in Hong Kong at that time, he found life very difficult: 'He [IC's father] retold his story like he was so poor at that time that he needed to eat wood-skin!' (email response, 6 May 2018). IC's mother had also come from outside Hong Kong (Macau) with her family, but her family felt it belonged to Hong Kong:

> So strictly speaking none of my parents are born in Hong Kong but they lived and grew here for long. (email response, 6 May 2018)

Learning languages at primary school

What was striking in IC's stories was the contrast between her experience of learning English at school and at home. She talked at length about how she had loved her English learning activities at home, such as watching the children's TV programme 'Sesame Street' and practicing English with her sister. Regarding Sesame Street, she wrote that she couldn't finish her homework fast enough because all she wanted to do was watch her favorite cartoon show:

> I switched on the TV, turned to TVB Pearl, and waited until I could hear the song "how to get to Sesame Street..." I don't know when I was hooked on this but I was surely fascinated by the characters and the songs, even though I had no idea on what the characters are talking (or singing) at that time. (LLH)

A large part of her motivation to learn English was to try to understand what the characters in the show were saying:

> I can say the show aroused my interest in bettering my English, so that I can finally understand what they are saying. (LLH)

English games with her elder sister were another source of motivation. Her sister, who was ten years old at the time, had the responsibility to help IC with her studies as their parents did not know English. IC and her sister ('a top student at all times' and a 'good teacher', LLH) shared the same interest in English, but whilst IC was engrossed with Sesame Street her sister liked 'Pride and Prejudice' from the BBC: 'she [IC's sister] has the whole set of books in VHS video tapes recorded from TVB Pearl' (LLH).

The two girls created English dialogues and role-plays based on their preferred programmes using a 'family' of soft toys (INT1) to give voice to their characters. IC would play the characters in Sesame Street whilst her sister would try 'to copy from Pride and Prejudice […] Mr. Darcy or something else' (INT1). IC brought her favorite toy ('Frightened Bear') to the first interview as a souvenir of her home language learning activities, explaining that 'Frightened Bear' personified her 'side' – which is to say her views and opinions – whilst her sister used other soft toy characters to express her own views and opinions. In her LLH, IC described how meaningful these games had been for her and how they spurred her motivation to learn English:

> I will probably say the passion to learning language (and creativity I guess) largely came from the time we spent at home - playing with the stuffed toys. Every night we will have our own stuffed toys - with different character and with each other - and did role-play having daily conversation - all in English. […] This was the happy moment I had before my bedtime - and surprisingly I didn't take English a burden during play. (LLH)

Apart from being fun, these creative activities seemed to have also increased IC's confidence in speaking English although she said they had 'minimal influence' on her English results at school:

> Though such habit has minimal influence on my English (as reflected by school exams), I still enjoyed this regardless how much effort I put into understanding what Elmo and Cookie monster were arguing, or how Ernie and Bert make their reconciliation after a stupid misunderstanding of each other. (LLH)

The importance of these games for IC also seemed to have been that she was able to experiment with English away from critical and judging eyes (such as those of her classmates and teachers at school), as suggested below:

> I am not confident in speaking in English in public but I was able to use English freely at home - that's what I would conclude myself the confidence built up from. (LLH)

This contrasted with IC's descriptions of learning English at school. She talked about unimaginative 'duck feeding' activities:

> It's duck feeding. Textbooks. First half, vocabularies for this chapter. Part B, grammar. Part C some reading exercise. Part D, it's a comprehension, it's a fill-in the blanks, try to make use of what you learned into this chapter into one passage, stuff like this. Supplementary exercise would be a small book bought from… I don't know where it is, it's called P.E.U., Practical English Usage book, full of grammar exercise, you have a grammar table, you have to do a dictation on grammar table every week and… yeah and try to memorise every vocabulary, you have to learn the spelling… (INT1)

Homework also consisted of 'copying sentence or simpler log guessing in grammar questions, as similar to other conventional duck-feeding primary schools' (LLH) whilst at home, her sister would drill grammar and vocabulary content to help her meet the school accuracy targets: 'my sister trained me to get 100% in my dictation as well' (INT1).

When I asked IC about her feeling towards this manner of learning languages, she answered that it was 'tiring' and 'exhausting'. In her LLH, she suggested not much intelligence was needed to complete the work:

> As long as you know the trick then you just put yourself into spelling or vocabularies and you put yourself into memorizing the whole passage, it's done (INT1)

Despite these seemingly negative perceptions, IC also saw a use in these activities. She said they provided a necessary 'base' (INT1) and a 'more systematic way' (INT1) of learning a language. In other words, although they were 'boring', they were a 'must-process' (IRT meeting), which is to say a necessary (though painful) part of English learning.

Secondary school

At secondary school, IC met a high school teacher with whom she still keeps in touch. In her story, this teacher is a role model, someone who inspired her, who shared 'a lot of thinking' with her (INT1).

IC's initial idea was to study graphic design, but she changed her mind and decided to study English. The reason for this change seemed to have been her teacher's advice, which was that 'if you study language you can do whatever you want as long as you can express yourself freely' (INT1).

Also during her secondary school years – perhaps as a result of her teacher's positive influence on her – IC became a dedicated self-learner. Her summers were spent mainly at the public library, gathering knowledge on a variety of topics (such as web design, Japanese, astrology and

feng shui) and following a tough schedule, which demonstrates dedication to learn and to develop herself:

> … during the two months summer holiday I used to go to the library, pick a topic every year so one year, I study about horoscope which is very funny, one year I study about website building (INT1)

> so when I get up around 10 or 11 I have my late lunch and I spend the whole afternoon on that particular topic and until 5pm, I watch my cartoon and then, dinner and then after dinner when I have time I play with my sister with my toys, if not then I would keep reading books or design my website. Yes. (INT1)

University

IC approached her university years in much the same way as she had approached self-learning during her secondary school days, which is to say with the intention for these years to be rich in experiences and knowledge and above all, meaningful to herself:

> During the three-year studies in the uni I didn't put a lot of effort in studying, instead i wanted to explore myself more in other aspect, like social skills or aesthetic interests. (LLH)

Apart from courses for her English major, IC enrolled in a cinema course as well as a French beginner course. She decided to study French after considering several aspects: first, she looked at the fact that it was less commonly learned than Japanese in Hong Kong; then, she acted upon the recommendation of a friend of hers who had learned it; finally, she felt it complemented her cinema course and corresponded with her idea that 'university time is the time to expose yourself more' (INT1).

Her experience of learning French was described as greatly different from the way she had learned English at school. She recalled a particular class assignment, for which she had to prepare an oral presentation in English on an aspect of French culture, which made her realize that learning a language involved more than just learning linguistic content:

> … when I start doing that presentation [she chose to present François Truffaut's movie, Les 400 coups i.e. '400 Blows'] I start thinking actually learning a language is not something only about a technical thing, it's not something about remembering about masculine or feminine form, it's something about the culture itself (INT1)

Her intensive summer course at Alliance Française (AF), Paris, at the end of her second year at university continued this interest in learning French through learning about the culture:

> I deeply believe that the more into the culture you will learn the language naturally (INT1)

IC's experience of studying French came to an end when she graduated. She has not undertaken further learning activities, whether formal or informal, since. In other words, her story is that of a French learner whose last formal French learning activities took place ten years before the inquiry.

First jobs: relishing international exposure

After graduating in June 2008, IC found employment in a popular and well-established Japanese supplementary education provider in Hong Kong where she worked first as teaching assistant and then as corporate trainer. At the same time, she also studied part-time for an M.A. in Language Studies at a Hong Kong university. She obtained her post-graduate degree in 2013.

After this, IC found a job with a well-known international food chain based in the UK, becoming responsible for recruiting new staff and training them to follow safety and hygiene regulations. During the inquiry, her job responsibilities also involved implementing an e-training platform as well as monitoring training in the Hong Kong and Shanghai shops. Her own training took her several times to the London headquarters, where she met her international colleagues. Although work was busy, IC seemed to be enjoying herself. Throughout the inquiry, it was obvious that she relished the opportunities she was given to expand her horizons whilst travelling abroad for work:

> I met people from Spain, from Italian from British, Scotland…Mexico, a lot of different people but I think they're more or less the same they are all friendly, they are all nice and, whenever you are true to them they must be in return true to you so I think, the formula is the same so there is no such there is no such thing about different nationality will have different reactions or comments (INT2)

Whilst IC was meeting people from different cultures, gaining a new understanding of the world, her family continued to live a local Hong Kong life. IC began to perceive the contrast with a more 'localized' sister:

> Compared with me she [her sister] has a relatively… not limited but her social life is more localized because I [am] used [to] hang out with different people, my friends, my boss is Chinglish and my colleagues are from somewhere else but where she works, it's an international company but the colleagues are local people so perhaps her personality or her cultural diversity or… oh her exposure is relatively more limited (INT1)

Her sister's lack of 'international exposure' became more visible to IC when her sister accompanied her to London on one of her business trips. IC realized through her sister's eyes the 'big variance, diversity between local Chinese and Western style' (INT1) and how far she herself had gone in clearing 'some misunderstanding or some misconceptions about Western people'

(INT1). For example, IC had changed her perception about her British manager's habit of starting the day by chatting about personal things before settling down to work:

> it's good to start with something non-work because they [managers] will feel more relaxed to talk about work later on they will [be] less oppose[d] to the things you are trying to bring them (INT3)

In the second interview, IC talked of her cultural awareness as a 'breakthrough' because she now felt on 'equal footing' with foreigners and needed 'no more [to] be afraid of meeting people with different nationalities':

> It's a breakthrough process I think from the beginning I start joining this company and up till now (INT2)

Also, as a result of contact with people from different cultural backgrounds, IC said she had become less distant and less incisive in her manner of saying things, which was something she had been criticized for in the past: 'I know that when people didn't come close to me they will think I am cool, distant, not very friendly somehow so I'm trying to adjust myself little bit so keep smiling, say hi!' (INT1).

To summarise, IC's early jobs gave her the opportunity to continue the process of developing herself and gaining a new understanding of the world. In this process, she developed a different relationship with her own culture and became more open to different views:

> I'm not a Chinese traditional person yeah… I'm quite o-p-e-n (said slowly) in terms of thoughts yeah positively I'm open to change (INT1)

But during the IRT meeting, IC announced to me that she had changed job and was now working for a local Hong Kong company where ninety-nine percent of the staff were local Chinese and where there was no need (at least for the time being) to use English. When I first heard about it, I saw this move as difficult to reconcile with the rest of IC's narrative and wondered what had happened during the time between the third interview (on 29 May 2016) and the IRT meeting (on 3 Sep. 2017). As the inquiry progressed, I learned this decision was not the consequence of one event or one action, but rather had a number of causative factors.

8.3 Tensions in IC's life

During the IRT meeting, IC told me that she had found a new job as corporate trainer in a large Hong Kong company. This meant that she would not travel abroad anymore and that she had to adjust to working in an entirely Chinese team ('if you talk about your personal life [at work] it may become gossip… you might be attacked', IRT meeting). I was a little surprised, but when I thought about this further, I realized that IC's stories had contained a lot of uncertainty regarding her ability to become fully accepted in a western or international team. Also, her stories had revealed insecurity regarding recent changes in the Hong Kong sociopolitical context, as will be explained in the paragraphs below.

8.3.1 Changing perceptions of herself in a western environment

During the inquiry, the way IC talked about her social experience with her colleagues during her stays in London suggested some challenges in adapting to a new cultural environment, as suggested in the excerpt below:

> I can still see myself not as talkative as the other European… so when I was in London the team organize a drink party for me which is very appreciated and we start drinking and I don't know it's just they are just naturally talking to each other quite easily and I am observing this (laugh) […] and every people is listening… and the people look very interest[ed] (laugh) (INT3)

In comparison with her European colleagues, IC felt uncomfortable talking about herself when socializing, which made her feel insecure:

> I may not be confident to talk about something very personal that make people interested to listen to me further (INT3)

She explained that whenever she tried to imitate her western colleagues' ways of talking up their lives ('it's seems that they are having a very rich personal life', INT3), her efforts seemed to fall flat. For example, she recalled telling her colleagues about how her dad had bought her a can of beer when she was five or six years old and how this had been badly perceived:

> … and I share about this and then I ask… "would you let your kids start drinking when they are very small ?" […] and then they just felt that "are all Chinese like this?" (laughs) […] and they start talking about they won't let their kids drink they will go to a pub still but they drink apple juice (INT3)

After several experiences of trying but falling short of creating the right sort of effect and instead feeling misunderstood and awkward, she came to the conclusion that she could not describe things in a 'very entertaining way' (INT3) with enough details 'to intrigue' westerners (IRT meeting). In other words, when socializing with westerners, IC always felt a little tense and on her guard.

As a result, it seems that she began to doubt her ability to fit into what she perceives to be 'western culture', as reflected in the excerpt below:

> I'm just thinking if my personality is still really outgoing enough to be working in a very diversified culture, I'm quite not sure because every people looks like very outgoing sociable you know drinking and can communicate quite confidently but I'm yeah I'm still hesit[ant] whether I can be really that kind of person when I really work overseas (INT2)

By contrast, life in Hong Kong seemed to compare favorably:

> … because I'm in the place that I born, so I can be very comfy, and I can be very confident, talking, communicating (INT2)

In Hong Kong, she felt she did not need to adapt to other cultures and would find it easier to have a normal social life. IC described the challenges of creating a social life abroad:

> you have to meet new friends you have to build your social network, you need to gain support from others sometimes you need to ask for support so…there are a number of challenges I can foresee (INT2)

IC's concern about her ability to adapt to other cultures also appeared when she asked me about my own experience of adapting to Hong Kong. Our conversation developed as follows:

> IC: … is that what you … encounter[ed] when you first in Hong Kong (laughs)?
>
> Me: yeah I… because I it's a little different for me because I…when I came to Hong Kong… so I have been here eleven years but before that (pause) …I really left my…HOME (stressed word) like my parents' home and lived in England on my own, and since 1989, so I was twenty two, twenty one twenty two, so since then, I've always lived abroad, and it was a variety of people… But yes I mean I can I can still remember what it was you know what it felt like to…at the beginning in England
>
> IC: Was it on your own at that time?
> Me: yeah… yeah, and…YEAH (stressed word) the challenge is linked to…living in a different culture, though it was very…CLOSE (stressed word) to France, but still quite different
>
> IC: yeah because…UK or London …is a society with diverse culture, that sometimes…it's the its diverse culture makes you feel a little bit lost sometimes (laughs) (INT2)

In this exchange, what IC seemed to be saying was that she saw western or 'international' culture as very different to Hong Kong culture, and that this created added difficulties. Elsewhere in the inquiry, IC hinted that outsiders could never fully grasp Hong Kong culture:

> I think the outsider is [only] able to appreciate the surface of Hong Kong culture (INT3)

> It may be a little bit hard for them [foreigners] to imagine what exactly I am talking about (INT3)

The following excerpt further explains in what ways Hong Kong culture differs from others and why she thinks it is hard for outsiders to penetrate:

> So first we don't have a really Hongkongese ah we have a Hongkongese culture in euh popular culture. But for other cultures like euh…music, like euh writing style, euh…I mean the very sophisticated aspect of culture […] So for example we have a lot of slangs in Hong Kongese culture and we'll be very happy to talk about this when we are also born in Hong Kong and we understand Hong Kong culture, but when we trying to promote it to other it's always hard Because first it's a popular culture, it's not highly appreciated by sophisticated people (INT2)

To reiterate, during her cultural experiences in Europe, IC started to question whether or not she could (or even wanted to) adjust to a different or culturally diverse environment on a long-term basis, even though she was enjoying the perspectives it provided. In addition, at the time, there were sociopolitical changes in Hong Kong which triggered feelings of insecurity and further affected her relationship with the 'home' culture.

8.3.2 The presence of sociopolitical factors in IC's narrative

The topic of Mainland China came up frequently in IC's stories, and generally not in positive terms. First, there were descriptions of her experience of training Shanghai staff. IC remarked that when training Shanghai staff 'ABC', the result was often 'ABEF' (INT3) and that she constantly needed to check what they were doing: 'you have to [be] patient and you have to be very insistent to say that no it's not the right thing' (INT3). By contrast, Hong Kong staff were described in positive terms; they were flexible and could take the initiative, and work with them was smooth and unproblematic:

> If I tell my [Hong Kong] shop managers "ok! We want to achieve A ok? And … I don't bother about the process" then they will be very flexible in doing the process to achieve target A (INT3)

> I am not trying to be discriminative but they [Hong Kong managers] are more smart in knowing how to achieve the target with their own way ok? (INT3)

Although IC conceded that the misunderstandings between the Shanghainese and herself might be related to 'cultural difference' or 'culture shock' (INT3) or that maybe her proficiency in Mandarin (the language she used to train them) added to the problem ('maybe it's part of language barrier because my native or my first language is not Mandarin', INT3), IC gave the impression that the main reason for her difficulties with the Shanghainese staff was that they were not prepared to take orders from her:

> …because part of culture I think their culture as they have to have their very strong mind is part of the reason (INT3)

Elsewhere in the inquiry, IC talked about how 'rude' Mainland Chinese were to Hongkongers (she chose the adjective 'rude' in the second interview to describe Mainland culture in general). In other words, she felt Mainland Chinese did not respect Hong Kong culture, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

> I guess… most of us understand it [the choice of the adjective 'rude'] why, because of how they behave in outside China, as tourist… how they speak, how they behave how they react with the conflict, how they think about themselves, that makes...us feel...very rude to it's not rude to us it's rude to our Hong Kong culture actually, it's rude to our area actually. Euh...they're not respecting others' culture (INT2)

There were many similar references to sociopolitical tensions in Hong Kong in IC's story. In the third interview, IC made explicit the need to stay put in Hong Kong ('not moving out') in order to influence the future generation of Hongkongers, as if Hong Kong was under siege and needed protection:

> It is my home somehow I'm still insisting that why I have to leave my place to somebody from outside make my home worse? There's no reason for that, so from this moment I will have the same feeling about last time that I'm happy to be here and I want this place to be better and better, not by moving out but staying here. Maybe influence in a positive way to the next generation (INT3)

IC's decision to move to Hong Kong and work for a local Hong Kong company can thus be seen as linked to the tense political atmosphere in Hong Kong one year after the 2014 students' protests known as the 'Umbrella Movement'. In the excerpt below, IC talked of her desire to 'contribute' to Hong Kong:

> I don't know maybe just move out or something else, it is not the right way to contribute to the society you are being raised by (INT3)

The search for the meaning of learning French in IC's story is thus situated in this context of tensions both at the personal level and at the sociopolitical level. Section 8.4 below will explore the role of learning French from this perspective and from the related perspective of IC's perceptions of French culture and language.

8.4 IC's perceptions of France, French and Frenchness

As might be expected, IC's perceptions of Frenchness come from different sources. One of the first she mentioned was French cinema. IC explained that French movies were instantly recognizable from the artistic feel and atmosphere they created: 'even though if you don't see the subtitles, even you don't listen you just see from the screen what it is you will know it is French' (INT1). From advertisements depicting France, IC developed the idea that French people knew how to enjoy 'the moments of life' and 'treasure […] their life' (INT2). From watching the news, IC also developed the perception that French people (as well as European) were concerned and knew how to fight for their rights:

> Britain, Germany, euh France in particular, because I always see some news about they're going on strikes because they're asking for some rights of their work (INT2)

By contrast, Hong Kong people behaved like 'slaves' towards their employers, forgetting their 'right to speak', as described vividly in the excerpt below:

> I think sometimes Hong Kong people are too tending to be slaves […] we are very good to the employers sometimes but we sometimes forget our rights. Yeah so so we are very hard hardworking yeah sometimes (laugh) and but sometimes we forget to speak for our rights and we always presume that we don't have the right to speak (INT2)

In other words (and as in Candice's and Yasmina's stories), IC's perceptions of Frenchness were also built in a process of comparison with her own culture:

> When you step up outside you can see the reality differently (IRT meeting)

Another example of this process of construction is contained in the excerpt below, where IC recalled a French film in which French children were playing in a forest. This made her realize how much more urban her Hong Kong childhood had been:

> so there's again children playing each other euh the background is … there's a forest like with a lot of trees, no buildings and yeah it's a big playground and they just run and with a lot of greenery and yeah it is what I perceived about "Oh how great French children can play in a big greenery forest… but we can't!" (laugh) yeah! that's what… that's what I perceive about French culture somehow (INT1)

In the IRT meeting, when we further explored IC's perceptions of French culture in comparison to Hong Kong culture, IC commented that it was important to be collectively proud of one's own culture because it would be the base for developing a shared concern in 'preserving' the culture. In the second interview, she had explained that one of her perceptions of French culture was that French people seemed proud of their culture:

> My perception is, French people they are proud of… they're proud of their culture, they're proud of their language…wherever you are in France, when you ask for directions in English even though they understand in English they can speak in English they will still speak in French… (INT2)

In the IRT meeting, IC added that she would like 'to have this [pride] in my own culture too', suggesting that Hong Kong people might not be united enough to defend their culture. This made me recall what IC had said in the inquiry about the tensions caused by the political changes in

Hong Kong since the return of sovereignty to China in 1997. In IC's narrative, the role of French learning is closely linked to this situation and to IC's anxiety about the future of Hong Kong, as will be further explained in section 8.5 below.

8.5 Exploring the meaning of French with IC

In IC's story, the decision to learn French (or other languages) can be understood as a desire to develop into a confident person because gaining an understanding of other cultural environments enhances her ability to deal with intercultural situations. But knowing languages and gaining a wider cultural awareness can also be seen as a way to define and strengthen her Hong Kong identity in the face of perceived threat from Mainland China.

I will begin with IC's quest to become a confident person on the world stage.

8.5.1 French as part of IC's drive to become more confident in the world

IC mentioned three role models and their influence, her high school teacher, the president of her university, and a work colleague, whom she said had all encouraged her to become 'more all-rounded in terms of thinking'. In the first interview, she talked about how these people had given her new perspectives and encouraged her to think critically:

> You'll look at different aspects from on the same issue […] you can see the same thing from the other point of angle and you will feel it in another way so you'll just feeling inspired and enlightened really! (INT1)

In the inquiry, IC also clearly showed her interest in learning about different cultures and languages. Her investment in learning English and her decision to work for foreign companies are examples of this.

A first interpretation of the role of French in IC's story is that it contributes, along with other cultures and languages, to IC's quest to become more 'all-rounded' and to acquire new perspectives on the world. In the excerpt below, she suggests the importance of languages in general in broadening her horizons:

> The more language[s] you learn the more… the easier you understand the rest of the world apart from your place […] people who are able to speak different language[s] are having a broader sense in looking at things because language[s] do making you look at things differently (INT3)

Being able to interact in different languages also helped IC to become more confident in the world. For example, she has learned to appreciate different ways of doing things (for example, her boss chatting before starting work; see section 8.2 above) as well as to appreciate different kinds of humour. For example, IC's comment below suggests that she is able to recognize the British sense of humour, as opposed to her sister who lacks these perspectives because of her more 'localized' outlook:

> She [her sister] has a less exposure internationally than me so for example … she doesn't feel the sense of humour about European people and she… she relatively quite stressful […] she doesn't feel it funny when people doing some tricks (INT2)

In the second interview, IC described her experience of meeting western colleagues in London as a 'breakthrough', not only because she realized that she was on 'equal footing' with westerners, but also because she had lost her fear of interacting with foreigners:

> I was yeah equal footing… and the thing is you're no more be afraid of meeting people with different nationalities…so in the past I'm I I'm quite afraid meeting with a guy from Italy because he sounds like very rude, and sounds like very strong personality… but in the end when you sit down, understand him more, talk to him more, and he is a very…enthusiastic guy who you know helping you and then play with you, yeah (laugh) have jokes with you so it's a breakthrough process (INT2)

To reiterate, one of the roles of French in IC's life is to form part of her quest to gain new perspectives as well as to build her confidence in dealing with the world.

8.5.2 French as a tool for cultural differentiation in the context of political tensions in Hong Kong

In IC's story, knowing French also appeared as a way to differentiate herself from Mainland Chinese and reinforce her identity as a Hongkonger. For example, IC suggested that including some French words in her English conversations was not only 'more fun', but it also made her sound more English:

> I think French can use along with English… for example…in the current company I'm working with sometimes we'll [her boss and her] speak French "Au revoir" "Bonjour" "How does it feel?… Comme ci-comme ça" yeah, they know each other but it makes your language into more fun, it puts more elements into it and makes it more… diverse… (INT1)

In addition, emulating the French-English code-mixing practices of her British co-workers reinforced her Hong Kong identity because code-mixing (specifically the mixing of Cantonese and English, which is usual in Hong Kong) differed from Mainland Chinese' linguistic practices, which were perceived to be more monolingual:

> … if it [French-English code-mixing] is the way that they [British people] speak … then it is… just like code mix[ing] between English and …Cantonese in Hong Kong but for example like Mainland immigrant, they won't so you can differentiate between how localized you are in a particular country or language (INT1)

Thus, in this excerpt, the multilingual practices of some British people in Hong Kong are seen as resembling Hong Kong multilingual practices whilst being different to the linguistic practices of Mainland Chinese.

Although the link is tenuous, using French alongside English is a way for IC to mark the boundaries of her identity as a multilingual and multicultural individual, as well as to position Hong Kong as a multicultural society in her talk about language in Hong Kong. The equation that IC is arguably making is that Hong Kong has more in common with Britain, in terms of its inclination towards multiculturalism, multilingualism and linguistic hybridity, than with Mainland China, which for IC is associated with monoculturalism and monolingualism as well as discourses of linguistic and political unity. The excerpt below expresses IC's view that China is not in favour of multiculturalism and multilingualism, as Mandarin has been imposed as the unifying language:

> China is an area with different races or different ethnic groups or different areas of people who speak their own language or dialects and Mandarin is just a way to unify (INT2)

By contrast, IC thought of Hong Kong as being accepting of other cultures and languages:

> We welcome different cultures to be in our society, we love to embrace good culture positive culture from other areas so you can see we have a lot cuisine from different cultures in Hong Kong and we love to try them we love to understand more about those cultural things, that's why we have French May every year, that's why we have some food festival, food fair [for] which suppliers from all over the world come to us (INT2)

In the IRT meeting, IC further explained that Hong Kong people were open to foreign cultures: ‘we [Hong Kong people] are not taking a resisting side of resisting other cultures […] Hong Kong is opened to the world’ (IRT meeting) whilst Mainland Chinese were ‘arrogant’ towards other cultures (IRT meeting).

In other words, part of the meaning of learning foreign languages (French as well as English) for IC is that they can be used to assert her identity as a Hongkonger, to distinguish herself from Mainland Chinese at a time of political transition in Hong Kong. By reasserting her Hong Kong identity, IC at the same time (re)asserts Hong Kong’s cultural existence, even if only within the confines of the interview situation.

8.5.3 French as a way to affirm Hong Kong identity: re-appropriation of a global language for the local context

When IC talked about her sense of national identity in the second interview (I did not specify whether national, religious or other) she chose to tell me about her national identity, sharing that she felt mixed western and local influences in her life and stressing the impossibility of separating the two:

> I won't have the definite nationality of culture here because we are, I am I'm born in Hong Kong and I'm born to be a multicultural person so my lifestyle is totally a mixture, but I think mostly I think it's Hongkongish because most of my time is in Hong Kong (INT2)

However, in the third interview, the local aspect of her identity appeared more prominently as expressed in the excerpt below:

> Identity (pause)…I will use the word local in Hongkongese… I am born in Hong Kong I am raised in Hong Kong …I was the last batch of the old education system… I study university three years in Hong Kong definitely I am a very local Hong Kongese I used the word local…because I am local I am exposed to local popular culture I listen to local songs I watch local movies…I am able to speak colloquial Cantonese, I go to those Cantonese gossip websites so I understand what peoples are referring [to] when they talk about some secret codes in Cantonese so pure local Hongkongese I'd say (INT3)

In other words, IC identified herself both as 'multicultural' and as 'local' but the local aspect of her identity seemed to prevail when she was required to choose (i.e. 'pure local Hongkongese'). IC made connections between national identity and language not only with Cantonese, but also by referring to Kongish, which she described as a local practice of mixing Cantonese with English words. According to IC, only local Hong Kong people (i.e. not Mainland Chinese) can understand Kongish:

> Only local Hongkongish can understand Kongish, and then can use Kongish fluently. Yeah because because, it's it's a funny mixture of Cantonese and English and Cantonese total different with the system of euh...Chinese or Mandarin, so so it's a way to highlight yourself I'm a really local Hongkongish (INT2)

Her descriptions of what she considered to be Hong Kong culture also contained the idea that it had both local and international aspects. On the one hand, there were very local aspects of the culture (such as local songs, Cantonese gossip websites, etc. which were hard for foreigners to penetrate; see section 8.3.1 above), but on the other hand, Hong Kong culture included many cultural influences from external sources:

> So my Western culture influence may be from TV programmes, maybe from schools, people I met from work definitely, and also from the Western... I don't know for those for example like the exhibition, like if there is a Christmas fair in the Stanley Plaza, so for those common activities that we have are trying to touch and trying to expose to it and become more Western-like people (INT2)

> So you can see we have a lot cuisine from different cultures in Hong Kong and we love to try them we love to understand more about those cultural things, that's why we have French May every year, that's why we have some food festival, food fair [for] which suppliers from all over the world come to us (INT2)

What is interesting in IC's conception of herself and of her culture is her interpretation of 'multicultural', as revealed in her posts about Frenchness in the FRENCHINHK FB group. IC's shared examples of perceived French culture in Hong Kong suggested a local (or 'localized') reinterpretation of it. For example, the first posting IC shared with the group was a picture of a French galette (see Figure 12, p. 264). She suggested an interpretation of Frenchness which in addition to involving coffee and 'galette' (a kind of pancake made of buckwheat, iconic of western France) also included eggs benedict and brunch. The latter, to most French people, sounds distinctively foreign. At the same time, IC suggested that she had an easier time finding 'galette' in Hong Kong than in France, which made it sound as if there were more (or equal) opportunities to experience French culture in Hong Kong than in France:

> I just had my Sunday brunch in a French café! Egg benedict and Breakfast galette! Yummy and feel so French (not sure if I have seen one galette when I was in France) (FRENCHINHK FB group posting, 4 Oct. 2015)

In the second posting, the picture and caption 'I love the tram' (see Figure 13, p. 264) superimposed an advertisement (for the annual French cultural event 'The Hong Kong French Film Festival') with an iconic mode of transport in Hong Kong (the tram). The effect again blurred the lines of 'French' culture: is the event a projection of French culture in Hong Kong or has it been assimilated as a Hong Kong cultural event? Even though this event is organized by the French Consulate and jointly sponsored by various Hong Kong businesses and organizations, along with the French government, the point this posting seems to be making is that French

culture in Hong Kong is readily assimilated into Hong Kong's multicultural and globally-oriented identity.

The perceived re-appropriation of French culture (and possibly, by extension, of other foreign cultures) by the local culture in IC's story is interesting, in the context of the tensions between Hong Kong and China at this moment in time. It serves to reaffirm Hong Kong's global identity and place in the globalized world in contrast to the centralizing tendencies of Mainland China. IC's practices of French (as well as of other languages) can be seen as part of her contribution to protect and reaffirm Hong Kong's identity in the face of the threat she perceived from China at the time of the inquiry: 'it's just about how to conserve our identity' (IRT meeting). By reaffirming its multicultural aspect whilst stressing Hong Kong's successful integration of foreign cultures, IC used the inquiry to emphasize Hong Kong's unique identity and its strong connections with the outside world.

As already mentioned (see section 8.3.2), an image of Hong Kong being under threat emerged in many places in IC's story. As a result of this, IC seemed to feel the need to reassert Hong Kong's existence and identity. An example of this was that she felt compelled to correct the foreigners' perception that Hong Kong was like the rest of China when she was abroad. Specifically, she recalled a conversation with a French waiter during which she made a point of affirming Hong Kong's distinct identity:

> I think it's a French waiter, when we had a coffee just opposite to the Notre-Dame… yeah? We have a coffee and then they asked "Where are you from?" and "We're from HK" and then "Yeah, it's China… it's part of China!" "No, it's not part of China!" (dramatic voice) blablabla like this… so we [Hongkongers] have a strong identity… myself yeah (INT1)

Likewise, IC recalled how happy she had been on a trip to England when a UK immigration officer had recognized her Hong Kong passport. To her, this meant that Hong Kong had a recognizable identity from Mainland China: 'it's a sign of identity' (IRT meeting).

IC's intense concern with these issues was palpable throughout the inquiry. One decision she seemed to particularly focus on was whether or not leave Hong Kong. A Facebook conversation with a friend about his planned move to Singapore with his Singaporean wife revealed her position on this matter:

> So this means escaping… Are you escaping? You are Hong Kong person why do you need to escape? (INT2)

'Escaping' was not an option for IC. During the IRT meeting as we explored her complex relationship with Hong Kong, IC explained the feeling of responsibility she felt towards Hong Kong and her desire to 'contribute' to preserve Hong Kong's identity:

> It's not about doing something great, it's about conserving the language or conserving the culture same thing. So imagine if no one is using the language so Cantonese will be replaced or if we all move out so no one will understand the root of the Cantonese culture for example and it will be replaced or be mistaken somehow […] so [contribute] is not about your work or is not about how beneficial HK will be financial wise or in any other aspects but it's just about how to conserve our identity (IRT meeting)

As previously mentioned, IC had also started to question whether or not she could fit into an international work culture after her experiences socializing whilst working for a British company (see section 8.3.1 above). In addition, she was disturbed by her observations that Chinese were often negatively perceived in Europe. The excerpt below tells the story of an incident in

Florence, where whilst waiting to be served an ice cream, IC thought the ice cream seller was intentionally ignoring her because she was Chinese:

> I was queuing between two Westerners and then… after serving the westerner before me, the server just saying "Hi!" to the person behind me… obviously, I was here and he knows me at that time and then… and then I just said "Hello, here!" … and then the server just realized then "Oh, OK, what do you want?" so… euh a couple of experience like this makes me feel like yeah I understand how they feel about Chinese (INT1)

The excerpt below further suggests her feeling that she could eventually become a victim of anti-Chinese feelings in Europe just because she looked Chinese; it also suggests that until then IC had felt quite protected by her Hong Kong identity, which in her mind is different to being Chinese:

> they can't distinguish between HK Chinese… no matter [who] it is, this is Chinese. I think it's the trend and I can understand so if I am a Westerner, if I am being disturbed by the Mainland Chinese so no matter who you are as long as you look like a Chinese I would have some perceptions […] so discrimination perception, bias yeah (INT1)

To reiterate, feelings of insecurity had started to assail IC and tainted her experiences abroad, so although she initially thought she would like to live abroad, she had started to reconsider her options. Apart from the fear of discrimination, she also started to think that moving abroad was problematic in terms of financial stability and job opportunities, as global competition was getting fiercer:

> In the past I have quite a strong eager or strong will if I can move to overseas to work and the States will be great! "yeah I I want to get a place!" But now I will say "no…don't think overseas is as good as you expect because they're still competition and the competitions are more furious because you are not competing with Chinese mainland locals but you're competing any people from European countries or rest of the world so euh and discrimination is getting more serious and serious towards Chinese? (INT3)

As an example of this, she mentioned an encounter with a Spanish colleague who felt at risk of his contract not being renewed. The excerpt below suggests insecurity both in terms of the economic risks of moving abroad and the risks presented by recent political changes and their associated uncertainty:

> I met a UK visitor who is from Spanish, and we talked about the cultural things because he moved to UK for 4 years […] they're [British authorities] trying to grow more British people to defend theirself […] it's a arrogant move because I think having people working with diverse culture is euh...is a positivity or it's a added value to the company as a corporate culture or corporate value (INT2)

In this excerpt, the shadow over the future fate of foreigners in post-Brexit Britain looms, something which may have also been in IC's mind when deciding to return to work in Hong Kong. A remark she made during the IRT meeting when discussing her decision to settle back in Hong Kong suggested this:

> The outside world might also have some dark sides like news or political stability so it does not seem that the outside world is better than your hometown (IRT meeting)

A drawing she scribbled for the IRT meeting (see Figure 14 below) illustrates her state of mind further. We see the words 'conflicts' related to both home (presumably in relation to the political situation in Hong Kong in the light of the inquiry) and the 'outside' (i.e. abroad). The word 'protective' is associated with home because as IC explained, 'home is your final destination or is your safe place' (IRT meeting). She added that she felt it was better for her 'to take a more protective approach' at this moment in time (IRT meeting).

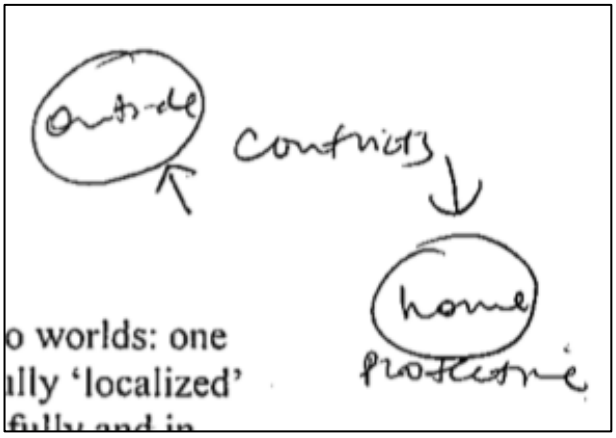

Figure 14: IC's notes for the IRT meeting (3 Sep. 2017)

To reiterate, various sociopolitical issues at home and abroad influenced IC's stories of identity at the time of the inquiry, and seemed to be behind IC's decision to go back to the security and predictability of Hong Kong. Although IC described herself in the inquiry as both very local and very global, it seems that her strong identification with Hong Kong and its culture dominates her story. For example, the way she re-appropriated French cultural images for her own context suggested a personal strategy to reinforce Hong Kong's identity as one of the great multicultural and cosmopolitan places in the world. This seemed to occur as a reaction to the political tensions in Hong Kong, but also as a reaction towards the outside world, which she increasingly perceived as threatening. In the inquiry, IC seemed to have changed her views about the attraction of living or working in other cultures, which prompted her to decide to come back to Hong Kong and work for a local company. In this way, her practices of 'global' cultures and languages need to be seen as being adapted for her own needs and for the needs of what she perceives as the local culture.

Two other aspects of her connection with French surfaced during the inquiry, and I will present them in the next sections.

8.5.4 French as a tool for social differentiation

During the inquiry, IC suggested that knowing French would be a source of curiosity for fellow Hongkongers, and that learning French was a way to make oneself noticed in Hong Kong society:

> They [Hong Kong people] will be impressed that you can speak a third language, they will keep giving you some French to ask you to translate it, they may ask you is Agnes b. pronounced as Agnes b… (INT2)

In the exchange below, IC also hinted at how French would make people feel 'high end', referring to an increase in social status:

> Me: So why do people learn French then? What's the use of knowing French in HK?
>
> IC: … perhaps HK people feel that French is more… superior that's what we said… it makes you feel high end (laugh) somehow… yeah the perception of knowing French is… you know French gives HK people a little bit… romantic, more… exotic and… if you know French or if you speak French it makes people think that "Oh yeah, you know French!" and it seems that you're… you're more than other people (INT1)

During the IRT meeting, IC added that by using French to replace English, one showed one was educated.

IC's descriptions of her childhood, as well as of her father's social situation when he arrived in Hong Kong (see section 8.2 above) also contained clues as to her social background and importance of increasing her cultural capital (including the knowledge of foreign languages such as French). At the end of the third interview, IC remarked that she felt it was a lot more difficult for a working class girl like her to move 'upward' socially. She added that she particularly liked

the phrase ‘everyone is equal but some are more equal than others’ (informal conversation, end of INT3). In another excerpt, IC repeated that code-mixing was also a way to show that you were educated:

> if I encounter some of the customer or some of the people who walk by and if they code-mix Mandarin and English somehow I would feel that you are… showcase… you are showing you are educated you know a little bit English et cetera (INT3)

These comments confirmed my impression that languages represented an important source of social and cultural capital and mobility for her.

8.5.5 Performing her identity with the help of French online

As already mentioned (see section 8.2 at university), IC had not studied French formally for some time. She recalled during the inquiry several instances of having lost proficiency in French, for example:

> You know after these few years of study of French…I’m trying to make use of them [French vocabulary]…I went to Paris, I go to a shop selling macarons and I just “Combien est-ce que c’est?” but I mistook it… 5 euros… I mistook 15 euros as 5 euros (laugh) so I paid 5 euros for actually 15 euros so it’s a very interesting experience (INT1)

But despite this, IC sometimes used French in online communication. In her LLH, IC wrote that she would sometimes use it to express ‘inner feeling’, which she explained as ‘emotions about personal life’ including those relating to family, work, or political issues (IRT meeting). Although her use of French seemed limited (in the form of French phrases such as ‘*Merci’, ‘C’est bon’, ‘Bravo’*, and so on), IC explained that the use of French as a ‘less widely accessed language’ (TLR) was useful because few people could easily understand:

> I want to speak something for myself, as an inner feeling, and I don't want others to understand it straightly from the post that I have in Facebook (INT1)

> I want to post something but I don't want others to "read it directly" (TLR)

> So you want to express it [inner feeling] online but you don't want to make it too explicit so you will think of some tactics or techniques (INT3)

In other words, French was used as a filter, a way to screen out impatient or unsuitable readers. IC also described French as a kind of code:

> I use the language as a way…it's like a code (INT3)

This meant that her online use of French was directed towards Facebook friends who were genuinely interested in her and in what she shared on her Facebook status. If they wanted to fully understand what she had written, they would have to take the trouble and the time to Google translate the French words:

> For those people who really want to understand me, then they will do the translation then they will try to understand it (INT1)

> I think it is my way to differentiate people who want to understand you from others or I just want some minority people…. to understand what feeling I am having (INT3)

What is interesting in these comments is the fact that although IC only knows a few words of French and has not studied it for ten years, the language still resonates for her and she finds uses for it in ways which are meaningful to her.

8.6. The meaning of French in IC's story

The place of French in IC's story may seem at first very tenuous because it had been ten years since IC took any formal French lessons. But despite the limited use that French appears to have in conventional terms, as a tool for communicating with French people or as a way of integrating into French-speaking communities, the inquiry reveals that French (and perceptions of Frenchness) perform a number of personal and identity-related functions.

First, French is a way to gain additional perspectives and a 'more rounded' mind, which is part of what she has set out to gain since secondary school. Secondly, knowing French helps IC to gain confidence in the world by being able to take part in a range of activities related to work, travel and culture. Also, becoming multicultural and multilingual is a way to differentiate herself from Mainland Chinese as well as contribute to (re)affirming Hong Kong's identity as a society with a multicultural outlook. This occurs in a changing sociopolitical context in which Hong Kong people have become insecure about their fate since the handover to China. Thus, IC's idea of multiculturalism evolves to become increasingly 'localized'. In this way, the study shows how IC's story of learning French is both a story of de-territorializing cultural experience as well as re-appropriating the global for local use, illustrating the point that the local is always present in the global and vice-versa (see Canagarajah & De Costa 2016, 2; see also chapter 2, section 2.2.1). Finally, French acts as a marker of social differentiation and serves to boost cultural capital, as well as acting as a 'secret code' to differentiate between groups online and types of friends. In all of these boundary-drawing activities, the close connections between language and identity also become clear.

Chapter 9 Nicole

Figure 15: Nicole's posting on her FB status (8 Jan. 2011)

9.1 Nicole and I

Nicole was 27 at the start of the inquiry. She is the oldest participant in this study. I met Nicole for the first time in 2008 in my French beginner classes. At the time, she was in the second year of an undergraduate degree in Visual Studies at a Hong Kong university. In the summer of 2008 and just before graduating, Nicole took a three-week intensive summer course in a private school in Paris. After the course, she stayed in Europe for another week touring several cities, but this was Nicole's second trip to Europe and the first of three visits to Paris.

During her time at university, Nicole became a volunteer for AIESEC (a youth-run international non-governmental organization providing young people with leadership development, cross-

cultural global internships, and volunteer exchange experiences[11]). She went to Europe four times with this organization. During these trips, she also tried to meet former classmates or work colleagues who were living in Europe. Apart from Europe, Nicole had visited Australia as part of a secondary school trip in 2003 and also went to Thailand as part of her dragon boat competition activities.

My first interview with Nicole was on 4 April 2015 and lasted for one and a half hours. We met at the university where I had taught Nicole in my French classes. We had not seen each other for a long time and Nicole was happy to be on the university campus again. She was as I remembered her, bubbly and smiling. She was wearing a fun Italian bag, which reminded me of her taste for quirky objects and of her self-deprecating sense of humour. On her Facebook page, there were funny poses, distorted images of herself and humorous posts about various topics, such as about the comedy drama 'Inside Out' by Pixar Animation Studios, which was one of her favorite movies. After the interview, we went to a local café and carried on talking about our lives since we had last seen each other.

Our second interview was on 22 January 2016, in the same venue as the first one. It was a rainy day. We talked for more than two hours. During that interview, Nicole started to cry as we discussed the terrorist attacks that had taken place in Paris during the previous autumn. She said that she was 'very sad' about the attacks (INT2) and began to talk about the political situation in Hong Kong as well as the tragedy of the lost Malaysian airliner, which had unfolded that same year. Her situation at work had also been difficult and Nicole said that her tears were triggered by 'everything that happened these few years' (INT2). After the interview, we continued to

[11] See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AIESEC. Also: https://aiesec.org

discuss the 2014 student protests in Hong Kong. We also talked about two former Hong Kong classmates who had also been my students and who now lived in Switzerland and in Paris. Nicole had visited them in June 2015 and gave me their news: one was developing a successful career in marketing in a large international group and the other was studying in Paris for a Master's degree in translation.

Our third interview was on 21 May 2016 and lasted just over one hour. We met for high tea at a popular hotel. Before the interview, we started talking about her new job with a Japanese company, as she had changed job twice since the previous interview and had a lot to tell me about this. This was one of the many professional changes Nicole had experienced since the start of the inquiry. Compared with our last interview, Nicole looked a lot happier. She said she had regained energy and a new motivation to study French despite not needing French in her job:

> I think it's mostly because of my energy and my mood. Now I am in a very good mood and I feel a lot of energy. Feeling curious about things and yeah feel like I am in actively learning mode now (INT3)

After the interview, we discussed contemporary art following an exhibition of Chinese contemporary art we had both seen and Nicole told me about her desire to create an art studio for the less privileged in the future. She was very enthusiastic about this idea and was envisioning organizing exhibitions of the work that would be produced.

During the inquiry, we also communicated regularly via Facebook or Messenger. More recently, we have also communicated via WhatsApp.

9.2 Nicole's stories: childhood, secondary school, university and work

Family

Nicole was born in Hong Kong. The language she speaks at home is Cantonese although her mother (born in China) also uses Mandarin. Nicole's father, who passed away just before Nicole started university, came from Shanghai and spoke Shanghainese (as well as some other dialects from the Jiangsu region) so Nicole also understands 'simple greeting, short sentences' in Shanghainese (survey). With members of her paternal family, she also communicated in Putonghua whenever she visited them in Shanghai because 'they seldom use Cantonese' (LLH). In her LLH, she talked about her level in Shanghainese as follows:

> Although I never learn Shanghainese properly, I am able to understand some simple phrases, words or catch maximum 50%-70% of a conversation by words I know, context and expression. (LLH)

In the inquiry, Nicole painted a picture of a family deeply imbued with Chinese traditional values inherited from Confucianism. Nicole mentioned her father's Confucian values and the big source of inspiration he was in her life:

> He taught me to be a good person and sometimes he would recite story from Confucius or Taoism and I found this interesting […] We didn't talk much but I can feel the way he wants things balanced… we have a saying in Chinese, you don't do excess or do less so you stay in the middle (INT1)

Some of the core orientations of Chinese philosophy – to keep 'things balanced' and not to be excessive ('stay in the middle'; INT1) seemed to have a big influence on how Nicole conducts her life. For example, she mentioned the importance of filial duty, which she tried to uphold. In

the first interview, she recalled how her father had reminded her of her duties towards her mother after an argument:

> You should always obey to your senior… to your family because she [your mother] is your parent and she must (emphasized) be right (INT1)

From her mother, Nicole learned to show compassion to less fortunate people:

> I remember when I was maybe four or five euh… we were going to somewhere and we walked passed a beggar and she was "oh!" and my mum went to a bakery to buy her some bread …and it's a strong memory to me (INT1)

Nicole's story thus started with a positive view of the heritage her parents had transmitted to her, despite the pressure exerted by duty-oriented Confucian traditions. Despite it being natural to help one's parents, Nicole hinted at the expectations that she should provide for her mother since her father's death:

> I want something that can offer me and my family a stable life euh my family is not rich and this can be a constraint for work or for big (emphasized) decision in life… […] first I need to think of how to take care of my mum with smaller salary euh […]… because now my mum retired and I don't want her to work anymore so I need to hhmmm… yeah I need to fulfill my duty on, I think I'm responsible to this, I need to take good care of her […] make her worry free (INT1)

But Nicole was also thankful to her parents for trusting her and allowing her to make her own choices. For example, they let her choose her degree subject even though the arts are normally considered an undesirable choice for a prosperous and successful career. In the same way, her parents had not planned the way she conducted her professional career. Nicole remarked that this was unusual for Hong Kong parents:

> …they [parents] just want me to be a nice person, a kind person but they don't euh… have expectation on what career you have to… you have to take up, what kind of man you've to get married with, they don't have very (emphasized) specific, they just want me to be happy […] and I think it's quite good because in HK, people try to… the parents try to plan everything for their children and it's like prison (INT1)

The only criticism Nicole seemed to have about her family was that they found it hard to share their feelings with each other, which led to misunderstandings: 'we don't talk openly and then, that leads to misunderstanding' (INT1). In the second interview, Nicole said that not showing emotions was a very Chinese trait: 'Chinese tend to hide their emotion' (INT2).

Learning languages at school

Nicole's descriptions of learning languages (English and Mandarin) at school were typical of many Hongkongers' experiences. She described an emphasis on teacher explanations (mostly in Cantonese), on form (grammar and vocabulary) and on memorization, and there was also little attention to speaking skills:

> Even in English lessons, teacher would explain grammar, vocabulary in Chinese. I took tuition lesson during the last 2 years of primary school where I did extra English exercise to prepare for secondary school. I had a Putonghua class per week from P.4 to P.6 [Primary 4 & 6] but that did not enable me to speak or understand the language. It was merely memorizing sentences and Pinyin. (LLH)

The same way of teaching and learning continued at secondary school, but Nicole seemed pleased with her progress, especially after she entered an EMI school. Her progress in Mandarin by contrast was slow: 'For Putonghua, we had one or two lessons per week from F.1 to F.3. However that did not make any impact on my interest or progress' (LLH).

In the inquiry, what seemed particularly significant in these secondary school years was a school trip to Sydney, Australia, in the summer of Form 3. It was the first time Nicole had the opportunity to use English in real life, and this made her realize how much she was able to understand and do in English:

> I went to Sydney for a 3-weeks study tour that I improved a lot on my conversational English. At that time I had not realized myself being able to speak English fluently and never had had the chance to try. (LLH)

This trip was significant for another reason. Nicole vividly recalled an incident involving an Australian shop assistant, as follows:

> I asked if you [the shop assistant] have something in your stock and not on display so it seems clean… it's the Chinese habit to ask for something new in the stock and she was mad about this. Because she said 'everything here is new, you cannot choose like that and actually these products are from your country, from China so what do you want?" and I was SHOCKED (stressed word) at that time! My memory is still so strong now after more than ten years! (INT1)

Nicole's shock was triggered by the stereotyping she experienced and also by the realization that the shop assistant did not differentiate between Hong Kong Chinese and Mainland Chinese; to her, they were all the same. For the first time, Nicole had to acknowledge her ethnic identity, which she had never thought about before. In other words, the Australian trip confronted her with the question of her ethnic and national identity, which can be summarized as: what was different about being a Hong Kong Chinese?

University

At university, Nicole pursued an undergraduate degree in Visual Studies: 'I always wanted to be an artist…to draw or to paint' (INT1). She studied courses such as Practical Art, Philosophy of

Visual Arts, Film Studies and Art History. In addition, Nicole decided to learn French because of the link between French culture and her interest in art. She also wanted to learn to pronounce French words in common use in the arts, such as the names of French painters:

> The reason I chose French is about the arts…I appreciate French arts, and I want to know more…. the simple reason is I want to pronounce the names [of the painters] right (INT2)

At university, she took two French beginner courses as well as joining one-month intensive French course in Paris. During the three years after she left university Nicole stopped learning French, but as soon as she was settled enough in her professional life, she started a routine of studying French every week in a one-hour informal class with a private French tutor with whom she has become friends. She has been taking this class for the past seven years. The lessons have mainly been structured around a textbook, and Nicole said that she liked to learn a language 'in an organized way' and to be guided by the teacher: 'I need someone, a teacher to guide me from zero to better stage so I think textbook is very important' (INT1). In the inquiry, Nicole mentioned wanting to pass the B1 DELF test (corresponding to the 'independent user/threshold' level of the Common European Framework of Reference), but has not done so yet.

In the inquiry, Nicole's descriptions of her language activities suggested that she had confidence in herself and was able to pick up languages relatively easily. She mentioned being good at inferring meaning ('I would say I'm quite good at guessing the meaning', INT1). For example, she was able to understand the gist of what her Japanese classmates in Paris were saying during her intensive French course in the summer of 2008:

> I sat with them when we had lunch and dinner and sometimes I can guess what they're talking about…always guess from their expression and tone and if I get a little hint on the topic they're talking of then I can guess maybe they like that thing or they don't like (INT1)

Whilst working for the small family-run French company, she also used her observation skills to guess what her French colleagues were talking about. Nicole's work as a volunteer for AIESEC during her university years also gave her opportunities to try out her language skills.

Volunteering for AIESEC during university: a super-connected Nicole

A year after starting university, Nicole enrolled as a volunteer for the international organization AIESEC. On its website, volunteering for AIESEC is described as 'a life-changing experience' (AIESEC website[12]).

Joining AIESEC was a defining decision in Nicole's university years because it gave her several opportunities to go abroad and meet other young adults from around the world. Her first trip was to Romania in 2007. There, she coached (with other members of AIESEC) a group of local university students on the topic of leadership. In total, she travelled abroad four times with AIESEC, including to Germany in 2010 and to Switzerland in 2015, making trips to Paris on both occasions.

The AIESEC trips were also an opportunity to learn a few words in different languages, which ignited her desire to learn more languages. In her LLH, Nicole wrote that making German friends had made her want to study German, whilst also mentioning that she was inspired to learn Russian, Japanese and Spanish:

[12] For AIESEC website see: https://aiesec.org

> I would like to learn German after finishing French B2. The reason why is some of my close friends are German. I am interested in other languages like Russian, Japanese and Spanish too but these will be definitely after I acquire basic knowledge on German which may come in few years. (LLH)

In her survey, Nicole also mentioned knowing a few words of Thai ('greeting, numbers, some vocabs') and of Polish ('very limited vocabs like thank you, delicious, good looking') as well as knowing some words in Korean, Portuguese and Japanese.

More prominently in her story, AIESEC trips were also a way to build a worldwide web of friendships:

> I was in a group with a German guy, he was doing PhD at that time (laugh) and a Polish girl, and we three became very good friend. And that German guy introduced me to some other German friends… when I travel to Germany, he introduced me to other friends and the other friend called Nicholas and… actually he went to HK to study and afterwards he came to HK twice for work…and another girl, she went to China to work and I got along quite well…very well with that girl and…she's half Chinese, her dad is Malaysian Chinese and… yeah because of these friends…I want to learn German. Because my Polish friends speak fluent German too! (INT1)

What I found striking in Nicole's stories was the care she took to nurture the foreign connections she made during her travels. The excerpt below describes how this works:

> And we somehow keep in touch. She [the Portuguese girl] move to a few cities before going to Beijing. She is now located in Beijing. She moved to Madrid in Spain and at that time my friend… I met her through AIESEC… she studied in [Hong Kong university's name] associated degree before… she went to Madrid for academic exchange. I introduced her to my friend and she stayed as flat mates, they shared a flat and she also introduced her [to] Portuguese who came to Hong Kong to work and I helped them to look for apartment and we stay good friends afterwards and then from time to time she has friends coming to Hong Kong, she will introduce them to me (INT2)

But although it seemed that Nicole was doing a lot of networking, she said that she did not make a conscious effort to do so; her only motivation was to make new friends:

> I think I'm friendly and I have good memory… when someone tells me she is going to somewhere or doing something in particular, that reminds me of certain friend who is related to that place or live in that place or… who has done that thing before, so I tend to connect them, not really to help them to network… and I think that helps me connect with many different people and from different countries (INT2)

When I asked Nicole why it was important for her to make friends from around the world, she suggested that it helped her to gain new perspectives and be more open-minded:

> It makes me more open-minded to anything and anything new or anything that that makes me think or look things in different angle. It's not necessarily positive or negative but tend to be more positive and more open to different opinions (INT2)

The desire to expand her horizons and seek multicultural as well as multilingual connections naturally drove Nicole's job choices. Not long after she graduated, Nicole joined a small family-run French company in Hong Kong. This job did not last particularly long, and in the space of the two years of the inquiry, Nicole changed jobs four times as well as taking a few part-time jobs. Not surprisingly, work was a recurring topic in our discussions.

Nicole's work experiences

After graduating from university, Nicole found her first full-time employment with a small family-owned French company specializing in trading well-known international brands. She was employed there as an administrator, but her duties involved a lot more than administrative tasks; for example, she was also involved in sales and to some extent in the financial aspects of the business. Although Nicole really enjoyed the challenge and the fact that initiatives were

welcomed in this company, she left after four years. This was followed by a series of job changes. She first joined the administration department of another French company, this time a large, international one where she was again employed as an administrator, a position she found increasingly frustrating. She found her actions and initiatives were limited by her line managers as well as by the fact that she belonged to a larger team where everyone had a specific role and defined tasks to accomplish. Nicole left and took two part-time jobs whilst looking for new ideas and a more long-term position. One of her part-time jobs in digital marketing gave her the idea to work in a marketing-related role. Without marketing experience but with the willingness to develop her skills, she briefly joined a small traditional Hong Kong family-run business specializing in skincare products, but left soon after to take up a more substantial role in a large Japanese company offering financial products. Nicole remained in this company for a little more than a year, and when I last met Nicole in May 2018 she had just changed job and company again.

The reasons why Nicole moved from job to job were complex. Her decision to leave a job first seemed linked to wanting to explore new roles and new tasks as well as different work cultures and environments:

> It's also interesting to work with the Japanese. I've never worked with them at all and they are very…they are theoretical in some way. They try to make everything so structure in a very structure way and a lot of timely approval process (INT3)

Also, Nicole was changing jobs because of her growing dissatisfaction with administrative duties. Many times during the inquiry, she stressed that as a curious individual, she needed change or would easily get bored. The message below highlights this trait in her character:

> i think i am rather ordinary… but indeed i am happy with my growth since university. and what i like (sometimes hate) about this job is my colleague giving me work they not wanting to do... hahahaa! and they never like explaining how to do either. So i really have to start things from scratch.. just perfect for a sagittarrius like me. i believe boredom can kill! lol! (Messenger, 17 Feb. 2012)

As a result of being bored in administrative positions, Nicole took the decision to reorient her career towards marketing because she felt that it would be more diverse and creative:

> I like the job [marketing] because I have to think or create something, it's so different than admin, you just have to work constantly without thinking anything outside your job, but that job [in marketing] give[s] you some space or it's actually your responsibility to create something and I like brainstorming new ideas […] I did the thinking part and I think that keeps one… keeps myself interested in this job, bringing in new ideas, and learning new ideas (INT2)

For a time, it sounded that Nicole had finally found her professional orientation. When I met Nicole for the third interview, she was beaming. She had found a position in the marketing department of a large Japanese company and her boss was supportive of her digital marketing initiatives: 'and my senior manager and my manager also think this is a wonderful idea to make this Facebook post' (INT3). She particularly enjoyed writing creative online texts and slogans to promote the company's products:

> And the thing I like is I can do copywriting. I like writing. Maybe I just discover recently. Yeah, I actually like writing (INT3)

But in May 2018, Nicole talked to me about her intention to quit her job in the Japanese company. Through the inquiry, I began to see that there were other reasons for Nicole's repeated dissatisfaction at work. I noticed the recurrence of difficulties she had with people at work and in particular, with her line managers. The excerpt below describes such issues:

> She's [her boss] local. She's I think in her fifties and she's quite special I would say (laugh). She's been in the company for eighteen years (laugh), started as a receptionist and then, maybe played with a lot of politics (laugh) and then, now she gets the position (laugh) yeah, and I would say she's not good in computer and new things. She has her own way to do things and so many people are against her. She is alone. And she has a temper too (laugh) (INT1)

In particular, Nicole often felt that her work was not valued or recognized enough by her line managers and she also felt taken advantage of, as suggested in the extract below:

> In my last job I had two bosses, and then the second one was… she wasn't experienced in admin. She didn't know what I was doing, she even ask me to tell her what I was doing to explain the whole process and I kept explaining, explaining but she wasn't so positive. Maybe she just used this to make me feel bad about myself. And when she asks me to do something on top of the to do list, I didn't say no. But already before euh without her job I had to work overtime in order to finish everything. I couldn't take more. But… but I said yes (laugh) (INT2)

Nicole's worst crisis happened with the small French company. Although she found the job fulfilling and appreciated the freedom and trust she was granted in the company, she decided to leave because she felt her boss had been 'unfair' to her. As revealed in the inquiry, this experience still marked her ('no, no we don't keep in touch because it was too unhappy', INT1) and was the beginning of a new awareness in her:

> What I have learned is that I need to protect myself in the workplace […] this is the big big part that I learned from my last job and… maybe to be more careful with the people who are close to the boss (INT1)

In particular, following this incident, Nicole was determined to learn to say 'no' and be less nice to people: 'one of them [New Year resolutions] I remember is to learn to say no, because I think myself euh sometimes being too nice to people, and especially in workplaces' (INT2).

To summarize this part of her story, Nicole had repeatedly felt hurt in her self-esteem at work and it seemed that this partly explained why Nicole could not settle for long in a job. Also, perhaps as a result of her artistic leaning and her visual studies degree, she craved the opportunity to be more creative at work. Having to work in teams where roles were strictly defined and restricted led to Nicole questioning what she could do to change direction and feel more contented. In the section below, I will look at the ways in which Nicole creatively (re)imagined her future self.

Imagined self

Something that became obvious during the inquiry was how heavily Nicole's problems at work weighed on her mind. In the interviews, Nicole appeared to be constantly questioning herself. One of the main questions was whether she was the source of her problems or whether others were.

A possible solution was to talk to others. Nicole mentioned talking to her French tutor about her problems and she was also talking to me during the inquiry. In addition, she mentioned taking personality tests (such as the Myers Briggs test) as well as visiting a fortune-teller in the hope that it would help her clarify her difficulties: 'I went to the fortune teller […] I think he read my palm he he says this line is euh it means that you have a great chance to live abroad' (INT3).

Another way of dealing with her problems was to take refuge in her imagination. In the inquiry, Nicole talked about the future in inspiring terms. Entrepreneurship appeared as a possible solution because being an entrepreneur meant she could do whatever she wanted and it would

also be an opportunity to demonstrate what she was capable of. She also mentioned the idea of charity projects because working for such a cause would be 'meaningful':

> … this is what I want to do too, because it's a prize I won for NGO in Hong Kong and I I want to work for a cause. Hmm, to help to give help to others or to euh make the wealth gap or the gap between the wealth gap smaller in Hong Kong. Hmm. To do something meaningful (INT2)

Nicole had already gained experience of charity work whilst working for the large French group, where she took an active part in a charity fundraising campaign. The Facebook picture below (see Figure 16) was chosen by Nicole on her FB status to illustrate her enthusiasm for charity work:

Figure 16: Nicole's posting on her FB status (11 Jun. 2015)

In one interview, Nicole talked about how proud she had been of her achievements whilst taking part in the fundraising project:

> I won this prize… actually my team won two prizes but the other teammates did nothing with for the project, it was only me did the whole thing. I did a promotional video and it went very successful, we got the highest vote and we already have that prize for the highest vote and this seventy-five thousand dollars is given by the panel. They think our

> project is well-structured and euh closest to our company value and that's why we got this prize. Hmm, and this is a moment I feel proud of myself (INT2)

From this, it seemed that Nicole developed an idea for a charity project of her own. She described it as a community project around art activities which would target the less privileged:

> I have one dream in my mind and that is quite strong because it's still active after two three years. Euh I had this idea since I went to euh studio to paint on during weekends, like two years ago. I went there maybe every or every two weeks euh I wanted to start up a centre or studio like that you have all the materials and thing for even board games or musical instruments. It's a like a community centre and especially for the poor kids or kids or people. Not only kids maybe the elderly or people with a disability, anyway the people with euh less privileges to enjoy the time making art (INT3)

To reiterate, Nicole made active use of her imagination as a way to deal with professional difficulties. By imagining a more suitable professional future for herself around activities she enjoyed, Nicole was able to keep her work problems at bay whilst maintaining her self-esteem and dynamism.

The next section explains the role of Frenchness in supporting these imaginative processes.

9.3 Nicole's perceptions of France, French and Frenchness

In the inquiry, Nicole described her perceptions of French culture and contrasted them with her own culture. In Nicole's perception, there were more differences than similarities between the French and Hong Kong cultures. For example, although both cultures were seen to be interested in their architectural heritage, they differed in the way they went about preserving it:

> … French people respect their heritage or their tradition. And I think in Hong Kong yeah most of the people, at least half of the people respect our heritage or euh historical sites in Hong Kong. But the difference is euh we don't have the power to preserve those heritages (INT3)

Another perception that kept reappearing in the inquiry was that French people were more 'bold' than Hong Kong people. The idea of French boldness was linked to Nicole's perception that French people dared realize (or had fun trying to realize) their creative ideas, even though their ideas may have lacked credibility at face value. According to Nicole, this differentiated them from other cultures and in particular from Chinese people:

> I think the French, euh, when they have an idea, they will work hard, put a lot of effort to realize it. But for other euh, well, people from other countries maybe the Italian or the Spanish, they would see euh, the difficulty and maybe put it aside. And…the Chinese would think… euh it doesn't make a lot of money, or you need a lot of investment to do it, so they may not realize it. But I think the French is bold, and they want to…euh make something new or to excite or to surprise people with their idea (INT2)

Nicole also described French people and culture as 'innovative', perhaps inspired by the recent images of French culture promoted in Hong Kong by the French Consulate (see Chapter 5, section 5.4.4.2):

> Innovative, I can associate this with the fashion, technology and also the language. I recently started a book telling the day-to-day expression. I started only a few pages and like the second one it tells- it's "faire un canard" [to dunk], it's to add sugar for your coffee (INT2)

When she went to Paris during her intensive study-abroad summer course in 2008, a street scene (see Figure 15, p. 305) made a particularly strong impression on her. On the photograph she posted on Facebook, we see people walking with a golf ball covering their entire head: 'The cover is like golf ball. They join many plastic cups together, and by staple, and then put it all

over their head, and just walk through the street' (INT2). Nicole explained that what astonished her most about this scene was that passers-by did not seem to notice the strangeness of the scene. Nicole interpreted this as a sign that French people were used to crazy ideas such as these which further reinforced her idea that in France, people are bold or uninhibited:

> I think they're [French people] bold. I once saw a few people walking in the street with a cover over their head, and it doesn't seem to make any much attention. If you do it in Hong Kong then you will be on Facebook like a few seconds later (INT2)

To the notion that French culture is innovative was also attached the notion of freedom. In Nicole's perception, French people were innovative because they felt free to do so; in other words, freedom stimulated even more ideas and creativity:

> …like the example I've given, the [French] people with euh their hair cover in the street. I can feel the freedom and how people euh react when they have new thing happening around them (INT2)

By contrast, Hong Kong people were seen as less adventurous because their decisions were less free. This was because they were preoccupied by the idea of profit-making, which limited creativity:

> Their reaction [French people's reactions] tend to be euh not exaggerate[ed] or euh they're more used to new ideas. But in Hong Kong or in China, when you have a new idea... you see that idea as foreign, only you agree with the idea if it is successful (INT2)

Among her other positive impressions of French culture was its perceived freedom of expression, illustrated by Nicole's choice of posting in the FRENCHINHK Facebook group. She chose the question/answer sequence 'Say something sexy in French' 'Non' (see Chapter 4, section 4.6.7)

as an example of Frenchness because, according to her, French people would never hesitate to speak their mind, which she had also observed whilst working in the small French company:

> First of all I think it's [‘non’ is] French because I think French is straightforward and…they tend not to please…just to say yes by saying yes… yeah because I think they are very straightforward and…they are not fake or yea it's like opposite to Chinese, Chinese tend to say yes yes yes to everything… but after all… you will put too much burden on yourself, but I think maybe generally for Westerner or non-Chinese… they know when to say no (INT2)

In the first interview, Nicole had remarked on the difficulty of working in a completely Chinese environment because Chinese people do not speak their mind: ‘I think it's even more difficult [to work in a Chinese environment than to work in a French environment] because Chinese tend to hide their feelings, emotions and… they would say something opposite to their mind (INT1). For this reason, she said she tried to avoid working for local companies (‘not completely local companies’, IRT meeting).

To summarise again, Nicole seemed attracted to French culture because of her perception that French people are bold and innovative and display freedom both in their expression and their ideas. By contrast, Nicole suggested that Hong Kong people were more restricted in their ideas and expression, drawing attention to the fact that Hong Kong society was cautious and less ‘open-minded’ because of the restrictions of traditional Chinese culture and the Confucian values she had mentioned earlier:

> I think the difference would be mainly that euh French are more open-minded and maybe braver to take risks or to be euh adventurous. In Hong Kong, euh although we not hundred percent said hundred percent same as China but euh we are we still have some we share some Chinese values, like we have to euh be close to our family, we have to live together and we cannot abandon everything in Hong Kong and then be an adventurer around the world, something like that and I think this is this kind of value or attitude is a

> one of the big differences between Chinese or Cantonese Hong Kong and French culture (INT3)

9.4 Exploring the meaning of French with Nicole

Although Nicole was continuing to take a weekly French lesson throughout the inquiry, there was very little evidence that the language had much use for her in conventional terms. In her techno-linguistic report, Nicole wrote that she used French rarely:

> Seldom I would write in French if my post is related to French. I found only 2 examples in my recent posts... The second one is basically in English only that I gave my painting a French title. (TLR)

She also suggested that knowing French perfectly was not necessary since there was Google Translate:

> … Google translate, I use it for translating text which makes it easier for text/ websites in French only. Although I have not read many more with the help of Google Translate, at least I do not panic when I see text in French only and it did help when I was in elementary level. (TLR)

In addition, Nicole suggested that her motivation to learn French fluctuated according to her professional development. When she was working for a Japanese company, French learning became less motivating: 'It's not that I don't want to learn it [French] but it's not among my priorities now' (INT3). But when I asked her if she was thinking of giving up French, she answered that she was not going to:

> I don't think I will give up French for Japanese. It's two things, they are separate, so it's not that I learn Japanese and I have to stop French. (INT3)

> It's not that I don't want to learn it [French] but it's not among my priorities now (INT3)

Yet, on other occasions, Nicole also showed signs of having a more durable interest in French despite the fact that she thought she was not progressing well and that she sometimes lost motivation for learning. In her LLH, Nicole described her level of French as 'sucky' ('I can speak in French in a sucky way') and 'similar to [her] English level back in Primary 4 and 5'. In general, her feeling was that she had not progressed much since university: 'The progress is slow as satisfaction from learning French is not very motivating and I am uncertain of my level since I never take any French public exam' (LLH). At the start of the inquiry, although Nicole had told me about her objective to eventually pass the B1 DELF test (see section 9.2 about university), she did not mention this again, suggesting either that she could not motivate herself to take it or that her interest in learning French was not merely linked to acquiring conventional qualifications and certificates.

Despite this, she seemed attached to continuing to learn French. In the first interview, she mentioned the possibility of working in France one day as well as gaining other benefits from learning French. All in all, Nicole emphasized in the excerpt below that language learning was an integral 'part of [her] life':

> I still imagine myself being fluent in French, and maybe one day will work in France or in a French company that I can use French at work. That gives me more opportunity potential […] definitely it gives me more confidence. Euh at least when people ask you what you like or what you learn or what you learn as... a third language, I can euh tell them about French. And it's euh can be a strength for at workplace. And it's also part of my life, because I like learning languages. And not especially being with foreigners, but euh it's a way to explore the world (INT2)

To summarize this aspect of her story, the meaning of learning French for Nicole is not explainable as a desire to gain linguistic mastery, although there is an awareness that knowing French well could be useful one day. The next sections explore what learning French (and by extension, learning other foreign languages) represents for Nicole at this moment in her life.

9.4.1 Learning languages as a way to satisfy her curiosity and cultivate an open mind

In general, the inquiry showed that Nicole's interest in learning languages was linked to her curiosity to discover the world and a desire to cultivate an open mind (as already suggested in section 9.2 above):

> I know more about the language and the culture and about the people and these are new things new ideas to me and, it may change my value my mind… mindset somehow (INT2)

> I think the more you know then the more you can understand and the more you can euh…when you understand more and then you have the ability to know even further so that is the advantage or the use to know several languages (INT3)

In the inquiry, Nicole repeatedly described herself as someone interested in trying new ideas and learning new things, in particular things that were not Chinese:

> I'm interested in different cultures and languages, I'm always curious about things that are not Chinese so… and this interest drives to learn new languages and meet new friends and I get happiness from this interest (INT1)

Learning different languages for Nicole was also a way to understand her own culture better:

> When you learn a new thing, a new language or culture, always I reflect on my own (emphasized) culture and it's like learning both culture or language at the same time (INT1)

For example, during her trip to Australia (see section 9.2 about her experience of learning languages at school), Nicole gained a new cultural perspective; she learned that Chinese people could be negatively stereotyped abroad. This made her reflect about her identity, including its possible ethnic and national dimensions.

With regard to her decision to learn French, Nicole suggested that her motivation was to learn about 'so much more' than the language: 'as I develop a language I think I can explore, I can understand so much more so and I [thought] probably I should take up French because I can learn so much more' (INT1). For example, Nicole hoped to feed her interest in art through learning French (see section 9.2 about university).

To summarise, learning languages (including French) in Nicole's stories can be seen as a way for Nicole to satisfy her curiosity and feed her desire for new ideas and cross-cultural perspectives. As art is a particular interest in Nicole's life, one of the particular meanings of learning French in Nicole's story is to keep her connection with art alive. This is particularly relevant for her in a context which currently limits her artistic aspirations. This idea will be further developed in the next section.

9.4.2 French as a pathway to her future imagined artistic self

Apart from using French to gain new perspectives and artistic knowledge, another role of French in Nicole's story was to maintain her connection to art. Nicole initially seemed to minimize the place of art in her life, as suggested in the following excerpt:

> N: I always wanted to be an artist, to draw or to paint. But along the years, I don't receive any training in art making or painting. I took lessons like after school lessons once a week for one or two years in secondary school to learn Chinese calligraphy, I liked it but I didn't further developed it into a career
>
> Me: Is this a disappointment in your life?
>
> N: No! Because after…like euh…maybe…maybe it's…the environment in Hong Kong, being an artist is even more difficult than getting a normal job in office so I opt for the easier (laugh) (INT1)

Despite this, several comments suggested that she was not fully satisfied with this situation:

> I want to maybe to be a painter after I retire or to use this euh painting talent or to use my sense in art or creativity euh in my job sometime or maybe for my next job (INT2)

Also, in the extract below, I developed the impression that she was resigned to her fate. The comments 'I work to live' or 'I hope in ten or fifteen years before I turn too old' suggested this, as follows:

> Me: (laugh) so how do you see yourself now? How do you see yourself in the future?
>
> N: hhmmm…myself now hhmm…I work for life… work to live but then euh…maybe after… I hope in ten or fifteen years before I turn too old, I can have more time for my hobbies, for my interests like painting, travelling than work
>
> Me: hhmm
> N: Now I…I put so much time on work and I have less free time for myself and…friends and families, I want it to be the opposite at…in certain period of time (INT1)

Likewise, in the IRT meeting, as we were going through my first written interpretation of her story, Nicole underlined her dissatisfaction with her life balance at the time of the inquiry ('my life is out of balance now') and stressed again the importance of art for her dream of being involved with art in future: 'I want to make this [art project] a full-time job not only for weekends'. From this, I began to think of French learning as a resource for Nicole to maintain a connection with her artistic interests and future plans. What was interesting in Nicole's stories was that learning foreign languages and associating with foreign friends appeared to be a compromise or reconciliation between these interests and plans on the one hand, and the constraints of her environment on the other.

9.4.3 Languages as a way to compromise with the limitations of her environment and its constraints

As already mentioned (see section 9.3), Nicole found the Hong Kong environment limited in creativity and less 'open-minded' than French culture. Thus, one role of languages seemed to be to compensate for this by gaining new perspectives:

> I like the feeling that you discover, I like to discover new things. I like just the feeling to find something different than my routine because in a place that you belong, people are quite similar in many ways, but when you go abroad maybe something you found so normal but they will find [it] so funny and I like that feeling (INT1)

In addition to these general limitations, the inquiry revealed many constraints in Nicole's life. Apart from tensions at work (see section 9.2), there was family pressure as Nicole became responsible for looking after her mother after her father passed away. Nicole also described Hong Kong as 'quite a stressful city' (INT1), for example the way people behaved with one another was a particular source of stress:

> Chinese [people] they would put things in a very polish way but actually they are humiliating or insulting or saying something negative […] they put in a very polish and positive way so sometimes if you're not careful or think in another way, you would be deceived "oh, they're saying something positive to… oh, they can be friends… they're showing…", they're being friendly to you but yeah (sigh/laugh) it's to be another way round (INT1)

Another source of stress in Nicole's story seemed to be the state of the world more generally at the time of the inquiry. The following excerpt suggests Nicole's state of anxiety during the inquiry:

> Between Hong Kong and China is very stressed, and… the internet users from mainland they tried to attack every Hong Kong celebrities or politicians who publicly voiced out their opinion against China. Like a singer called Denise Ho, she's very outspeaking, and she withdraw her business from Tao Bao, the Chinese Alibaba, and she made statements… against the Chinese government and support the… yellow umbrella revolution, and her page is attacked like non-stop now. And…even Taiwanese politicians are being attacked on Facebook. And like the son of… Beckham, the footballer in UK, his son posted a picture of dalai lama, with his saying…I don't remember the saying, his quote. And he had attack from the Chinese. They- they're crazy! I can't imagine why what other say matter so much to them (INT2)

In our conversation about the political situation in Hong Kong, her connections with her foreign friends seemed to serve the purpose of distracting her from this anxiety. When I asked her about the importance of her involvement with the international community, she answered that it made her feel better: 'At least to… to make myself feel better' (INT2). She also said that she was thinking of renewing her British passport and suggested that she would be prepared to leave Hong Kong: 'China can change just within a second. They… there's no logic you can guess. So… better to have a secondhand [plan]', INT2).

Yet, when the fortune-teller predicted that she might live abroad in future, she seemed to dislike this idea:

> I am not eager to move outside Hong Kong. I still feel Hong Kong is my home and want to stay close to my friends and family, but euh yea maybe in future. I don't know (INT3)

In fact, Nicole's story showed that she was deeply attached to Hong Kong despite there being several aspects of its culture she felt unhappy with (for example, the fact that there was limited interest in the arts and few opportunities to express one's creativity). The two excerpts below indicate her attachment and connection to her culture and her language:

> It [Cantonese] is just a big part of me (INT1)

> Cantonese it's a language that evolves all the time and it's like my character (INT1)

Besides, Nicole remarked that every culture was imperfect, suggesting that Hong Kong culture was as good as any despite the tensions:

> I don't think you can ever find a culture that you fit in hundred percent and after I've been here for all of my life I still survive so I think I fit in although in some ways I don't agree with the majority maybe but I… yeah maybe I compromise (INT1)

In the inquiry, Nicole's connection to foreign languages and cultures thus appeared as a form of reconciliation (Nicole called it a 'compromise') with the environment, through a process of imagination. This arrangement was suggested in her description of her identity, in which she used the character Alice of Wonderland to suggest that there was more to her than met the eye:

> Oh! It's difficult [to define her identity]. It's like a question in Alice in the Wonderland…Who is Alice?… I think my identity would be just a bunch of descriptions about me. My name doesn't tell anything, someone born in Hong Kong, loves learning languages, curious about new things, adventurous… like making friends blah blah blah…. My identity yeah really difficult to answer (pause) It also includes all the things and all the things I have done, all the things I have seen and all the people I meet I met (INT3)

The Alice metaphor seemed to underline the presence of two Nicoles: one Nicole having to live in her imperfect reality (for example, the fact that work was a dispiriting place for her) and one Nicole who nurtured a different self, inspired by art and by her dreams of the future. In the inquiry (see section 9.2), Nicole talked about her respect for her father's values and particularly about his 'middle way' of thinking (the Confucian way). From this heritage, whose presence had continued and even perhaps intensified since Nicole's father passed away, leaving her with increased responsibility towards her mother, the idea of 'compromise' was necessary: 'I know euh sometimes you have to go against your opinion or your values just to compromise' (INT2).

9.4.4 Frenchness as one of the elements of 'compromise'

In the inquiry, another of the roles of Frenchness was to assist Nicole's process of accomodation with herself and with her context, in a manner which avoided rejecting her upbringing and the traditions of her culture. As already mentioned, Nicole's perceptions of Hong Kong culture contrasted with her perceptions of French culture regarding the role of the arts and the place of creativity (see section 9.3). In a post-interview email, Nicole further described Hong Kong culture as not 'comparable' to French culture in terms of the treatment of art in society:

> I can see HK is developing in arts yet it's not comparable [to French culture]. Take art fair as an example, you can easily find a few stalls doing exactly the same thing and the atmosphere is more commercial than artistic (email dated 28 Feb. 2016)

In addition, Nicole was not satisfied by the limited choices of career in Hong Kong, as mentioned earlier:

> There're many people doing something they don't like in Hong Kong. They just work to get their living. And… it's not about… it's not what life is all about […] There are limited choices here for people to choose from. Like I study in art, and I couldn't find a job related to art... and we lack diversity here, and I find it quite boring. And euh and also the culture it limits your creativity too (INT 2)

To summarise, Nicole found it hard to fully express herself in Hong Kong. In the excerpt below, Nicole appears to suggest that learning about French culture was a way to lift herself out of Hong Kong with the idea of potentially being able to physically 'break away' from the way people lived their life there:

> … it gives me ideas about euh others' life living on the other side of the world, euh it's not necessary for me to live in the same way as other Hong Kong or the major Hong Kong people live. To live is to make yourself feel contented, or happy, or trying to offer help to others, and yeah it's… yeah it… should break away from the ideas or to physically been in Hong Kong (INT2)

But in the following excerpt, French comes across more as 'a breathing space' that enables her to deal with her own culture, rather than 'breaking away' from it:

> Me: So it [learning about French culture] gives you the ideas and the confidence to think of how you can be in your own society, even if it's very different?
>
> N: Yeah. Euh… even I believe or I agree with some French ideas, it may not be possible in Hong Kong but still… it tells me that it's not impossible in the world. So it's not impossible at all. Maybe not happening in Hong Kong, or Hong Kong people think it's euh not possible or naïve or think... in a negative way, but still it works, somehow. So euh yeah it gives me some breathing space or euh ideas, or it keeps my curiosity… being curious about other cultures and think in different perspective towards one thing (INT2)

Ideas of Frenchness thus gave her ideas for ways to deal with her environment, to be different in it and possibly to change it, for example by giving art a greater role. However, crucially, although Nicole expressed her desire to 'break away' from the thoughts and the ways of doing things in her society (which Nicole called 'tradition'), she was not prepared to violate her society's rules:

> …there are always alternatives or other ways to present yourself or […] there're many ways to achieve one goal […] or to break away from the tradition, but not violating any rules or it can be simply something new (INT2)

9.5 The meaning of French in Nicole's story

To conclude, the practice of learning about languages and their cultures took on several meanings and roles in Nicole's story. Her connection with French language and culture appeared as a way to gain some respite from the constraints in her life (particularly her difficulties at work) as well as gain new perspectives and ideas. French also created a link with her interest in art and her need for creativity, which she was not able to express in her own context. Ideas of Frenchness also created a space in which to reflect and reconnect with herself. The role of French in Nicole's story can also be seen as an encouragement to do things which seem 'impossible' in Hong Kong (for example, perhaps, her dream of an art-related community project). Her connection to French (and to other languages) also appeared as a compromise with her context, which is to say that it should not be seen in oppositional terms, but in cohabiting terms.

Chapter 10 Discussion

This study has aimed to discover what it means to learn French in Hong Kong by focusing on the particularities of four individuals' stories, in a way which has avoided the reduction of language learning experiences to accounts of 'motivation' occurring in a sociopolitical vacuum. In the stories of Candice, Yasmina, IC and Nicole, learning and using French can be seen as an affordance for identity construction at a particular time in their lives, within the limitations and affordances of their context. At the time of the inquiry, Candice was still a university student and full of questions about who she was, what she wanted to do and what she might become. Yasmina, IC and Nicole had all been working for a few years when the inquiry started, with Nicole's experience of learning French at university being the most distant (she left university in 2008). But like Candice, the three of them were also trying to clarify who they were and what they wanted to do in their lives. The issue of finding their place at work was an especially burning issue in the stories of Yasmina, IC and Nicole. In other words, the inquiry caught the participants at the beginning of their adulthood, a time when most people find their first full time jobs and wonder about the suitability of these jobs (and about their suitability for these jobs), and about the consequences of these professional choices for their future.

Although the analytical process in narrative inquiry warns against excessive generalization – Clandinin and Connelly suggest that many narrative inquirers end up writing a generalizable document, 'in which the threads constitute generalizations and participants fade into support roles' (2000, 143) – this discussion will be looking across the four stories reported in this study because, as Bruner points out (2004, 702), looking across several narratives can help to 'thicken' understanding. Riessman (1993, 70) also notes that '[t]o reach theoretical levels of abstraction,

comparative work is desirable'. Clandinin (2013) sees in the creation of threads between experiences an opportunity to 'open up new wonders and questions' about the phenomena under study as well as become 'more responsive' to it (p. 132).

Before summarizing the insights gained from the data in relation to the main research question – in what ways does the learning of French as an additional language contribute to processes of identity formation – I will start by highlighting what the study uncovered in contrast to previous research into identity and language learning.

10.1. Learning French in Hong Kong: key findings highlighted by the study

This study generally suggests that the reasons for learning French in Hong Kong are highly individualized and localized as well as being interrelated with other aspects of the participants' lives in a dynamic process, reflecting Dewey's conception of experience (see Chapter 4, section 4.2.2). In other words, the study illustrates the complexities of socially-constructed identities in an era of globalization and mobility.

The study also illustrates Layder's (2006) point regarding the importance of agency (p. 145). A main finding in the inquiry is that French is a way to deal dynamically with a 'complex of micro-hegemonies' (Blommaert & Varis 2015, pp. 3-5) such as impositions or limitations at the institutional level (i.e., the workplace for Yasmina, Nicole and IC and university for Candice). Likewise, in Yoshimoto's thesis (2008) about Japanese women (including herself) learning English, English is presented as a way to liberate herself from the gendered and sociocultural inequities in Japanese culture:

> In my case, English liberated me from old cultural values and norms, transforming me in a third place, in uncharted waters. I am becoming something of an entirely different person who has multiple voices, challenging, breaking, revaluing and relocating both Japanese and Western cultural expectations toward women. (Yoshimoto 2008, 250)

Emotions – often triggered by how other people were felt to think of or behave towards the participants - also appeared to have played an important part in the dynamic agentive process. French gained additional meaning in relation to the emotions triggered by the changing political landscape in Hong Kong, as well as in relation to colleagues' behaviours or attitudes (for Yasmina, IC and Nicole) or peers' reactions (in Candice's story). This resulted in a great diversity of agentive behaviours.

The study also shows great variation in the perception of the 'local'. The learning of French and the perception of Frenchness inevitably draw on stereotypes of French and Frenchness that circulate globally but are given individual and local expression in a variety of ways. Related to this, the study serves to illustrate Pennycook's point (2010, 80) that 'the global is always manifested locally, and the local is always part of the global'.

In addition, French appears as not the only but as one of 'a multitude of different niches' (Blommaert & Varis 2015, 5) in which identity is constructed. From this perspective, learning an additional language such as French can be seen as one of the many micro actions or 'changing options' human beings use to 'assemble' themselves according to 'what is right or wrong' for themselves (Rampton 2006, 12). Indeed, in their narratives, French appeared alongside other

interests and activities, such as photography and cinema in Yasmina's narrative, voluntary work and networks of friends in Nicole's story, and the New Age philosophy movement in Candice's narrative, as well as involvement with other languages in all their stories (including English, which was used alongside French in IC's narrative as a way to differentiate herself as a Hongkonger in contrast to Mainland Chinese). Following Blommaert and Varis (2015), the use of French in the participants' stories can thus be described as a form of 'accent' (p.16) to perform distinct identity moves.

Furthermore, the study shows that although the participants often defined French language and culture by contrasting it with their own, the role of French in the participants' stories was not merely an act of resistance against their cultural environment. Unexpectedly, the study shows that the participants used their generally positive (one could say 'idealised') perceptions of French culture to re-assess their own culture in a process of comparison between 'points of sameness and difference' (Coffey 2010, 125), looking for ideas to help them understand their environment better as well as renegotiate their relationship with it, such as in Yasmina and Nicole's stories. In this way, the process of learning French appears as a process of rediscovering and reinventing Hong Kong culture rather than trying to link up with a French community. In this way, the study further illustrates Hennig's finding (2010a) that additional language learning is a way to gain 'a sense of societal and cultural belonging' (p. 313). The findings also demonstrate that learning an additional language is a way to 'reinvigorate the local and empower the locals' (Gee 2000, 121).

Finally, another major finding of this study is that the participants find, in their limited French, a lot of meaning potential, challenging conventional ideas of what it means to learn a language. In

the inquiry, the participants' practices can be described as activities of reflection (French is described as a 'breathing space' in Nicole's story; INT2), as a way to nurture the self (by mobilizing sides of the self they feel they cannot express in their own culture (as in Yasmina's story) and as a channel for creativity in general (e.g., in Candice's and Nicole's stories). French also appears as a separate mode of expression online (e.g., for Yasmina and IC). In this way, the study shows how individuals in Hong Kong use additional languages in their own ways and for their own needs, and how language learning is more than just learning the 'correct' linguistic forms, even though learners themselves might not be aware of it.

To conclude, throughout the inquiry, a picture emerged of French as a highly personalized and context-based resource, the overarching purpose of which seemed to act as an affordance for identity construction. In particular, French appeared in the participants' stories as a resource to negotiate the constraints in their society as well as to preserve a sense of who they are or want to be. This role was constantly changing in response to changes at the contextual level (including at the personal, institutional and wider sociopolitical contexts, according to the analytical framework; see Chapter 4, section 4.3). In this, the picture of the language learner that emerged in the study challenges the idea that language learners take on a language to master it and instead, painted a picture of language learners using multiple aspects of the language (including intrapersonal, interpersonal and intercultural insights as well as a range of semiotic and interactional potentials) to perform their identity and exercise their agency.

In this, the study provides points of contrast with the perspectives gained from previous motivational studies, which have mainly looked at language learning from the points of view of acculturation, as briefly summarized in the following section.

10.2. The study's perspectives in comparison with motivational studies

In conventional or modernist sociolinguistics and language studies, there is a French community and French institutions which learners try to 'negotiate access' to, as in Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of communities of practice (or CoPs). In this study, where French is an additional language, the choice of French is of interest for several reasons. First, young Hong Kong adults are usually encouraged to make 'useful' study choices for their future career – such as studying English or business – and French does not easily fall into the category of 'useful' choices. Often, French is considered to be just a hobby. Secondly, the French community in Hong Kong, even if it is growing, is still small (see Chapter 5, section 5.4.1), which means that there are few opportunities to meet French people or work for French companies and thus, there is little reason to learn French if it is seen as a way to gain access to a French community.

Certainly, in the stories of Candice, Yasmina, IC and Nicole, there were no clearly expressed intentions to learn French as a way to negotiate entry to a French community (for example, to live in France or to interact with the French community in Hong Kong) or to learn French for instrumental purposes (for example, to prepare for a French exam or to join a French company). Although Nicole had mentioned wanting at some stage to take the DELF exam and has continued to learn French – and her knowledge of French was useful in finding employment – what was striking in the others' stories was how 'light' their involvement with French learning seemed to be. As already mentioned in the introduction (see Chapter 1), I had often wondered what students gained from a three-month French course. And although the four participants mentioned at some stage during the inquiry that they had considered either studying in France or going on a 'working holiday' (a Hong Kong scheme to encourage young people to experience

working abroad), these intentions were never mentioned again or elaborated upon in the inquiry. Perhaps the participants had mentioned these ideas so as not to disappoint me, or possibly they found it easier to express such conventional 'motivations'. In other words, from a conventional point of view, the participants' involvement in French would appear to be insignificant. For example, IC and Yasmina's level of French has not progressed much since studying it at university (in 2006-2007 for IC and in 2012-2013 for Yasmina). Yet, IC's short and far from recent experience of learning French played an important role in her stories as a connection to the outside world and as a way to reaffirm her local identity at a time when Hong Kong was going through a difficult political transition. The significance of additional languages changes, then, once they are seen as affordances for identity construction.

Also, another insight of the study was that the meaning of French for the participants existed only in relation to other languages and other cultures, including their own, and was also affected by the ongoing contextual developments in their society. For example, Yasmina's perceptions of French were built alongside her knowledge of the Japanese language and culture and in relation to her perceptions of Hong Kong culture, but also in relation to her personal situation during the inquiry. This included difficulties at work that were in turn linked to political tensions in Hong Kong. In other words, the meaning of French was generated by many different elements in her stories and was continuously changing.

In order to give additional background to these claims as well as offering some points of comparison between the four participants' stories presented in chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9, this discussion will summarise key aspects of the meaning and role of French for the participants as the study captured it during the two years of the inquiry. In the first main sub-section, I explain

how French can be seen as an act of agency in response to locally-generated norms and constraints in the participants' stories. This insight will be refined in the following sub-section by adding the notion that French also appeared as an act of rediscovery and reconciliation with the local environment. Finally, I will discuss the participants' personalized French practices as examples of processes of identity construction.

10.3. Learning French as an act of agency in response to locally-generated norms and constraints

In the inquiry, the participants' involvement with French emerges as a way to deal with perceived norms and constraints in their context. As already noted, from the perspective of language as social practice (see Chapter 2, section 2.3.1), language is considered not only as a reflection of social reality, but also as something with the potential to shape social reality (see Pennycook 2010, 129), and resistance can be seen as one way of shaping this reality. In the participants' stories, taking on French appears as a form of resistance against the way things are usually done in their society; they are resisting 'simply being socialized into the norms of a social group' (Rampton 2006, 12) or what Ollerhead (2012) calls being positioned in 'undesirable ways' in their society (p. 67; see also Makoe 2014, 657; Morita 2004; Norton 2001).

Although the narrative inquiry perspective of looking at experience in its wholeness (see Clandinin & Connelly 2000, 17) generally precludes looking at parts of this experience in isolation, I have decided for the sake of clarity in this discussion to summarize the role of French in the participants' lives in relation to the three levels of context defined in Barkhuizen's analytical framework (2016; see Chapter 4, section 4.3.2). First, I will identify the connections

between French learning (including French language and culture) and the participants' experiences at the institutional level of context (including work in Yasmina, IC and Nicole's stories and university in Candice's stories). Following this, I will illustrate the role of French in relation to the wider sociopolitical context. Finally, I will explain how connecting to French can be seen as a response to thoughts and emotions generated by the institutional and sociopolitical levels of context, experienced at the personal level.

10.3.1. French as a resource to deal with the institutional context

In all four participants' stories, perceptions of institutional pressure appeared repeatedly. In this, the study highlights the importance of power differentials and inequality in language learning and echoes poststructuralist studies of identity (see, for example, Norton 2000). Candice mentioned being unable to reach out to her university peers because they were not interested in the same things as her ('We don't have common topic. They always chat about little things, small talk', Candice INT2), which made her feel lonely and self-conscious at times (she repeatedly described herself as 'weird' in the inquiry). Another example of institutional pressure in Candice's story was her description of being confronted with conformist ideas about women in her society:

> When I was young and… many… not many but… my family particularly, grandma, my grandma said that I had to remove the spots (Candice INT1)

Similarly, Yasmina and Nicole's stories contained descriptions of a society expecting them to behave according to certain norms. For example, Yasmina conveyed images of pupils being forced into a moral straight-jacket in her Catholic secondary school:

> You were told good and bad values very clearly, you would know what [it] is according to the Bible, you have do what… you have a clear taboo and straight instructions to do everything (Yasmina INT1)

Her descriptions of her first full-time work experience also suggested the pressure of conformity: 'If your behaviour's out of their expectations they think you are out of the box of common sense so they might discriminate you' (Yasmina INT3). As for Nicole, constraints appeared in the form of her father's expectations that she should lead her life according to the Confucian codes of behaviour: 'You should always obey to your senior… to your family' (Nicole INT1). In Nicole's stories too, pressure from her hierarchy at work kept reappearing. For example, her line manager was described as being difficult, out of touch with new technologies and someone whom everyone criticized, but no one could challenge:

> She's local. She's I think in her fifties and she's quite special I would say (laugh). She's been in the company for eighteen years (laugh), started as a receptionist and then, maybe played with a lot of politics (laugh) and then, now she gets the position (laugh) yeah, I would say she's [her line manager] not good in computer and new things. She has her own way to do things and so many people are against her. She is alone. And she has a temper too (Nicole INT1)

Their perceptions of Frenchness and the role of French appeared in contrast to these difficulties at the institutional level of context, as explained in the final research texts (see Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9). To illustrate here some of the relationships between institutional constraints and Frenchness in the participants' accounts, I will use Yasmina's stories as an example (see also Chapter 7). In her stories, French people were perceived as free to express themselves and unconcerned about being rude (for example, the 'bitch-faced' waiters; Yasmina INT2). Yasmina mentioned the French waiters' behaviour in relation to her difficulties at work. There, Yasmina felt unable to express her ideas and told several stories of feeling stressed and inhibited in the presence of her peers, for example:

> …in workplace […] I have problems (laugh) in speaking (laugh) ... in reporting the issue to my boss in Cantonese […] sometimes I blame myself for being so nervous, speak to a senior grade (Yasmina INT3)

Another example is feeling she had to follow the way everyone thought (which she referred to as 'common sense') even though she may not agree; also, she suggested it was unsafe to share her view:

> They call it common sense… if your behaviour's <u>out</u> (stressed word) of their expectations they're they think you are <u>out of the box of common sense</u> (stressed word) […] If your behaviour's out of their expectations they think you are out of the box of common sense so they might discriminate you (Yasmina INT3)

In Yasmina's stories, her perceptions of Frenchness can be seen as a tool to imagine being more confident and thus, true to herself in relation to the power differentials and her difficulties in expressing herself at work:

> you just speak directly and « I don't want to do that thing» and it's kind of truth and it's representing your own self (Yasmina INT2)

The second function of Frenchness in these stories is that it is a tool for Yasmina to contest the power she is subjected to in a process of rescaling, which can be described as a way to regain power in a situation where power differentials exist (see Blommaert 2010, 34; see also Brenner, 2011; Chapter 3, section 3.5.1). Following the 'bitch-faced' French waiters' example, she takes control of the situation in her own mind by drawing upon perceived French behavioural norms for inspiration:

> If they wanted to give you bitch face, they would really give you the bitch face (laugh). It's kind of euh « I don't really want to do it, but I have to do it so I give it to you ! » showing their real own self (Yasmina INT2)

Whether this leads to actual contestation is another question, but clearly there is both inspiration and potential in these processes of comparison and rescaling.

To summarise, these examples illustrate the use of French and Frenchness as a way to exercise agency and - potentially at least – to regain power over the institutional level of context.

10.3.2. French and the Hong Kong sociocultural and political environment

During the inquiry, there were multiple hints in the participants' stories about the challenges of their sociocultural environment. The appeal of French culture must therefore be seen in relation to this wider level of local context. For example, Hong Kong culture in Yasmina's stories was described as not 'free' and full of 'hidden agendas' and 'restrictions' (Yasmina INT1) which contrasted with the way she perceived French culture as 'free', 'carefree' and 'relaxed' (Yasmina INT2). Again, the matrix of similarity and difference is used here to construct the identities of places in relational terms.

Nicole shared several stories of frustration because her initiatives were not recognized at work or she was not able to exercise her creativity. By contrast, French people appeared to her to be more open-minded and more innovative than their Chinese counterparts, who were seen as hindered in their creativity by Confucian values:

> I think the difference would be mainly that euh French are more open-minded and maybe braver to take risks or to be euh adventurous. In Hong Kong, euh although we not hundred percent said hundred percent same as China but euh we are we still have some we share some Chinese values, like we have to euh be close to our family, we have to live together and we cannot abandon everything in Hong Kong and then be an adventurer around the world, something like that and I think this is this kind of value or attitude is a one of the big differences between Chinese or Cantonese Hong Kong and French culture (Nicole INT3)

For Candice, who felt different from her university peers and often described herself as 'weird' (e.g. Chapter 6, section 6.2), French culture appeared as the antithesis of Hong Kong culture in terms of embracing individuality. Chinese culture was described as something which does not give 'a lot of praise or … appreciation' but instead distributes criticisms, which results in 'low self-esteem or not [being] really confident when doing things' (Candice INT3).

In IC's perception, Europeans (including French people) appeared more involved in fighting for their rights. By contrast, Hong Kong people were described as 'slaves' and as forgetting their rights (IC INT2), with IC adding that Hong Kong people 'always presume that [they] don't have the right to speak' (IC INT2). These perceptions were developed in the context of the struggle between Hong Kong and Mainland China, which was prominent in IC's stories. In other words, the appeal of Frenchness was intensified in IC's stories in relation to events at the wider sociopolitical scale in Hong Kong. These tensions were also in the background of Yasmina and Nicole's stories.

Connections to the political environment in Hong Kong also appeared in Yasmina's stories in relation to her difficulties at work. In the excerpt below, Yasmina painted a picture of overwhelming inferiority during a luncheon where the student-led demonstrations of the autumn of 2014 (known as the Umbrella Movement) were discussed. The fact that she did not share her

point of view was related to her perception that speaking up would create problems for her (including the possibility of losing her job, although this was not expressed clearly):

> They [colleagues] were making fun of the whole issues and describing the protesters and the students as really… violent, but it's not something that I that I …experienced in the movement and… I don't know why I feel kind of ASHAMED (louder) that I didn't speak up in that luncheon and I'm glad that I didn't speak up because of course (laugh) I will have a hard time afterwards (laugh) I would definitely have a hard time afterwards if I speak UP (laugh) ((spoken loud in a kind of jokingly manner)) but I don't know why I feel so ashamed at that time… because I feel so lonely in that luncheon (Yasmina INT1)

In this example, the recent political tensions in Hong Kong can be seen to exacerbate Yasmina's difficulties at work, including her difficulties in communicating her ideas in her society:

> "We don't say this, we won't say that !" and we try to not, to talk about some sensible euh sensitive, sensitive political issues for example. […] and I feel so so so (laugh) awkward and then I… OK I just don't talk about these issues anymore, and euh it's not free to speak about it (Yasmina INT2)

For Yasmina, Frenchness, in contrast to this, represented the freedom to express oneself openly and without regard to what other people may be thinking (exemplified by the 'bitch-faced' French waiter). Yasmina imagined that if she could speak French fluently, she would 'be more natural' and true to herself ['truly to myself'] (Yasmina INT3).

Equally, Nicole's anxiety, linked to her difficult work experiences as she was trying to find her role in the professional world (during the inquiry, she moved jobs several times) seemed multiplied by the various tensions in the world, including in Hong Kong. At one stage during the second interview, Nicole started to cry as we mentioned the Paris 2015 terrorist attacks. After she had calmed down, she suggested that the recent news was adding to her anxiety ('it's about…yeah everything that happened these few years', Nicole INT2). She described the

political tensions between Hong Kong and China as ‘very stressed’ (Nicole INT2) and her link to the international community as a way to make herself feel better (‘At least to… to make myself feel better’, Nicole INT2) as well as a kind of insurance policy if things went wrong with China:

> China can change just within a second. They… there’s no logic you can guess. So… better to have a secondhand [plan] (Nicole INT2)

The political changes in Hong Kong also featured prominently in IC’s narratives. In the inquiry, she repeated in different ways that Mainland China represented a threat for the future of Hong Kong culture, for example: ‘it's not rude to us it's rude to our Hong Kong culture actually, it's rude to our area actually. Euh...they're not respecting others' culture’ (IC INT2). There seemed to be a link between this situation and her decision to come back to work in Hong Kong for a local company. She presented her decision to stay in Hong Kong and not to ‘escape’ abroad (IC INT2) – as she accused some of her friends of doing - as a matter of duty to Hong Kong in relation to the threats posed to Hong Kong culture:

> I don’t want to say I’ll move out because yeah… I know Hong Kong is getting worse so I’ll move out no […] I don’t know maybe just move out or something else, it is not the right way to contribute to the society you are being raised by (IC INT3)

Making connections between Hong Kong and other cultures seemed to be a way for IC to cope with the perceived threats to Hong Kong culture. In the inquiry, IC underlined the multicultural as well as ‘localized’ aspects of her Hong Kong identity (which by extension also characterized her view of the identity of the territory):

> I won't have the definite nationality of culture here because we are, I am I'm born in Hong Kong and I'm born to be a multicultural person. So my lifestyle is totally a mixture, but I think mostly I think it's Hongkongish because most of my time is in Hong Kong (IC INT2)

Hongkongers' code-mixing practices (for example, English, with some French words, mixed with Cantonese) was presented as an expression of this Hong Kong identity, and was contrasted with Mainland Chinese culture, perceived by IC as monolingual (i.e., Mandarin-only):

> … if it [French-English code-mixing] is the way that they [British people] speak … then it is… just like code mix[ing] between English and …Cantonese in Hong Kong but for example like Mainland immigrant, they won't so you can differentiate between how localized you are in a particular country or language (IC INT1)

In this way, IC's story illustrates Bloammaert and Varis's (2015) idea of individuals striving to create 'small spaces of uniqueness, of things that we believe we do not share with others' (p. 27). In addition, the role of French (and English) here appears as a way to reinforce (and/or (re)establish) the local culture and identity, seen as multicultural and multilingual in comparison to China's (perceived) monolingual and monocultural identity. In Chapter 5 (see section 5.3.1), I suggested that the inquiry into the four young Hong Kong people's identity might have a lot to do with the perceived gradual loss of Hong Kong identity. Ben Bland, the South China correspondent for the *Financial* Times, in his recent book entitled 'Generation HK' remarked:

> In researching this book, I spoke to a wide range of exceptional young Hong Kongers who are on the front lines of a battle to define themselves, their city and their future at a time of great uncertainty and change. (Bland 2017, 120)

To summarise, the participants in this study used French (as well as other cultural resources and languages, such as English in IC's story) to resist constraints and exercise agency at the institutional and the broader sociopolitical levels of context (see Barkhuizen, 2016) again through a process of rescaling. Again, it is uncertain whether these acts – of resistance, and of imagination – represent actual rescaling, but nevertheless the imaginative rescaling is noticeable and has significance at the so-called 'personal' level.

I will now consider in more detail the role of Frenchness in relation to the personal level of context. According to Barkhuizen's framework of analysis (2016, 663), the personal level is the one at which individuals have the greatest scope for agency.

10.3.3. French as a resource at the personal level: asserting and re-claiming the self

The interpretations of the role of French in the participants' stories so far have highlighted the socially constructed nature of language. Considering the participants' inner thoughts, emotions and ideas (which is to say, the personal aspect of their stories and the sociality dimension of the three-dimensional inquiry space; see Chapter 4, section 4.3.2) added new insights into this socially-constructed process of language use and learning and into the role of French in the participants' stories.

At this stage, I find it useful to refer back to the role of subjectivity in understanding agency (see Chapter 3, sections 3.3.1.2 and 3.3.1.3). During the inquiry, it was clear that emotions played a role in triggering agency and the participants' stories of the Hong Kong environment not allowing them to express their desires seemed to have triggered an interest in Frenchness, as they saw in it a resource to express 'their hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions' (Clandinin & Connelly 2000, 50; see also Clandinin & Rosiek 2007, 39 & 41). Ortner (2005, 34) highlights the relation between agency and a matrix of feelings (or what she calls 'a matrix of subjectivity'). I will illustrate this with examples from Yasmina, Nicole and Candice's stories.

Yasmina did not feel able to express her own ideas at work. Because she had to control what she said, she was tense with her superiors and unable to communicate her ideas (even in Cantonese).

The result of this was visible. For example, when I met her for the third interview, she appeared to have lost weight and looked exhausted, from overwork and being anxious about work. Yasmina's difficulties with self-expression appeared at several places in her stories, including in her memories of childhood, school and university. In her LLH, for example, she talked about her 'worst memory' in childhood (Yasmina LLH) following her rejection by several kindergartens because she did not know Cantonese, having spent the first three years of her life in her maternal non-Cantonese speaking family in Southern China. Similar difficulties and feelings appeared in her descriptions of university (see Chapter 7, section 7.2).

By contrast, her descriptions of herself in Japanese and French cultures conveyed an image of someone at ease with herself and with others, even though her situation in these contexts was different since she did not have the pressure and constraints of work and could relax more and since her involvement with Japanese and French cultures was temporary. Nevertheless, through the way she talked about her experiences in these cultures, Yasmina suggested her openness to others and their ideas. For example, she talked about how the Japanese singer Sheena Ringo and her pop-rock band 'Tokyo Jihen' had opened her views about taboo topics (see Chapter 7, section 7.2). In a similar way, the French New Wave cinema (*La Nouvelle Vague*) also seemed to play a role in developing curiosity and openness (see Chapter 7, section 7.3).

In this way, the role of French (as well as Japanese) can be seen in Yasmina's stories as a resource to build a more confident image of herself – perhaps leading to actual confidence – as well as the inspiration to dare to express her own views in an environment where she had felt restricted in doing so.

French has a similar confidence-building role in Nicole's stories as she deals with several constraints in her life, including the weight of Confucian values in her upbringing ('we have to be close to our family, we have to live together and we cannot abandon everything in Hong Kong and then be an adventurer around the world' (Nicole INT3) and her work situation (see Chapter 9, section 9.2) and finds through French a way to keep alive her suppressed dream of becoming an artist (see Chapter 9, section 9.4.2). With perceptions that French culture is artistic, creative and innovative (see Chapter 9, section 9.3), another role of French (as well as that of other languages) can be understood as a way to achieve a 'compromise' (Nicole's word) with her environment and more particularly, a way to deal with the absence of art in her life and the fact that she is not able to use her creativity. Another role of French in Nicole's story is to allow herself to breathe and reconnect with herself (see Chapter 9, section 9.4.4).

In this way, the inquiry into Nicole's stories also illustrates that the meaning of Frenchness is linked to processes of identity construction and is strongly related to the imagination. As Norton (1995, 410) notes, imagination is where we explore new possibilities of self for the future (see also Wenger 1998, 185; Clarke & Hennig 2013, 81). Early and Norton (2012) also note that imagining ourselves as different is a potent way of dealing with the limitations and impositions of the local environment (see also Chapter 3, section 3.4).

The personal meaning of Frenchness was also evident in Candice's story, as explained in Chapter 6. For example, French culture was perceived as appreciative of uniqueness (which she referred to as 'the culture of "finding the charm in others"', Candice, Messenger, 11 Apr. 2016) and this became a resource to assert herself as a 'weird' individual, which is to say a unique individual, different from everyone else, as well as reclaim self-respect:

> Understanding that each of us is different and unique, at the same time knowing that we are all the same and that we should treat each other equally and fair (Candice, Messenger, 11 Apr. 2016)

To summarise, French was one of the resources used at the personal level to deal with negative emotions, and strive to be the person the participants wished to be. This aligns with Layder's idea of identity as a *self-realization* project (2004, 143; see Chapter 3, section 3.3.1.3) as well as with Hennig's idea of 'self-formation' (2010b, ii; see also 2010a) whereby part of the attraction of learning a language such as French is that it serves 'to attain a particular life-style, to add value to the quality of life and achieve a sense of self-fulfillment' (see also section 2.4.2.2). In this way, the meaning of French (and by extension, the meaning of learning other languages) appears also as part of a 'reflexive project of the self' (Giddens 1991, 5), which is also present in the concept of 'care of the self' as it involves 'making oneself open to oneself, to further develop oneself, to transform and return to oneself' (Hennig 2010b, 30).

10.4. French learning as a way to rediscover and reconcile with the local environment

Although the sense of agency I have so far highlighted may appear to be an act of of resistance to certain aspects of the local environment, one of the key insights of the study is that Frenchness provides resources for people to reconcile themselves with this environment to some extent. This reveals one aspect of the relationship between 'fixity' and 'fluidity' (e.g., see Otsuji & Pennycook 2010, 244; see Chapter 2, section 2.2.1).

In the inquiry, participants could be seen to construct their identity partly by borrowing circulating images and perspectives from other cultures, illustrating the point made by Block

(2007) that in some ways 'discourses may be seen as resources of identity construction' (p. 19). However, these resources tend to be integrated in ways that avoid confrontation at the local level. Even though their rescaling practices may appear to have few external results, the study shows that using resources from French is to engage in processes of negotiating power differentials. They then can go back to their environment with new perspectives and a better understanding of it, which helps them cope with its demands. Thus, another important aspect of the study is that part of the meaning of learning French is as a means to understand and navigate the local culture.

10.4.1. French as part of a process of reconciliation with the local culture

In the study, the participants' identities can be pictured as being constructed at two levels: at ground level (the physical space of Hong Kong where they need to compromise and conform) and the higher imaginary ground where they go to perform different kinds of identities (including on the net). It is in the interactions between these levels that participants' processes of identity construction take place in relation to French, drawing on additional resources from imaginative engagement. As noted in Chapter 3 (see section 3.4), imagination is a place from which we 'move back' to 'look at our engagement through the eyes of an outsider' (Wenger 1998, 185). From this place, we gather flexibility, freedom and energy and explore new identities and new relations.

Yasmina resolved her problems in her 'local' culture by appropriating elements from 'non-local' cultures such as French and Japanese. For example, through Frenchness she developed intercultural awareness via a process of comparing similarities and differences, which help her to

communicate better about herself, to gain confidence, and to have her individuality accepted and recognized by others, but all in a way that avoids confrontation:

> I think in the whole process of communication, it shows your respect and your… your open-minded side throughout the communication if that communication is efficient or at least, whole parties think you are really communicating and try to understand each other (Yasmina INT1)

In other words, borrowing from Frenchness did not lead to a rejection of her environment, but rather helped her negotiate her way into her own society.

In Nicole's story, the appropriation of Frenchness served the purpose of rehearsing the goal of reconnecting with art in the future (she mentioned a community art project she has had in mind for several years), but Nicole also clearly signalled her intention not to confront the realities of her local culture (for example, by not trying to pursue an artistic career in Hong Kong in view of the weight of public and family opinion about this). Instead of confronting the prevalent discourses in her society, Nicole found in her connections with the outside (through foreign cultures, languages and friends) a 'compromise', as through imagination (and for the time being, through imagination only), she could temporarily break away with 'tradition' and continue nurturing her artistic dreams:

> …there are always alternatives or other ways to present yourself or […] there're many ways to achieve one goal […] or to break away from the tradition, but not violating any rules or it can be simply something new (Nicole INT2)

This aspect of the participants' engagement with French clearly illustrates Layder's (2006) point about conformity and deviance, mainly that they are not 'stark alternatives' but 'have many shapes and can be deceptive in appearance' (p. 145; see also Chapter 3, section 2.2.2). Layder's

insight also echoes the point made by Otsuji and Pennycook (2010, 244), that 'fixity' and 'fluidity' are not dichotomous. Compromise may suggest fixity, but by being charged with imagination it becomes more fluid and dynamic than it seems.

10.4.2. French as a way to reinforce and assert the local against the global

IC's relationship with the local context was different. Her appropriation of languages can be seen as an attempt to strengthen the local identity by resisting an external or global imposition. IC's use of English and French alongside Cantonese, and her conception of multilingual practices, serve to differentiate herself as a Hongkonger from Mainland Chinese (see Chapter 8, section 8.5.2). This appears to resemble the kind of 'clandestine literacy practices' described by Canagarajah (2004, in Norton 2012, 5), a form of resistance against the pressure exercised on Hong Kong by Mainland China (see Chapter 8, section 8.3.2). Her decision to move back to Hong Kong and work for a local company after working for two large international companies over a number of years was also narrated partly as an act of resistance on behalf of Hong Kong. In addition, IC appeared to resist pressure to learn to socialize in a western way and also hinted at the difficulty of competing for work on the global work market (see Chapter 8, section 8.3.1).

To conclude, this study illustrates the poststructuralist contention that identities are discursively constructed in ways that show both compliance and resistance (Weedon 1997, 109). Social subjects 'actively interpret the world' (Weedon 1997, 93) and are positioned by, while actively positioning themselves in, the local and global discourses they are subjected to.

10.5. Individualizing and personalizing French: using multilingual language practices as affordances for identity construction

The stories of the participants show that they used French in ways which affected their identity, illustrating the point that language is 'an activity rather than a structure' (Pennycook 2010, 2). Pennycook makes the point that:

> [I]t is not language that governs the speakers of the language but rather the speakers that negotiate what possible language forms they want to use for what purpose (Pennycook 2010, 129)

In this study, the notion of 'forms' takes on a new meaning as it is not primarily linguistic forms that serve affordances but rather forms of engagement with the multiple meanings offered by individual perceptions of French and Frenchness.

10.5.1 'Truncated' and personalized practices

Drawing on Blommaert's (2010, 103) notion of 'truncated repertoires', this section shows how limited levels of 'competence', in the conventional sense, are not an obstacle to the performance of identity work in and through the additional language.

In the inquiry, Yasmina shared some examples of her use of French in the techno-linguistic report (TLR), including a visual (Yasmina's self-processed black and white photograph of Hong Kong's harbour, see Chapter 7, Figure 10, p. 223) preceded by a phrase in English and French, as follows:

> finally home. quirky weather. exhausted soul. bonsoir chez moi. (Yasmina TLR)

She explained that the use of French in this post was like an artist putting paint on a canvas ('similar to put paint on a canvas', IRT meeting) and that it was done to share her idea of Frenchness with her friends so that they could experience it for themselves (see Chapter 7, section 7.4.4). Yasmina's idea of language and communication thus transcends the conventional notion of language. In the excerpt below, Yasmina expressed her conception of language as an ensemble of words, atmosphere, feelings and actions, which is to say not language alone but a range of semiotic potentials:

> So I think sometimes the word itself is associated with the atmosphere, the feeling and also including some kind of actions (Yasmina INT2)

At the same time, in her stories, she suggested that French could serve as a 'mystery key' (Yasmina INT2) to enter a secret communication corner, in which she would exchange with a distinct group of friends - the classmates with whom she had shared the French study-abroad trip (see Chapter 7, section 7.4.4). But once again, the use of online translation means that not knowing the language fully may not be an obstacle to participation in these 'secret' communities.

Candice's approach to learning and using French also illustrated a broad understanding of language, which extended far beyond conventional ideas of language learning and took account of its emotional dimensions and expressive potential. It seemed that singing French songs and writing short creative dialogues in her French university class (see Chapter 6, section 6.5.4) enabled her to connect to emotions she could not express in other languages:

> When I create the plot… the French little plots… I euh… I could… I would say I couldn't create… create it in Chinese… too… yeah (Candice INT3)

She described being motivated to put all of herself into these creations as not many people would be able (or interested) to decipher what she was trying to say (see Chapter 6, section 6.5.4).

IC's practices of French equally expanded the traditional view of what language and language learning means to additional language learners. Although French may have seemed peripheral in IC's life since she had not studied it formally for ten years, she used it in a similar way to Yasmina in that she makes her message less readily available to her audience:

> I want to post something but I don't want others to "read it directly" (IC TLR)

In this way, French appeared as a way to form and reinforce group boundaries:

> I think it is my way to differentiate people who want to understand you from others or I just want some minority people …. to understand what feeling I am having (IC INT3)

Another boundary-drawing function of French in IC's stories was related to her desire to assert Hong Kong's identity as a multicultural and multilingual society, in relation to the existential and cultural threat represented by China, with its perceived homogeneity and monolingual orientation. This was a recurring theme in her stories. In her Facebook postings linked to Frenchness (for example, the French galette; see Figure 12 in Chapter 8, p. 264), the suggestion IC made in her comment was that that French culture was readily available in Hong Kong and there was no need to travel to France to experience it (see Chapter 8, section 8.5.3). In this way, IC's posting could be interpreted as a re-appropriation of Frenchness by and for the local context.

To summarise, IC, Candice and Yasmina's practices of French were not limited to the use of words. Instead, and as already illustrated in the discussion, their practices involved a range of insights as well as semiotic (e.g., 'bonjour chez moi') and interactional (e.g., 'mystery key') potentials, which they used to 'react to given societal circumstances in their own way' (Hennig 2010a, 309) and at the same time construct and perform their identity. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the participants' practices can be seen as 'translanguaging practices' (Li Wei, 2011) although there are other ways of describing diversity of language use (for example, the metrolingualism and polylanguaging practices described in Chapter 2, sections 2.3.3 and 2.3.4). In general terms, translanguaging refers to 'the ability to choose between following and flouting the rules and norms of behaviour, including the use of language, and to push and break boundaries between the old and the new, the conventional and the original, and the acceptable and the challenging' (Li Wei 2011, 94). In this study, French learners found in their practices of French a way to reconnect with their selves and deal with the pressures and limitations of their context. They actively fashioned their language practices using all kinds of resources, including intercultural, interpersonal and psychological insights from French culture (as well as from other cultures), circulating images of Frenchness and a range of semiotic and interactional potentials that allowed them to negotiate the boundaries (e.g., 'secret code') of their identities.

In this way, the study illustrates the phenomenon of the 'de/reterritorialisation' of language use (see Jacquemet, 2005) and the transcendence of traditional identity categories, which a report by the New York group K-Hole – known to have introduced the term 'normcore' to describe contemporary youth trends – captures in the following way:

> Once upon a time people were born into communities and had to find their individuality. Today people are born individuals and have to find their communities. (Youth mode Oct. 2013, 27)

In addition, in illustrating that language learners are capable of doing a lot more with language than their teachers think, the study creates a link with learner autonomy. Like the students in Jacques Rancière's 'Le Maître Ignorant' who surprised their history teacher, Jacotot, by learning history in French, a language they did not know at first and learned by themselves through reading history, the participants surprised me with the meaningfulness and richness of their practices of a language they are still mostly considered beginners in.

10. 6 Implications

The main insights gained from this study can be summarized using the multiple meanings offered by the French phrase *'plus qu'une langue'* ['more than a/one language']. It is more than one isolated language as the perceptions of Frenchness are built in relation to other languages and cultures. It is more than one indivisible language in that it is more than the sum of linguistic features, and it also plays more than one role in the construction of the participants' identities. This may signal that educationalists and instructors need to reconsider the nature of additional language learning and their ways of teaching. The sections below suggest some directions for the future, in the areas of research methodology, theory and pedagogy.

10.6.1 Implications for methodology

Apart from providing extensive insights for the purpose of this research study, the findings also suggest that the methodology of narrative inquiry has enabled the participants to better understand themselves, as several participants reflected upon in the study. Candice expresses this in the following terms:

> Because when I'm clear about myself, the outside world seems to be clear… it's like a mirror, what you see in the mirror is actually not about the things or the actual things, it's about myself (Candice INT2)

Yasmina also remarked that the research was a chance to understand herself more ('to make clear points on my thoughts… and… to recall [my] memories or journeys' ; Yasmina INT2) whilst IC reflected that the study was an opportunity to present as well as compare her views about Hong Kong and the world, as suggested in her comments below:

> I think it is a good chance for me to have constructive platform, to introduce Hong Kong culture. So for example, what you understand about Taiwan and what I understand Taiwan is different so it's good for us to share. And it's good for me to really understand how French people looking the same thing as us it must be different so I would love to see how it's different (IC INT2)

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) indeed stress that narrative inquiry has the capacity to open up new possibilities for seeing oneself and being oneself in the world:

> [T]he outcome of narrative inquiry is important not so much for the knowledge they contain but for the vicarious testing of life possibilities […] that they permit.' (Clandinin & Connelly 2000, 42)

Also, as Laplantine (1999) suggests, through getting to know oneself better, individuals become more able to understand others through the complex and multiple reflection of their self: 'Si je peux comprendre les autres c'est parce que je suis autre que moi'[13] (p. 81). This idea is also present in Bakhtin who points out that we can only define ourselves in comparison to others:

> To be means to be for the other and through him [sic], for oneself. Man has no internal sovereign territory, he is all and always on the boundary; looking within himself, he looks through the eyes of the other… I cannot do without the other, I cannot become what I want to be without the other; I must find myself in the other, finding the other in me (in mutual reflection and perception) (in Atkinson 2010, 618).

Thus, a first implication of the study is that narrative inquiry can bring about a better understanding amongst human beings by narrowing down the differences between them and instead emphasizing their interrelatedness. Indeed Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) point out that individual experiences are 'a source of insights useful not only to the person himself or herself' (p. 17).

This study has shown how far-reaching narratives can be. It is never only one person's story; as soon as it is shared, the story is appropriated by readers, which can have far-reaching

[13] My translation : 'If I can understand others it is because I am other myself'

implications in their lives too. Clandinin (2013) underlines that when a narrative inquiry manages to make 'the complexity of stories lives visible' then it 'allows audiences to engage in resonant remembering as they lay their experiences alongside the inquiry experiences' (pp. 50-51). And this resonance can bring about change. Barkhuizen (2011) observed the impact of engaging in a narrative research project on teachers noting that this process helps them to understand better their teaching experiences, but also serves as a catalyst for making 'worthwhile changes' in their teaching (p. 397). In this way, narrative inquiry can be said to have the power to transform (see Barkhuizen 2011, 397; Barkhuizen, 2009; see also Li & Zhu, 2013).

Another implication of narrative inquiry is that, as Clandinin notes, it can help people develop the notion that their stories are worth telling and thus that, all their different individualities are important (see O'Donoghue, 2012). This can have far-reaching implications for society as well as for the classroom, where issues of inequality are always present. Through the type of self-reflections arising from thinking narratively about oneself and one's language learning experience, individuals can regain a sense of self-worth.

Furthermore, Clandinin points out that narrative inquiry has the power to change the discourse at policy-making level (see McKenna, 2017). In education, for example, she suggests that narrative inquiry can help look at the problem of 'retaining' teachers differently by considering instead how to 'sustain' them in their profession as they face increasing pressure and stress at work (see McKenna, 2017). Similarly, narrative inquiries can help shift educationalists' view of language learning towards being an affordance for identity construction rather than as a means to achieve linguistic competence in pre-defined terms.

10.6.2 Implications for theory

Within a context of conventional language education that keeps languages separate and assumes monolingual norms and practices as its target, the study counterposes the existence and significance of learners' complex practices and repertoires, and reinforces the general importance of considering identity in relation to additional language learning. The study also provides insights into the non-dichotomous relationship between fixity and fluidity in studying language phenomena (see Otsuji & Pennycook 2010, 244). Furthermore, as recent sociolinguistic research directions have suggested (see Flores *et al.* 2017, 545-551), this study underlines the need to reconsider the notions of multilingualism and of language competence, as already hinted at in Chapter 3, section 3.2.

As a broad indication of what this reconsideration might look like, Ros i Solé (2016, 17) suggests that we need 'a new philosophical toolkit' to understand the possibilities that language learners encounter. Ros i Solé (2016) argues that SLA has over-emphasized the 'cognitive capabilities of the individual and the pursuance of an "ideal set of objective language knowledge"' (p. 17) and that we need to reconsider its philosophical foundations (p. 16). She proposes a 'humanisation project' (p. 17) of SLA, which would involve:

> [A] new way of investigating the world that values the personal and the reflective, the intuited and the imagined, and where the language learning experience is 'unjudged' by the rational mind. (Ros i Solé 2016, 19)

Conventional notions of 'multilingualism' have also been challenged. For example, Li Wei (2016) suggests that we are in an era of 'post-multilingualism', which highlights boundary-crossing and downplays the 'co-existence or co-use of multiple languages' (p. 20). A post-multilingualism viewpoint accepts that the rules of using languages are *flouted* and that the boundaries are pushed and broken (Li W. 2016, 8). The notion of *translanguaging* practices captures this process of going '*beyond* languages' or 'transcending' separate languages (Li W. 2016, 3). This study contributes to the understanding of the creative, critical and 'transformative' practices of multilingual speakers (see Li W. 2016, 8; see also Flores *et al*. 2017, 549; Li & Zhu, 2013; Li W. 2011) as well as the ways in which a language 'can be appropriated and exploited without allegiance to its historically native speakers' (Li, W. 2016, 2).

Linked to this, the study contributes to ongoing conversations about the need to redefine the notion of competence, including that of linguistic repertoire (see Busch 2012, 521). What exist at the moment are many different perspectives, which have a lot in common in the way they address complexity, creativity and ways to re-appropriate language, but there is no consensus on how to approach teaching and learning languages in the age of multilingualism, mobility and diversity.

Kramsch (2006) addresses the 'symbolic and subjective aspects of language' with the notion of 'symbolic competence' (p. 201). Kramsch and Whiteside (2008) describe 'symbolic competence' as 'the ability not only to approximate or appropriate for oneself someone else's language, but to shape the very context in which the language is learned and used' (Kramsch & Whiteside 2008, 664). The learners in this study display symbolic competence in their ability to appropriate

linguistic and cultural aspects of French and employ them for a range of purposes in Hong Kong, thus potentially reshaping not only themselves, but also the 'local' context.

Dervin primarily focuses on the need for a reconceptualization of the notion of 'intercultural competences' in the plural form (2011; see also Dervin, Paatela-Nieminen, Kuoppala & Riitaoja, 2012; Dervin & Tournebise, 2012). In the study, the participants all demonstrate a heightened and dynamic awareness of both 'local' and 'other' cultures. IC's observations of westerners' socializing characteristics (see Chapter 8, section 8.3.1) is a good example of how learning about others help understand oneself more.

Yet another perspective is that of 'plurilingual and pluricultural competence', a research programme commissioned by the Council of Europe (see Coste, Moore & Zarate, 1997; Beacco & Byram, 2003, 2007; Candelier, 2003, 2008; Moore & Gajo, 2009). Moore & Gajo (2009) claim that Francophone studies have contributed not only to the development of 'plurilingualism' as a concept, but also to 'the shifting and reshaping of key issues in language learning in a multilingual world' (p. 149; see also Coste & Simon 2009; Macaire, 2008; Castelloti & Moore, 2005). However, the notion of plurilingualism remains little known in Anglophone research circles, according to Macaire (2008, 21). This is despite the fact that early descriptions of plurilingualism resemble more recent characteristics of complexity and hybridity in language learning use:

> Plurilingual and pluricultural competence refers to the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as a social agent has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and

> experience in several cultures. This is not seen as the superposition of distinct competences, but rather as the existence of a complex or even composite competence on which the user may draw. (Council of Europe 2001, 260)

The notion of repertoire also appeared in the 'plurilingual' research literature along with directions for assessing the 'transversal' dimensions of this competence. An extract from Jean-Charles Beacco (2005) - who was involved in the development of the notion of plurilingual and pluricultural competence for the Council of Europe - outlines some of the characteristics of a composite plurilingual repertoire:

> The individual's plurilingual repertoire is […] made up of various languages he or she has absorbed in various ways (childhood learning, teaching, independent acquisition, etc.) and in which he/she has acquired different skills (conversation, reading, listening, etc.) to different levels. The languages in the repertoire may be assigned different, perhaps specialised functions, such as communicating with the family, socialising with neighbours, working or learning (Beacco 2005, p. 19)

But in this extract, the notion of 'plurilingual repertoire' also seems to resemble a traditional multilingual view of different languages with different functions, and to neglect the role of the learner agency in deciding what languages consist of and how they are to be used in particular contexts.

In terms of assessment guidelines and practicalities, the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR) (or Cadre Européen Commun de Référence pour les langues;

CECR) provides some useful guidelines for plural approaches ('approches plurielles') to learning, teaching and assessing languages (see Candelier, 2003) and is already used by numerous institutions and teachers (e.g., see Council of Europe, 2018). The CEFR distinguishes general competences (or 'compétences globales') from 'communicative competence', which includes linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences. Four different types of knowledge are also acknowledged, including 'savoir' (or 'knowledge'), 'savoir-faire' (or 'skills and know-how'), 'savoir-être' (or 'existential competence') and 'savoir-apprendre' (or 'ability to learn') (see Council of Europe, 2018; see also Candelier 2003, 83-84).

In relation to this study, we can say that 'savoir-être', which the Council of Europe describes as 'the sum of the individual characteristics, personality traits and attitudes which concern, for example, self-image and one's view of others and willingness to engage with other people in social interaction' (Council of Europe 2018, 11-12), potentially touches on the issue of language learning in relation to identity development. However, in practice, the focus often remains on linguistic attainment and conventional communicative competence. In this study, linguistic attainment is not the main or only concern of most of the four participants and if language learning is defined in conventional terms, the learners' practices in relation to identity construction are all but invisible. The study has shown that the participants' interest in French mainly seemed to serve the purpose of extending their repertoire of identities, rather than their repertoire of languages, and of dealing with societal constraints. For some of the participants, involvement in French learning also appeared to have a 'light' temporary role. Thus, the question remains of how educationalists can develop a language classroom for learners such as IC, who do a great deal with their languages but not in ways which are amenable to measurements in the ways understood by conventional language teaching approaches.

To summarise, although there exist some guidelines for pedagogy in the age of 'new multilingualism' (Li W. 2016), there is not yet a consensus as to how such a multilingual approach can be carried out in the classroom, or as to how to define multilingual competence, as insights and directions have come from different fields and parts of the world (see for e.g., Stratilaki 2012, 191). The section below surveys some pedagogical suggestions for the multilingual classroom.

10.6.3 Implications for pedagogy

As a broad general guideline, Kramsch (2009) first suggests that languages should be taught 'as a living form' (p. 191). This means that language learning and teaching should be envisaged as a part of learners' lives, not detached from their social life or from their social identities. Moore and Gajo (2009) underline that viewing the learner as a 'social actor' means recognizing his or her 'capacity for action and analysis' (p. 142) in echo of Giddens' view that human beings are social agents who have the capacity for emancipation, which he has called the possibility of 'self-actualisation and empowerment' (Giddens 1991, 6). In other words, the language classroom needs to acknowledge the existence and importance of learner agency.

A first suggestion for teaching is to apprehend the learner in the sociopolitical context (Heller 2007, 345). Flores *et al.* (2017, 550) suggest developing an awareness of the different types of constraints on the language learner. In this study, learning foreign languages operated as a form of resistance, for example against perceived sociopolitical changes in Hong Kong (IC), against the imposition of gender norms (Candice) or cultural norms (Nicole and Yamina). Thus, language learning also needs to be viewed in relation to several 'forms of social differentiation'

such as, gender, race or social class (see Flores *et al.* 2017, 548). However, once again the study shows that the categories cannot be employed in a pre-determined fashion, as they are negotiated differently by different learners.

In this way, the language classroom needs to give learners ways to continue to be the agentic beings they are outside the classroom. Hennig (2010a, 320) notes that 'learners need to be given the same sense of agency with which they apply German outside class for their own purposes'. Yet it is common for most language classrooms to strip the learners of their 'social self' and to take them as is there was no social imprint on them. Kubota, Austin, and Saito-Abbott, (2003) note that students may leave their language studies 'with the impression that learning a foreign language entails only how to communicate basic personal needs or facts' (p. 21). The authors further point out the danger of leaving out 'the sociopolitical dimensions in which language and culture are intrinsically embedded' (Kubota *et al.* 2003, 21). Their study investigating students' backgrounds and learning experiences reveals that language learners (even at beginner level) would welcome discussions about issues of race and social justice, which they judge 'incredibly important' (Kubota *et al.* 2003, 21). The authors thus argue about the necessity for the language teacher to find ways to address social issues, diversity and inequality in the classroom:

> Researchers and practitioners must shift their attention beyond apolitical appreciation and celebration of foreign culture, to critically explore issues of diversity and sociopolitical aspects of human communication, and to make foreign language education instrumental in creating greater equality. (Kubota *et al*. 2003, 22)

This observation echoes Ollerhead's (2012, 80) call for the development of the concept of 'transformative pedagogy' with the AL classroom becoming a place where learners are offered opportunities to 'own the target language' and gain 'more powerful identity positions for the future' (p. 79). As the result of her observations of teachers' pedagogical practices and investigation of the way they were responsive to their learners' development and multiple identities, Ollerhead (2012) argues against hiding behind carefully crafted lessons and instead acting on learners' demonstrations of interest during the lesson as well as using these 'as a springboard for a deeply contextualised lesson' (p. 79).

However, viewing the language classroom as a place where individuals get to exercise their identity implies being able to improvise activities and to guide learners in the expression of their stories and points of view. In this, perhaps, creative activities (see paragraphs below) can help. Also, from a multilingual classroom perspective, all of the learners' languages can become part of the lesson. Ollerhead points out teachers will need to be able to recognize 'which identity positions offer their learners the best prospects for social engagement and interaction' (2012, 79). This means getting to know learners more personally, especially those who might feel marginalized for various reasons. In the light of this, it seems that educators would also need to develop an increased awareness of their own identities and subjectivities before the language classroom can be transformed. As Ollerhead (2012) illustrates, traditional teaching approaches encourage teachers to affirm their power as native speakers (in other words, they are the ones who know) when the language teacher in the age of 'new multilingualism' (Li Wei, 2016), who does not have linguistic competence as the sole target, will also need to learn about his or her learners and give them opportunities to develop their identity. This requires a completely new set of skills.

Classroom activities should aim to give learners varied opportunities to exercise their identities instead of being subjected to one role (that of the beginner student) and one task (mastering the native-speaker norms of an external language). These could include a syllabus focusing on issues of interculturality (e.g., Dervin, 2012 ; Jackson, 2011) or/and activities harnessing the kind of creativity multicultural learners display outside the classroom (see for example Li W.'s examples of 're-appropriated English' or 'New Chinglish', 2016; or Blommaert's example of French in Japan; 2010, 29-30; see also Sergeant, 2009). In other words, learners must be allowed to depart from linguistic convention, in ways that are not automatically labelled as 'errors'. Lantolf (1993) refers to this as 'linguistic freedom' (in Belz 2002, 35). Creative activities such as drama or creative writing also give learners possibilities to explore their opinions, their emotions and their identities. Bauman R. (2000) highlights the benefits of drama in particular:

> Verbal performances [...] turn out to be reflexive in several dimensions; not only are they linguistic forms about language, but also cultural forms about culture, social forms about society. Such performances, then, represent for participants an arena for the display, contemplation, and manipulation of salient elements, practices, and relationships that allow language to serve as a resource for the expression of identity. (Bauman R. 2000, 4)

Kramsch (2006) also suggests a creative approach to language teaching. She argues for making space in the language classroom for 'emotional identification with the worlds of fiction' and creative writing activities because multilingual writers' 'positionings as linguistic subjects – as authorial and narratorial selves – may prefigure their positionings as social subjects' (p. 195). This study suggested that Candice found in her French lessons (which were based on drama techniques) a meaningful way to explore and express new identities. She commented on how

writing creatively in French enabled her to express herself even though she only had a basic command of the language:

> I like imagining characters and have empathy with them. In some way they express who I am because I put a bit of my feeling and identity in them. (Candice Reflective essay, Dec. 2015)

Singing French songs was another way to vent her social sensitivity and emotions though the conduit of lyrics, which she adapted and made her own. In particular, she mentioned a video extract from the musical *'Les Misérables'*, which had made a lasting impression on her:

> And I really really like the feeling to be a refugee, it's really dramatic and I imagined myself in this situation and I… and I just sing in this situation and it's really touching! Yes! (Candice INT1)

In her research about multilingual speakers, Belz (2002) realizes that the hybrid use of multiple languages in creative writing activities gave learners a better sense of who they are and of their place in the world as well as giving them a sense of empowerment as they became aware of their 'multicompetent self'. As Stratilaki (2012, 197) points out, combining multiple languages is a mark of 'freedom of choice and dynamic procedures throughout life'; multilingualism is also synonymous with self-confidence and 'competence to interact in various situations' (Stratilaki 2012, 197).

As also suggested in this study, reflexivity (through the use of language learner histories or through the narrative inquiry-type process itself) helped participants understand themselves and their life trajectories as well as helping them navigate and respond to various constraints.

Finally, the language classroom needs to integrate multimodal forms of communication and multiple perspectives of language practices. Kramsch (2006, 203) reminds us that communication is also realized in 'vocal, graphic, acoustic, visual and gestural' modes (see also Flores *et al.* 2017, 549; Li W., 2016). This echoes Block's description of identity as 'self-conscious, ongoing narratives that individuals perform, interpret and project in dress, bodily movements, actions and language' (2007, 32). Also, reflecting on the complexities of the self in relation to one's culture and to people from other cultures generates ideas on how to live with others in the world.

Saying this, the findings suggests that there is still a need for linguistic form in the language classroom. The study has shown that some participants (e.g. IC and Nicole) see the value of language classes in which grammar and vocabulary are presented in a 'systematic way' (IC INT1). IC remarked that such activities were a necessary 'base' (IC INT1) and a 'must-process' (IC IRT meeting), while Nicole said she liked to learn a language 'in an organized way' and thought that a textbook is 'very important' (INT1). However, this does not necessarily mean following fixed syllabi or treating all linguistic forms as fixed in themselves. This points once again to the complex interaction between 'fixity' and 'fluidity', and to the need of the multilingual language classroom to address both and to be critically aware of what they might mean in particular contexts.

To summarize, the future language classroom (even at beginner level) should take into consideration the expression and exploration of identity. In this new conception of the language classroom, the language learner does not simply cease to exist as a social actor - because he or she knows little of the language and cannot express him or her/self well enough in it – but is

better able to realize, expand and explore new possibilities of self. In other words, in the age of multilingualism, the language classroom also becomes a place for '*self-realization*' (Layder, 2004; see Chapter 3, section 3.3.1.3) as well as a place for '*self-formation*' (Hennig 2010a, 2010b; see Chapter 2, section 2.4.2.2). It is also a place where multilingual subjects are given opportunities to 'draw strength from the flexibility and versatility afforded by their various languages' (Kramsch 2006, 195). As Kramsch (2006, 206) reminds us, many language learners are 'anxious to liberate themselves from the constraints of the one (monolingual) [mother] tongue and its associated habitus' and 'seek emotional, cognitive, social fulfillment in a multilingual subjectivity'. It is up to us as language teachers to tap into these desires and subjectivities to reinvent an inspiring and empowering language classroom.

Finally, I will add some of my personal reflections on what I learned from conducting the study. Firstly, I strongly believe that narrative inquiry has the potential to help language teachers and researchers understand how languages are part of people's lives, how they are not just things that learners 'have' or 'do' but resources that help them to *be.* Moreover, narrative inquiry can help learners in their language learning and life journeys by uncovering aspects of their individuality and their relatedness. Gaining ownership over their stories and their linguistic resources helps them to gain confidence. Also, reflecting on the complexities of the self in relation to one's culture and to people from other cultures generates ideas on how to live with others in the world.

Secondly, in terms of my practice as language teacher, this study has made me think that the needs of language learners are not being met by conventional approaches. 'Translanguaging' offers a new way of thinking about language learning and teaching. In my future language classroom, I would like to offer a vision of language learning which would incorporate 'the

personal experiences and cultural history of the learner and acknowledge their cultural baggage irrespective of national boundaries' (Ros i Solé 2013, 336). Generally, I would encourage learners to make the link explicit between different languages and discuss their practices outside and within the classroom (Conteh 2018, 446). I would also create more opportunities for them to express themselves and use both language and non-linguistic resources in many different ways, for example by mixing languages (for example, IC's narrative suggests that she appreciated the opportunity to present French cultural topics through the medium of English). Reflection on past experiences of language learning is also something that I found useful for both teachers and students. Through LLHs or similar devices - for example, narrative inquiries (see O'Mochain, 2006) and language portrayals or « le dessin réflexif » (see Mossakowski & Busch, 2010 ; Achour-Chaulet *et al.,* 2009) - teachers can discover more about their learners' worlds and learners can find a way to exercise greater agency in approaching their learning experience and relating it to their lives. Also, based on this study, I would like to give more attention to exploring one's feelings and sensations through learning a language. Ros i Solé (2016, 37) suggests an approach to language learning which would involve 'privileging the sensations, the impressions and the epiphanies one can experience in another language'.

Chapter 11 Conclusion

11.1 Summary

This study begin with the question of what learning French might mean for the participants in this study, four young learners of French as an additional language in the multilingual and globally connected Asian city of Hong Kong. The question arose partly from my own curiosity as a teacher of French, especially after learning about language learner histories (LLHs) and reflecting on my own histories of language learning. It also arose from my increasing interest in the concept of identity, which seemed able to link the personal with the social, and the local with the global. Hong Kong, at a time of changing sociopolitical conditions and an intense questioning of its own identity, turned out to be an interesting and revealing context in which to explore the connections between language learning and identity.

The methodology of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly 2000) was used to observe and understand processes of identity construction in relation to French learning through the unique and individual stories of the four learners. The study found that in French and in conceptions of Frenchness, the four participants found useful resources for the construction of identity, despite having limited levels of proficiency in French in conventional terms. The study revealed how additional language learning involved growing intercultural awareness, which was used to deal with the local cultural environment and the tensions expressed in its own changing identity.

The study therefore highlighted that language learning needs to be considered differently, away from a priori categorizations with static views of the self, homogeneous ‘local’ identity

categories and stereotypical 'global' representations of target languages, because these attempts to categorize cannot do justice to the complexity of language learning as an individual and social practice. The study's depiction of the interplay between learner identity and additional languages reveals more about both: how identity is changed by the process of learning, and how the languages are changed by being taken up and appropriated by learners. Along with other studies, this study opens the way for new approaches to language learning which contrast with most existing language classrooms, where language learners continue to be mainly treated as if they were 'processing devices that convert linguistic input into well-formed (or not so well-formed) output' (Lantolf & Pavlenko 2001, 145). As Makoe (2014) notes, students and language learners are 'not passive participants in institutional socialisation processes' (p. 665), as they continue to be social agents in the classroom. In addition, languages and their cultures are not learned in isolation from other languages and cultures, and the language classroom must start to address this, rather than imposing 'multiple monolingualism' disguised as 'additional languages' and 'multilingualism'.

To summarise, the study has highlighted some of the ways in which learning French is far more than learning a language, and this has significance for the way we understand language as well as for the classroom and how we view language learners.

11.2 Limitations

There are of course a number of limitations in this study. I would like to start by pointing out that narrative inquiry relies on participants' self-reports, which is to say on selective memory and on

their own emphasis of experience. Ochs and Capps (1996, 21) stress that narrators can only share 'partial representations and evocations of the world'. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) also note :

> Experience, for the pragmatist, is always more than we can know and represent in a single statement, paragraph, or book. Every representation, therefore, no matter how faithful to that which it tries to depict, involves selective emphasis of our experience. (Clandinin & Rosiek 2007, 39)

Pavlenko (2007) also remarks that narrators 'use the act of narration to impose meaning on experience' (p. 168). As already explained, in the study, the interpretation of experience needs to be seen as temporary and only relevant at this particular moment in time. Meanings change constantly and are remembered differently at different moments, as well as according to who the listener is. It is possible, for example, that the participants' responses were affected by their perceptions of my identity (as a French person, expatriate in Hong Kong, former teacher, and so on), which made them exaggerate the role (and particularly the positive aspects) of French learning and Frenchness when telling me their stories.

However, I was never unaware during the study that the participants used their narrative accounts to present themselves in a particular way (see Pavlenko 2007, 177), since it is part of the definition of identity for it to be achieved discursively. By addressing the question of what it means to learn French, and acknowledging that identity is constructed not only discursively but also relationally, the study acknowledged from the outset that it was dealing with processes of meaning-making by both participants and researcher. In narrative inquiry, it is as much the participants as the researcher who create an interpretation of what learning French means in a

process of co-construction. Thus, for example, I used my personal understanding of French culture in the FRENCHINHK FB group to encourage my French learners' own views of it; there were many times when they did not agree with my choice of visuals 'representing French in Hong Kong' and challenged it. Being on the 'native-speaker' side of 'knowing about' French culture thus gave both the participants and me an opportunity to engage with the topic of the study. This would have happened in a different way if the researcher had not been French, but would not be more 'objective' or 'true' than the idea of French and Frenchness presented in this inquiry. In any case, determining the 'truth value' of learning French (Pavlenko 2007, 176) is never the purpose of a study of this kind (refer to Chapter 4, section 4.2.3). As Hennig (2010a, 311) points out, interpretation and the construction of meaning is always formed 'at the expense and exclusion of other possible interpretations and meanings'. In a similar way, Clandinin and Rosiek (2017, 13) remark that narrative inquirers can only proceed 'with an attitude of knowing that other possibilities, interpretations, and ways of explaining things are possible'.

Another limitation is that I could not consider whether there were gender differences in terms of language learning experiences and practices, since there were no male participants in the study. In fact, the great majority of participants who volunteered to participate in my study were women, which also reflects the general gender distribution in French classes in Hong Kong.

As Candice's story shows, there are signs that the process of choosing to study French has some feminist resonances. In her own thesis, He (1998) points out that the narrative approach 'has close links with feminist epistemology' (p. 31). This research inquiry, by focusing on women's experiences, contributes to further understanding of the unidentified 'women's ways of knowing' (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule 1986 in He 1998, 31). Future research in the context of

Hong Kong could look at differences and similarities between male and female perceptions of learning and using French or other additional languages.

However, it needs to be pointed out that narrative inquiry does not aim to be representative of any given population, but rather to understand the singularity of individual experiences. This is what « penser par cas » (Passeron & Revel, 2005) entails (see Chapter 4, section 4.2.4). In the same way, with this approach, it is not necessary to have a large sample size as a singularity is not 'substitutable' by another equally singular case (see Passeron & Revel 2005, 18).

Similarly, although the study has made a priority of focusing in detail on additional language learning in a particular time and place, an unavoidable limitation is that it is set in a context which is very particular, though arguably not more so than any area-based study (e.g. Lamoureux's (2012) study of Canadian French speakers, Kinginger's (2004) study of an American French learner and Coffey's (2010) study of British French learners). As mentioned in the study, Hong Kong is going through an intense phase of sociopolitical change, with both tension and rapprochement with China in dynamic interplay. This is affecting the sense of national and ethnic identity as experienced by many of its inhabitants, for example in IC's story. Besides, Hong Kong is an urban environment where fluidity and diversity prevail and which perhaps make issues of fixity and unity less visible. Louise Ho famously described Hong Kong as a 'geographic, cultural and political anomaly' which is essentially 'a cosmopolitan city with a rock-hard Chinese core' (Ho 2000, 382). In one of her poems, she also described Hong Kong as 'smaller than a speck on the map' but as 'a nerve centre in the world', at once a 'minuscule place' and a 'global space' (Ho 2009, 108). Perhaps, in such an environment, it is easy to overstate the case for fluidity, mobility and diversity, and further studies are needed to balance

the views of identity and language learning presented in this study.

11.3 Ways forward

To conclude, similar studies within other (in particular, regional) contexts and with other categories of participants (for example, male participants and other levels of proficiency) would be useful to continue the exploration of the role of so-called 'additional' languages in everyday life experiences. Studies could also investigate further additional language practices (involving HK and non-HK participants) and particularly look at how additional languages might serve as a 'secret code', which is to say not only as a way to reach out to but also as a way to exclude other people on the Internet, as suggested by the narratives of IC and Yasmina.

Such inquiries would add to those voices who call for an acknowledgement of the 'diversity or multidimensionality' of language learners in curriculum and language classrooms (e.g. Byrd Clark, 2010) as well as the recognition that 'representations of languages become both symbolic and significant resources' for individuals who have multiple identities (Byrd Clark 2012, 132). Also, there is a need to reconsider the concept of language to reflect 'the ever-increasing heterogeneity and diversity in language education as well as citizenship, rather than categorising individuals and languages as socially imagined homogeneous entities' (Byrd Clark 2012, 132). Language is increasingly becoming de-territorialised under conditions of superdiversity (Jacquemet, 2005; Blommaert, 2007; Rampton, 2006). To reflect this, I will close this study with some pertinent questions asked by another researcher: 'Should the focus of education be on promoting the dominant language of the social context […] while neglecting the complex repertoire of learners made up of other languages? Or should multilingual and intercultural

competences be part of the content gamut of teaching practices?' (Stratilaki 2012, 198). In Hong Kong at least, it seems that we have only just begun to question the automatic acceptance of the former, monolingual orientation, and to explore the possibilities of the latter. Narrative inquiries are part of the story of this transition.

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Appendix 1a - Information sheet study project

Learning French in Hong Kong:
A sociocultural and narrative perspective on language learner identity
in the age of globalization.

In my research, I am interested in local individual stories of French learning in the context of Hong Kong. I want to investigate how individuals come to learn French and what it means for them to know an additional language such as French. **I invite you to join my study if you are interested in exploring this topic with me.**

The research activities which are involved are presented below and are also summarized in the attached Table.

- The research would start by completing a short survey about your background as well as a Language Learner History, which will consist of writing a text of 2 to 5 pages in length about your foreign language learning experiences, including French. This would be followed by an interview in English of approximately 1.5 hours. If you are not willing to be interviewed, please indicate this on the consent form. These activities could start as soon as you are ready.

- Then towards the end of 2015 or at the very beginning of 2016, the research would continue with the following activities:

    - First, I would like to collect details about your language learning practices including your use of technology in learning languages. To do this, you would be asked to answer emails about various aspects of your language learning experience as well as complete a form about your use of technologies in learning languages.
    - Also, in order to further explore what learning French means for individuals in Hong Kong, I would ask for your permission to access your FB pages/status/postings as well as conduct two more open-ended interviews. These interviews of approximately 1.5 hours each would be organized at your convenience in the middle and at the end of the data collection period i.e. around January 2016 and June 2016 at your convenience.

Be assured that your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained throughout the research period and after. For example, your name will not appear anywhere and the information I will collect from you will be safely stored with no one other than me having access to it. *I therefore truthfully believe that the study involves no potential risk for you.*

If you have any questions about this study, please do not hesitate to contact me. If you agree to participate in the project, please fill in the consent form and send it to me by email.

Thank you very much.

Lorraine de Beaufort, Ph.D. student, Email: XXXXX

Appendix 1b - Timelime and data collection methods

The table below summarizes what the study would entail in terms of activities and time involved. The activities can be spread out during the year at your convenience.

Table summarizing the data collection methods:

Research design		When ?
Time involved		**From Sep 2015 to Sep 2016** (+ a re-interview **by the summer 2017**)
What?	FIRST DATA COLLECTION ACTIVITIES	**Sep. to Nov. 2015**
	1) A **survey*** and a **written narrative activity (Language Learner History -LLH)** -> Guidelines will be given to write the LLH -> It should be between 1.5 to 5 pages	
	2) **A first open-ended interview** -> This interview would last between approx. 1.5 hours.	
	REST OF THE STUDY DATA COLLECTION METHODS	**From Nov./Dec. 2015 to Jun. 2016**
	3) Completing a techno-linguistic report (history of the technology(ies)/resources you have used or still use in each of the languages you are studying or have studied). -> This would be a form to fill in.	
	4) Answering emails -> This would happen approximately once every month.	
	5) Sharing artifacts including photographs and evidence of FB or other written exchanges -> With participants' agreement	
	6) Two more open-ended interviews in the middle and at the end of the data collection period -> Interviews would be organized at the convenience of the participants; -> They would last between 1 and 2 hours.	
	7) A re-interview of each participant after he/she read the researcher's analysis	**To be decided** – at the end of the data collection period by the summer 2017.

* The survey will gather information about participants' place of birth, family background, their current activity, qualifications, schools/programmes they attended, languages they speak at home and languages they learned including results.

Appendix 2a - Information sheet (survey + first interview)

Learning French in Hong Kong:
A sociocultural and narrative perspective on language learner identity
in the age of globalization.

As already indicated to you, my research project is about the investigation of local individual stories of French learning in the context of Hong Kong. I want to investigate how individuals come to learn French and what it means for them to know an additional language such as French in Hong Kong. I would like to invite you to continue to participate in my study.

This phase of the research would start by completing a short survey about your background. This would be followed by an interview in English of between 1 and 1.5 hour. In this part of the study, I would also like to look at your Facebook status (or any other social network status). If you are not willing to grant me access to your Facebook status, please indicate this on the consent form.

Be assured that your identity will be kept strictly confidential and that these *activities are in no way a test of yourself or your English abilities and will in no way affect your grades in the French class.*

Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained throughout the research period and after. For example, your name will not appear anywhere and the information I will collect from you will be safely stored with no one other than me having access to it. *I therefore truthfully believe that the study involves no potential risk for you.*

If you have any questions about this study, please do not hesitate to contact me. If you agree to participate in the project, please fill in the consent form and send it to me by email.

Thank you very much.

Lorraine de Beaufort
Ph.D. student
Email address: XXXX
Mobile: XXXX

Appendix 2b - Information sheet (second part of study)

Dear Students,

Learning French in Hong Kong:
A sociocultural and narrative perspective on language learner identity
in the age of globalization.

In the second part of my research, I will investigate in even more details the local individual stories of French learning in the context of Hong Kong, and I would like to invite you to continue taking part in my study.

The second part of the research would include investigating two main areas during the academic year of 2015-16. First, I would like to collect details about your language learning practices including your use of technology in learning languages. To do this, you would be asked to answer emails about various aspects of your language learning experience as well as complete a form about your use of technologies in learning languages (i.e. a techno-linguistic report). Also, in order to further explore what learning French means for individuals in Hong Kong, I am asking to access your FB pages/status/postings or other social networks status/pages/postings as well as conduct two more open-ended interviews. These interviews of approximately 1.5 hours each will be organized at your convenience roughly in the middle and at the end of the 2015-16 academic year (i.e. December/January/February and April/May). If you do not wish to grant access to your Facebook status or other social networks, please indicate this on the consent form.

As for the first part of the study project, your identity will be kept strictly confidential and *activities will in no way affect you or your grades or your standing at university, at work or in society. Confidentiality and anonymity will continue to be maintained throughout the research period and after.* Your name will not appear anywhere and the information I will collect from you will be safely stored with no one other than me having access to it. *Once again, I therefore truthfully believe that the study involves no potential risk for you.*

If you have any questions about this part of the study, please do not hesitate to contact me. If you agree to participate further in the project, please fill in the consent form and send it to me by email.

Thank you very much once again.

Lorraine de Beaufort
Ph.D. student
Email adress : XXXX
Mobile: XXXX

Appendix 3a - Consent form – LLH

CONSENT FORM

I agree for my French teacher
(Name: _____) to have access to my LLH for research.

I understand that what I write will NOT affect me or my French class performance or my standing at university or in society. Also, I understand that the information in my LLH is confidential and that my anonymity will be fully protected.

I understand that I will provide my name, phone number and email address for communication purpose and that this personal information will be kept strictly confidential.

Finally, I can withdraw my consent at any moment without any adverse consequences.

Signature of participant:

Name of participant:
(Full Name in Block Letters in English and Chinese)

Email address:

Telephone number:

Date: _____(day)/_____(month)/_____(year)

Appendix 3b - Consent form - First part of the study

Learning French in Hong Kong:
A sociocultural and narrative perspective on language learner identity
in the age of globalization.

CONSENT FORM

I agree to participate in the first part of the study which is being conducted by Lorraine de Beaufort, Ph.D. student at XXX (name of local Hong Kong university).

The procedure as set out in the attached information sheet has been fully explained. I understand that information obtained from this research may be used in future research. I understand that the information I will share as well as my opinions will not affect me or my standing at university or in society.

I understand that my name, phone number and email address will be kept for communication purposes and that any personal information about me will be kept strictly confidential.

I am **willing/ not willing** ***(please circle your answer)*** to be interviewed (in English) at my convenience. I agree to have the interview audio recorded for the purpose of the study.

I am **willing/ not willing** ***(please circle your answer)*** for Lorraine to have access to my Facebook status or other social network platform status and for her to select postings for discussions during the research period.

My participation in the project is voluntary. I acknowledge that I have the right to question any part of the procedure and can withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

Signature of participant:

Name of participant:
(Full Name in Block Letters in English and Chinese)
Email address:
Telephone number:

Date: _____(day)/_____(month)/_____(year)

Appendix 3c - Consent form - Second part of the study

Learning French in Hong Kong: A sociocultural and narrative perspective on language learner identity in the age of globalization.

CONSENT FORM 3

I agree to participate in the second part of the study, which is being conducted by Lorraine de Beaufort, Ph.D. student at XXX (name of local Hong Kong university).

The procedure as set out in the attached information sheet has been fully explained. I understand the study will further investigate my French learning experience at university or since university. I understand that information obtained from this research may be used in future research.

I understand that the information I will share as well as my opinions will not affect me or my French class performance or my standing at university, at work or in society. **I may withdraw from the study at any time. I may contact the researcher to give my opinions and comments about the study. If requested, the researcher will give the results of the study once it is complete.**

I understand that my name, phone number and email address will be kept for communication purposes and that any personal information about me will be kept strictly confidential.

I am **willing/ not willing** ***(please circle your answer)*** to take part in two further interviews (in English) at my convenience. I agree to have the interviews audio recorded for the purpose of the study.

I am **willing/ not willing** ***(please circle your answer)*** for Lorraine to have access to my Facebook status or other social network platforms and to select postings for discussions during the interviews.

I am **willing/ not willing** ***(please circle your answer)*** to answer Lorraine's email about my language learning practices.

My participation in the project is voluntary. I acknowledge that I have the right to question any part of the procedure and can withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

Signature of participant:

Name of participant:
(Full Name in Block Letters in English and Chinese)
Email address:
Telephone number:
Date: _____(day)/_____(month)/_____(year)

Appendix 4 - Summary of meetings with participants

The table below contains details of my meetings with each participant, including the length of the interviews and notes regarding the manner in which each meeting was organized, and my own observations of how I perceived the atmosphere of the meeting. All my meetings with the participants were recorded using an iPhone. Overall, I recorded between 6.5hrs to 7.5hrs with each participant. The first, second and third interviews were all transcribed, but the last meeting (labeled Interim Research Text meeting i.e. IRT meeting) was not. During that meeting I took notes directly onto my computer. The table also gives information about the informal meetings (not recorded) I had with the participants during the period of the study.

	Meeting dates and length	Meeting places	Notes
Candice	1st interview: 7 Nov. 2015 (1.30hr)	Office at Candice's university	Quiet venue, one interruption; Warm atmosphere; Had lunch after meeting
	2nd interview: 28 Feb. 2016 (2.15hrs)	Office at Candice's university	Same venue as first interview; Break during the meeting (looked at my Japan holiday pictures); Had high tea after meeting (talked about her Xmas experience in China)
	3rd interview: 17 May 2016 (1.18hr)	My home	Candice had expressed wanting to see where I lived; Relaxed, sitting on carpet and eating homemade muffins; Walk to the nearby village afterwards; First time Candice visited this area of HK
	IRT meeting: 25 Aug. 2017 (1.56hr)	My home	Candice wanted to see my new place; Lunch in the village; Came back home for tea; Candice in a conundrum about her future, discussed this for over 1 hr
	Informal meetings (not recorded):	1) Kubrick's (3 Sep. 2016) 2) Green Hub café (28 Feb. 2017)	1) Sharing a meal, chatting 2) Discussed her recent study abroad semester in Taiwan; catching up
Yasmina	1st interview: 2 Apr. 2015 (2hrs)	Agnès b. café in TST	Yasmina had suggested another place but it was closed; Yasmina took me to Agnès b. café; a little too noisy but light and pleasant. Lost one third of the recording due to mis-manipulation of my new phone recorder; took notes straight after meeting.
	2nd interview: 12 Feb. 2016 (2.15hrs)	Outdoor café in Kowloon Bay area	Yasmina's suggestion; pleasant temperature outdoors; alternative kind of café; nice coffee & cakes; very relaxed
	3rd interview: 16 May 2016 (1.22hr)	HKU campus outdoor sitting area	Yasmina's suggestion; Quiet venue; Had dinner first at the Buddhist vegetarian restaurant; Yasmina was very tired from work
	IRT meeting: 8 Sep. 2017 (1.58hr)	HKU campus indoor sitting area	Quiet venue; Had dinner first at the Buddhist vegetarian restaurant; Relaxed, happy at work
	Informal meetings (not recorded):	1) Avenue of Stars (17 Oct. 2015); 2) IFC (8 Sep. 2017)	1) Dinner at a trendy café; catching up 2) Dinner at Japanese restaurant; catching up
IC	1st interview: 16 May 2015 (1.30hr)	Outdoor sitting area	Happy to see each other because after a long time; Interview started at a café near IC's workplace but it was too noisy; IC insisted to pay for coffee; outdoor sitting area was pleasant
	2nd interview: 20 Feb. 2016 (2.43hrs)	Hotel lobby	Muffled atmosphere; Relaxed with tea and cakes

	3rd interview: 29 May 2016 (1.08hr)	*Café Causette*	Famous French patisserie in HK; IC's suggestion. Had brunch at the same time as interview
	IRT meeting: 3 Sep. 2017 (1.48hrs)	*Café Causette*	My suggestion this time. Had brunch again; First few months in her new job
	Informal meetings (not recorded):	none during the research period	IC traveled a lot during that period (training in London and Shanghai)
Nicole	1st interview: 4 Apr. 2015 (1.30hr)	Office at Nicole's former university	Quiet venue, no interruption; Hugged each other because we had not seen each other in person for a long time; Had coffee and cakes at a local café after the interview
	2nd interview: 22 Jan. 2016 (2.20hrs)	Office at Nicole's former university	Same venue as 1st interview; Nicole was very emotional during the interview; Took the train to town together, talked about the situation in HK
	3rd interview: 21 May 2016 (1.08hr)	Gold Coast Hotel	My suggestion; Large upscale hotel by the sea, relaxed; Had high tea during the interview; Went for a walk along the sea after the interview
	IRT meeting: 9 Sep. 2017 (1.20hr)	My home	Nicole wanted to see my new place; Had dinner in a local Indian restaurant and then went back home to eat the birthday cake she brought for me; Shared it with my husband, nice evening
	Informal meetings (not recorded):	1) Starbucks (16 Oct. 2015) 2) Les Fils a maman (30 Aug. 2017)	1) Discussed the Myers Brigg personality test in relation to work difficulties and possible changes 2) First time Nicole and I chatted in French. Talked about her perception of her level in French; catching up

Appendix 5 - Language Learner History (LLH) instructions

My research is interested in gaining insight into learners' experiences of and perspectives on learning languages in general and on learning French in particular in the context of Hong Kong.

Writing a LLH is a way for you as language learner to reflect on issues and events which happened during your language learning education. In engaging in this reflective process, you will gather insights into your behaviour and preference as language learner and reach "a deepened appreciation and understanding of personal experience" (Mercer 2013, 164), which will be useful in the process of continuing to learn languages throughout your life.

Please note that there are no 'right' or 'wrong' ways of writing an LLH and no 'right' or 'wrong' versions; your story is interesting in its uniqueness.

Your story is of course confidential and your anonymity will be fully protected.

TWO WAYS OF WRITING YOUR LLH:

- Option 1: To help you in your reflection and guide you in writing your LLH, you could either use the guidelines in sections 1 to 5 below and write a reflection under each heading (see guidelines below)

or

- Option 2: Organise and write your text without the help of sections 1 to 5, as indicated in section 6 (see guidelines below)

IMPORTANT NOTES:

1) Your **LLH must be <u>at least</u> 1.5 to 2 A4 pages in length.** (You can also write more if you wish). It should also be **written in English** (please note that your written proficiency in English is not the focus of this activity).

2) The MOST IMPORTANT about writing your LLH is to **be as descriptive and detailed as possible, rather than just write a superficial chronology.** Feel free to organise and order your story as you wish, as well as add any aspect/remark you want.

3) For more information about how to engage with a self-reflection process, you could navigate the Open Software 'Learning to learn with Kaleidoscope' designed by Helsinki University at: http://h27.it.helsinki.fi/vkk/kaleidoskooppi/intro.php

<u>SUBMISSION:</u>

- **The deadline** for sending me your LLH is: <u>_as soon as possible or **by 25 October 2015**</u> **(please let me know if you have some difficulty meeting this deadline)**
- **Please send the soft copy of your LLH** at my email address: XXXXX

<u>GUIDELINES ON WHAT TO WRITE IN YOUR LLH:</u>

IDENTIFICATION

Full name (in English):
Email address:
Telephone number:

Option 1:

1. DESCRIBING THE PAST AND PRESENT

Please, describe the languages you learned and your language learning experiences during your primary and secondary school years (as well as at university if applicable). Feel free to organise and order your response as you wish.

2. FOCUS ON MOTIVATION

Please, describe the evolution of your interest in languages as well as your particular motivation for these languages and what you do to sustain your motivation to learn them.

3. FOCUS ON KEY EVENTS

Please, talk about events which you think are significant to understand your language learning history. For example, you could talk about emotions you experienced, people you met, or your successes or failures with learning languages.

4. FOCUS ON LEARNING

Please, talk about teaching which has inspired you (or teachers) as well as easy/difficult aspects of learning languages for you, and your learning strategies.

5. DESCRIBING THE FUTURE

Please, talk about your vision of yourself in the future (including any plans linked to language learning or language use). Also, describe your language learning goals in the near future (including BUT not only, your goals in French).

Option 2:

"MY LLH AS ONE TEXT"

If you prefer not to answer sections 1 to 5 above, please organise your LLH as one text as you wish. Remember that your LLH must be AT LEAST 1.5 or 2 A4 pages long.

Merci !

Appendix 6 - First interview guide

A/ IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION ACROSS TIME

1) Questions linked to: self-concept (psychological factors incl. emotions); the past and present.

- *Do you have a role model in life? Tell me about this person.*
- *Tell me about your parents.*
- *How do you think your parents see you?*
- *How do you view yourself in comparison to your parents?*
- *Have you ever disagreed with your parents regarding your future or your education? Please explain? How did this make you feel?*
- *How do you think other people (your close friends/boyfriend, teacher, neighbors, etc.) see you?*
- *Can you recall a remark someone made about you? How do you remember it?*
- *How would you describe your true-self? (i.e. in what way are you different to anyone else)?*
- *Tell me about successes/ disappointments you have had in your life in general. Why were they disappointments/successes? How did you experience them?*
- *Tell me about your fears and your desires about life.*
- *Is there anyone around you who you can talk to about your studies or your future? Tell me about him/her or what advice you can remember from him/her?*

2) Questions linked to: imagined self; imagined communities of practice; the future

IMAGINED SELF

- *How did you imagine yourself when you were a little boy/girl? Tell me how this vision of yourself has evolved over time -> How do you see your future?*
- *What is your current main goal?*
- *How have your goals gradually changed since you started university? What made them change?*
- *Do you see yourself living abroad? Tell me about this.*
- *Are there any of your friends or family who live abroad? Where? Are you in touch with them?*
- *And how about living in a French speaking country?*

B/ LANGUAGE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

1) Questions aiming to reveal motivation, past and present language learning experiences (incl. the abroad experience)

LANGUAGE LEARNING EXPERIENCE IN GENERAL

- *Tell me about the objects or photographs you brought related to language learning in general.*
- *(If different not already mentioned) In your LLH, you pointed to significant key moments in your life linked to language learning. Tell me why they were significant moments.*
- *(If different not already mentioned) In your LLH, you mention about some disappointment and successes linked to language learning.*
    - *Tell me about these successes. What do you attribute these successes to?*
    - *Tell me about these disappointments. What do you attribute these disappointments to?*
- *What do you think are your strengths and weaknesses as a language learner? Which strengths would you like to have?*

- *What aspects of your language learning are you confident about? Worried about?*
- *What do you think is most important when learning a language?*
- *What advice would you give someone starting to learn a new foreign language? Any special advice for French?*

FRENCH

- *Tell me about the objects or photographs you brought related to French learning in particular.*
- *In your LLH you mentioned that (you chose French because…). Tell me more about your decision to start learning French.*
- *Do you remember the first time you heard French) (or refer back to LLH)? …. Tell me about this.*
- *What was the first time you used French (orally, in writing, etc.)? What can you remember about it?*
- *Do you know (other) people who also study French? Do you discuss your learning experience together? What might you discuss, for example?*
- *How do their reasons for learning French compare to yours? (similar or different?)*
- *In your LLH, you mentioned knowing other additional languages (such as Japanese, Spanish…). Why did you decide to learn them?*
- *How do you compare studying French and studying English?*
- *Can you recall a piece of French art (film, sculpture, opera, etc.) which has made an impression on you? Explain.*

PAST EXPERIENCE OF LEARNING FRENCH IN THE CLASSROOM AT UNI ***(with former students)***

- *How would you describe your proficiency in French?*
- *What can you remember about studying French at university? How did you experience it?*
- *Can you recall one lesson or one element of a lesson which was particularly useful to you? Tell me about it.*
- *How did you see yourself in the class (compared to others)?*
    - *in terms of language learning skills or ability?*
    - *in terms of learning style/personality?*
- *Have you continued studying French after uni? Why/why not? How?*
- *How has your view of French changed since uni?*

ACTUAL EXPERIENCE OF LEARNING FRENCH IN THE CLASSROOM AT UNI ***(with undergraduates)***

- *How would you describe your proficiency in French?*
- *How do you judge the French class?*
- *Can you recall one lesson or one element of a lesson which you found particularly useful? Tell me about it.*
- *How do you see yourself in the class (compared to others)?*
    - *in terms of language learning skills or ability?*
    - *in terms of learning style/personality?*

- *Will you continue studying French after uni? Why/why not? How?*
- *How has your view of French changed since you started learning it?*

THE ABROAD EXPERIENCE ***(if any)***

- *Share with me significant experiences you have had whilst being abroad?*
- *How did it feel living in another culture?*
- *Have you experienced any fear/discomfort whilst being abroad? Is the way you felt related in anyway to your personality or to your culture? Please explain.*
- *Can you recall any particular moment that surprised or annoyed you? Why did you feel this do you think?*
- *What made you the happiest when you were abroad?*
- *How would you like to live in this society?*
- *Were there anyone you can remember whilst being abroad? Tell me about this person.*

C/ *LANGUAGE LEARNING PRACTICES*

1) Questions related to learning practices (incl. out-of- classroom practices)

- *What did you do which was related to the French language recently? (In your LLH, you mentioned……)*
- *(How do you study French out of schooling context?)*
- *Are there any issues linked to French which you are particularly curious about and would like to learn about?*
- *Do you engage with French (culture or otherwise) outside the classroom? How? How do these activities compare with the ones in class?*
- *Can you recall any French art (film, sculpture, opera, etc.) which made an impression on you? Explain.*
- *How is learning French similar or different from learning English?*

2) Questions related to how learners understand French learning in their context; how they use it

- *(You mentioned friends/family who are also learning French). Who do you use French with?*
- *Do you communicate with people from different cultural or linguistic origin? Where? How? Tell me about an exchange.*
- *Tell me about a foreigner you met in HK or abroad who made an impression on you.*
- *Do you use French in HK outside the classroom?*
- *Where can you hear French in HK?*
- *In your opinion, is speaking French useful in HK?*
- *How is learning French seen among young people in HK today?*
- *How does that compare to other languages ?*

Appendix 7a - Second interview researcher's guide

Section 1: Building on 1st interview and/or last meeting + exploring the techno-linguistic report

A/ Catching up. For example:

- What has happened since we last met in terms of French and in your life? (e.g. what about this new job? What about your new French class? How about the French class environment? Your classmates? The teacher?
- Tell me about your motivation to learn French at the moment?
- What are you doing (currently/after class) in relation to learning French (directly or indirectly)?
- How was your latest trip to…/your last holiday?
- Did you have new ideas about your studies/future/job, etc. since last time we met? What triggered them?
- Any resolutions for this year?

B/ Probing techno-linguistic report answers. For example:

- In your techno-linguistic report, you wrote….
- You also mentioned…. In what ways/ why/ can you explain….
- Who told you about this website/youtube channel/blog, etc.? Why do you follow this one in particular? How do you use it? What do you especially like about it?
- Tell me about this exchange on FB/IG….?
- Who do you target by using some French in this caption/post?
- Do you use the FRENCHINHK IG account? If no, why not?
- What do you think about it? Do you use any other IG accounts related to France or French? Which ones? Why?

Section 2: Exploring "Frenchness"

A/ FRENCHINHK FB group (Participants were asked to look back at the various posts (discussions and photos) in the FB group "FRENCHINK")

1. *Introductory question: What would you do if you could speak French?*

Questions:

2a. Look back at the pictures and discussions shared in this group in October/November 2015 and *share any particular reaction you may have had when seeing these posts even if you did not contribute any comment or "likes".*

2b. Which of the picture(s) shown in the FRENCHINHK group would you associate the most with French language/culture? Explain why.

2c. Which picture would you DEFINITELY NOT associate with French culture? Why?

2d. What is your personal view of what represents "Frenchness"? (refer back to pictures if necessary)

B. Questions about the idea of the French language compared to other languages: How participants see DIFFERENT LANGUAGES

Task: Use **your own** adjectives (or the list of adjectives below) to describe each language. The same adjective can be re-used as many times as you want.

USEFUL/ BLAND/ATTRACTIVE/ DIFFICULT/ EASY/ BEAUTIFUL/ UGLY/

FUNNY/ SERIOUS/ FRIENDLY/ PRESTIGIOUS (+ add your own)

Language	**Chosen adjective(s)**	**Notes about your choice**
Cantonese		
Mandarin		
English		
French		
German		
Spanish		
Japanese		

Possible follow-up questions:

1. *Tell me about the adjectives you have chosen for these languages (-> probe what participants mean exactly i.e. any image/sound/etc. associations)*
2. *Which ones do you consider positive adjectives? Are there any negative adjectives in the list?*
3. *Do you feel that some of these languages are more feminine or masculine than others?*
4. *You have re-started (or are continuing) studying French, have your feelings for French changed over time? In what way(s)?*
5. *Do you think learning French has changed you? In what ways?*
6. *Do you feel you are different when you are using different languages e.g. French, Cantonese or English?*
7. *What are the advantages of knowing some French in HK? How do HK people see you when you say you know some French?*
8. *If you wanted to study another language, which one would you choose? Why?*

C. Questions about the idea of French culture compared to other cultures => How do participants see DIFFERENT CULTURES

Task: Think about adjectives you would link to the cultures in the table below. Use your own adjectives.

Culture	Chosen adjective(s)	Notes about your choice
HK		
Mainland China		
English		
French		
German		
Spanish		
Japanese		

Possible follow-up questions:

9. *Tell me about the adjectives you have chosen for these languages (-> probe what participants mean exactly i.e. any image/sound/etc. associations)*
10. *How would you compare French culture to your own culture? (Are there any similarities between HK and French cultures? Any differences?)*
11. *When you visited France (or in HK, when you see French people), what did you think about the French culture? Please explain.*
12. *Was your perception different before you went to France i.e. has your perception changed?*
13. *How is being associated with the French culture different to being associated with another culture (e.g. Japanese, German, Spanish, English)?*
14. *Is knowing French helping you in your social life?*

Further exploration: how participants fit in their own culture

15. *How do you feel you fit in in your own culture?*
16. *What do you like about your culture?*
17. *What bothers you in your culture?*

D/ Exploring participants' sense of "personal style"

Questions:

- (TASK BEFORE INTERVIEW): *Which pictures 2/3 pictures/postings did you select on your FB account which:*

a) give an idea of who you are particularly well; or
b) *give an idea of who you want to be or do in life particularly well.*

18. *How would you describe your style? (e.g. in clothes/ music/ lifestyle, other...; e.g. brands likely to buy; shops, etc.)*
19. *What do you think of your style compared to other people?*

20. *What does your style most resemble (e.g.in fashion/ stars/ music/ films…)?*
21. *What kind of people do you feel most attracted to? Why?*
22. *What do you see as French style?*

E/ Questions linked to postings on FB or IG personal status (my selection of pictures):

-> *Why did you post this picture?*
-> *What does this picture/album say about you?*
-> *Why did you decide to use French in this comment?*

DEBRIEFING:

28. *Why did you agree to take part in the second phase of the research project?*
29. *Have you benefited from this interview? In what way(s)?*

Appendix 7b - Second interview (participants' preparation task)

During the second interview, I will explore in more details what learning French means to you as an individual in the context of Hong Kong.

***To prepare for the interview**, please take a look at the list of questions below and think about your answers. You don't need to send me back this sheet, but I hope you will be able to **give these questions some time and serious thoughts so that our interview can be fruitful. Merci** ☺.*

A. Introductory questions:

1. *What would you do if you could speak French fluently?*
2. Questions about the FRENCHINHK FB group:

Take some time to look back at the various posts (discussions and photos) in the FB group "FRENCHINK".

a. To start with, look back at the pictures and discussions shared in this group in October/November 2015 and *share any particular reaction you may have had when seeing these posts even if you did not contribute any comment or "likes".*
b. Following on this:
   - *Which of the picture(s) shown in the FRENCHINHK group would you associate the most with French language/culture?* Be prepared to explain why.
   - *Which picture(s) would you DEFINITELY NOT associate with French culture.* Why?
   - *Where do you think the associations you made with French language/culture might be coming from?*

B. Questions about the idea of the French language compared to other languages

- How do you see DIFFERENT LANGUAGES?

Use **your own** adjectives (if not, you can use the **list of adjectives** below) **to describe** each language. The same adjective can be re-used as many times as you want.

USEFUL/ BLAND/ATTRACTIVE/ DIFFICULT/ EASY/ BEAUTIFUL/ UGLY/

FUNNY/ SERIOUS/ FRIENDLY/ PRESTIGIOUS (+ add your own)

Language	**Chosen adjective(s)**	**Notes about your choice**
Cantonese		
Mandarin		
English		
French		
German		
Spanish		

Japanese		

Prepare to explain what made you choose these adjectives.

C. Questions about the idea of French culture compared to other cultures

=> How do you see DIFFERENT CULTURES?

Think about adjectives you would link to the cultures in the table below. Use your own adjectives.

Culture	**Chosen adjective(s)**	**Notes about your choice**
HK		
Mainland China		
English		
French		
German		
Spanish		
Japanese		

Prepare to explain what made you choose these adjectives.

D. Your style

- *How would you describe your style? (e.g. in clothes/ music/ lifestyle, other...)*

- *Can you explain how your style is different from others?*

- *What does your style most resemble (e.g. in fashion/ stars/ music/ films…)?*

- *What kind of people do you feel most attracted to? Why?*

- Look back at your FB status and pick two or three postings you would like to tell me about either because:

- They give an idea of who you are particularly well; or
- They give an idea of who you want to be in life particularly well.

A très bientôt !

Appendix 8 - Third interview questionnaire with IC – May 2016

Aims of third interview:

- Take more time to explore further a theme which seemed was not exhausted because of either poor interviewing techniques, time constraints or other factors during the interviews;
- Explore how interviewees' views might have changed and why, and thus explore the question of identity in continuous movement;
- Clarify unclear points;
- Give an opportunity for interviewees to revisit their answer.

I. CHECKING FACTS

IC	30? Graduated in?	Language Studies (English)	Pre-uni: / Uni: 2 beginner level courses Post-uni: /	Uni summer programme in England (1 month); summer course in France (1 week?); several trips to Europe for work	C Mother tongue: C	Japanese Italian	Mother: C Father: C

Catching up on news:

- How is the training going on?
  - Have you trained people with the new system yet?
  - Any feedback about your training skills?
- News from her trip to Europe and Shanghai.
  - Any interesting experience in terms of encounters or insights after your trip to the UK and to the North?
  - Any new feelings about China after your trip?

II. REVISITING PAST INTERVIEWS

Beliefs and attitudes (including about language, learning and culture)

Languages

- In the second interview and in your techno-linguistic report, you mentioned that using French would be to express "inner feelings" i.e. use French as a "less widely accessed" language to express my inner feeling online
  - What does "inner feeling" mean? Can you give an example?

    - Any example of French language use recently?
- In the 2nd interview, you mentioned that you had decided to post bi-lingual posts on FB to inform her foreign friends (incl. me) of what is happening in HK.
    - Have you continued doing so? Why/why not?

- What are your thoughts about Cantonese vs. Mandarin in HK schools?

<u>Cultures</u>

- In the 2nd interview, we discussed HK culture and you said HK culture was "very closed" and that it was hard to "promote it to outsiders" and that's why Hongkongish culture is not "really appreciated by sophisticated people"
    - Who are these people?
    - What do you think outsiders are interested about in HK?
    - Why did you say it was hard to promote HK culture?

- What would main points of difference be between French and HK cultures?
- What about similarities between HK and France cultures?
- What bothers you in HK culture?
    - In the first interview, you mentioned that you were "not a Chinese traditional person" and that you were "quite o-p-e-n in terms of thoughts"
    - In the 2nd interview, you mentioned working for xxx gives you the opportunity to be open. Does this mean you prefer working for a foreign boss than a Chinese boss or organization?

- In the second interview, you mentioned that young HK people were more "confident in performing in front of people" in the street.
    - Tell me about this.

Language practices:

- In your techno-linguistic report, you said that you might mix English with French.
    - Why would you do this?
    - Do you have any examples of this recently?
- How is mixing languages seen in HK society (e.g. by teachers at school)?
- In the second interview, you mentioned that in HK, " local people" would code-mix "between English and Cantonese in HK" but "Mainland immigrant won't so you can differentiate between how localized you are in a particular country or language"
    - Can you explain what this means more precisely?
    - How about Mainland Chinese who also know English, they might use some English too?

Self/identity

- In the 2nd interview, you mentioned that in a crowd of people from different nationalities, you felt less outgoing than most of them.
    - Has this changed?
- You said that feeling less outgoing made you think you wouldn't quite like or be ready to live abroad.

    - Has this changed?
- You said that sometimes it was the "diverse cultures" which made you a little lost.
    - Can you explain?
    - Does knowing French help you socially abroad?
    - How about in HK, do you hang out with mixed-cultural groups?
    - How does it feel compared to when you do the same abroad?

- Discrimination in HK:
    - In the first interview, you mentioned that there is a lot of discrimination against Mainland Chinese.
        - What about Mainland Chinese who can use and speak Cantonese?
    - You mentioned in the first interview that you have experienced a feeling of discrimination during your travels (e.g. in Italy) because people viewed you as Chinese. Have you felt discriminated against during your recent travels?
    - In the first interview, you said that you recalled that you wished that you could live abroad. You said "at that time I'm 100% certain that I wish I could stay".
        - During the inquiry, you said that many things had made you change your mind including discrimination? Is this one of the reasons why you don't want to live abroad anymore ? Please elaborate your feelings about living abroad.
- How would you describe your identity?
    - After the 2nd interview, you shared with me that you didn't see yourself working abroad and resented being asked "Where do you see yourself in 10 years?.
        - Why did you take this comment so personally, do you think?
        - How do you see your situation in HK in the future?

Imagined self

- What effect would speaking French fluently have on your life?
- Would you be different living in a French-environment? Can you imagine how ?

III. LONGITUDINAL ASPECT OF THE LEARNING FRENCH EXPERIENCE

1. Motivation

    a. Have you seen any movies or done anything recently related to French language or French culture?
    b. Have you met new people who are connected to French language or culture?
    c. Have your views about French language and culture changed since we started the study? i.e. Has anything happened that may have changed your view ?
    d. How has your motivation for learning French evolved throughout the study?
    e. Do you think it might be possible that you one day won't recognize French words at all?
    f. What would you say knowing French has brought you?
    g. Do you hear more French in HK since we started the study one year ago?

2. Tell me about your plans for the future.
    a. In the second interview, you mentioned that at the moment, it wasn't the "critical moment" to learn French. What would a "critical moment" be?
    b. Any plans linked to learning French or visiting a French-speaking country (In the near future? In the far future?).

Appendix 9 - Transcription guidelines for all transcribers

Source: Adapted from Kvale (2007, "Transcribing Interviews", p. 9 of 15 (SAGE online); adapted from Have (1999).

To ensure a high degree of reliability between the transcribers, I would like you to follow the following transcription guidelines:

General:

- Do a "**verbatim**" transcription. This means that all the words need to be transcribed including hesitations, pauses, etc. (see transcription convention below).
- As a guideline, one hour of recording should take about 8 hours to transcribe.
- Use the letter R for the Researcher's turns and the initial of the participant's pseudonym for the participant's turns)
- Format: single-spaced; double space between turns.
- As a guideline, 1 hour of transcription represents between 20 to 25 single-spaced pages.

-> See the example of a 8.21-minute transcribed section for Yasmina (provided)

Transcription convention:

… three dots > a tiny ‘gap’ within or between utterances

(pause) > more noticeable pause

? interrogation mark > Rising intonation in interrogative sentences/utterances

! exclamation mark > Falling tone; Exclamations e.g Yeah!

word underscoring > stress (via pitch and/or amplitude).

WORD Upper case > LOUD sounds relative to the surrounding talk.

(?) > incomprehensible

(()) > Double parentheses indicate the transcriber's descriptions rather than transcriptions. E.g. ((hums the tune)) ((adjusts the recording)) etc.

@@@ > Laughter -> the amount of @ roughly indicates the relative duration of laughter

*** word *** > transcriber’s best guess of the words of speaker

Hmmm > used when a sound signaling either approval or active listening is heard.

Euh > used when a sound showing hesitation within or between utterances is used.

Italics > for foreign word e.g. in French such as *Bonjour*

Also:

. full stops > use full stops if you judge there’s a natural break in the utterance.

, commas > use commas if you judge they improve the readibility of a sentence/utterance.

“ phrase/word” > use quotation marks to make clearer the fact that the speaker is quoting someone or herself/himself

Appendix 10 - My techno-linguistic report: Summary of technologies used for learning the foreign languages in my life

A techno-linguistic report consists of recording the various technologies you have been using throughout your life to learn foreign languages. This might include technologies used in-school/college (such as Moodle, Web-CT, email, blog, mobile phones, apps, social networks, etc.) and out-of-school in your spare time (such as mobile phones, blog, social networks, apps, YouTube, Vimeo, etc.).

Please fill in the table below. When you have done this, please answer the questions in section 2 with as many details as possible. Thank you.

1. Table: My techno-linguistic diary

My languages	Technologies I often use/'ve used (be precise and briefly state what for e.g. for homework)	Technologies I use/'ve used sometimes (be precise and briefly state what for e.g. for homework)
Mandarin	In school:	In school:
	Out-of-school:	Out-of-school:

English	In school:	In school:
	Out-of-school:	Out-of-school:

French	In school:	In school:
	Out-of-school:	Out-of-school:

Other language (specify):	In school:	In school:
	Out-of-school:	Out-of-school:

2. Questions related to your techno-linguistic report

a) What are the websites you often visit* to learn English? And which ones to you visit to learn French? Please provide the links and also briefly describe the functions of these websites.

*Please note that "visiting" means going to the website, but not necessarily contributing to it.

	Websites for learning English		**Websites for learning French**	
Websites I often visit	Name + link:	Function (e.g. spellchecker; interactive game, etc.)	Name + link:	Function (e.g. spellchecker; interactive game, etc.)
	1.		**1.**	
	2.		**2.**	
	3.		**3.**	

Table 1: Websites visited for learning English and French

b) What are the sites you contribute/have contributed to* in order to assist you in learning English and French? And how and how often do you contribute to each of those websites?

*Please note that "contribute" means that you actively participate by posting comments, videos, photos or in other ways (e.g. chats or Skype-type video conversations).

	Websites for learning English		**Websites for learning French**	
Websites I contribute/'ve contributed to (provide the name + link)	Name + link:	How and often do you contribute? (e.g. post photos & videos; almost every day)	Name + link:	How often do you contribute? (e.g. post photos & videos; almost every day)
	1.		**1.**	
	2.		**2.**	
	3.		**3.**	

Table 2: Websites I contribute(d) to for learning English and French

c) Please answer the following questions:

- What News Feed do you subscribe to from French learning websites or French-related websites (on FB, Twitter or other platforms; please specify)?
- Which website(s) do you enjoy posting most on? Please explain why.
- Do you use the French language on any of these websites? Which ones? Give the names of the websites as well as examples of what you have written.
- Regarding your social media postings, do you write in French? What have you written, for example?
- Why use French in some of your postings? Please explain.
- Any interesting experience in posting status updates in French on Facebook/blogging/Instagram/Twitter, etc.? Please explain.

Appendix 11 - SURVEY OF PERSONAL INFORMATION (strictly confidential)

Before answering this form, please note that confidentiality and anonymity are taken seriously in this study. This form will be safely stored with no one other than me having access to it. Also, your name will not appear again in other information I will collect from you.

1. Name: _____ (English) _____(Chinese)

2. Mobile phone number: _____ 3. Email: _____

4. Age:

5. Student at _____ university*:
   Major: _____ Minor: _____
   Year of you graduated: _____

6. Place of birth*: Hong Kong Mainland China Other:

7. How long have you been living in Hong Kong:

8. Are your parents currently living in HK?* Yes No
   If yes, how long have they lived in HK? _____

9. What is your mother tongue*?
Cantonese Putonghua English Other:

10. What language(s) do you use at home*?
Cantonese Putonghua English Other:

11. What languages do your parents know*? (You may choose more than one option)
a. Mother: Cantonese Putonghua English Other:
b. Father : Cantonese Putonghua English Other:

12. Please rate your parents' overall English language ability (please tick the correct answer):

	Does not speak it at all	Very weak	Weak	Fairly fluent	Fluent	Fluent as a native speaker
Mother's ability						
Father's ability						

13. Please fill in the information about the secondary school(s) you attended.

Form(s)	Name of secondary school(s)	Medium of instruction		
		English	Cantonese	Putonghua
		English	Cantonese	Putonghua
		English	Cantonese	Putonghua
		English	Cantonese	Putonghua

14. Please name the English Examination(s) you took prior to entering University (could be DSE or IELTS or something else) and the grade you received (A, B, C, D, etc. or if a number, state total. e.g.: 4/5):

Name of examination	Where did you take it *(Please circle your answer)*		When did you take it	Grade you received
	Hong Kong	Mainland China		
	Hong Kong	Mainland China		

15. How long have you studied French*?
One semester Two semesters/ 1 year 2 years 3 years Other:

16. If you have studied French before (even a little), where did you study? Please provide some details below:

Names of place(s)	Year(s) courses are/were taken (e.g. 2012)	Number of hours per week (e.g. 3hrs/week)
University(ies): _____ _____		
Secondary school: _____		
Alliance Française (Hong Kong)		
Elsewhere:_____		

17. What is your level in French*?
Beginner Post-beginner Intermediate Higher intermediate Advanced

18. Have you ever studied abroad (including summer exchange)*? Yes No
<u>If YES*:</u>
Where?_____
When? _____
For how long? _____
Did you study French whilst abroad? * Yes No

19. Have you ever lived abroad*? Yes No
<u>If YES*:</u>
Where? _____
When? _____

For how long?
_____

20. Which other languages do you know (even if a little)? _____
How long have you studied them for? _____
Please specify your level in those languages: _____
*Please circle the correct answer(s)

Thank you for your participation.

Appendix 12 - Summary of the different phases of participant recruitment and field texts collection

The table below presents the timeframe for recruiting participants as well as the timeline for collecting the LLH and techno-linguistic reports as well as interviewing (including the three interviews and the interim research text interview i.e. IRT interview)

Stages of data collection	Jan. to Apr. 2015	Apr. to Jun. 2015	Sep. to Oct. 2015	Nov. to Dec. 2015	Dec. 2015	Jan. to Feb. 2016	May to Jun. 2016	May 2017	Jun. to Jul. 2017	Aug. to Sep. 2017
Observing a French beginner class at a local Hong Kong university	√									
First stage of recruitment of volunteer participants among former student population (9 volunteers)	end									
Collecting LLH from former student volunteers		√								
First interview with former student volunteers		√								
Observing two French beginner classes at two Hong Kong local universities			√							
Recruitment of volunteer participants from the undergraduate classes at 2 Hong Kong universities (11 volunteers)			end							
Collecting LLH from undergraduate volunteers				√						
First interview with undergraduate volunteers				√						
Recruitment of participants to take part in the rest of the study (6 former sts; 6 undergrad = 12)					end					
Collecting techno-linguistic reports from the 12 participants						√				
Second interview (12 participants)						√				
Third interview (12 participants)							√			
Selection of 4 participants (1 undergrad. + 3 former students) for the analytical procedure								√		
Composing an interim research texts for the 4 final participants									√	
Interim research text meeting with the 4 final participants										√

Appendix 13 – Longitudinal perspective about language learning in IC's story

This table shows the perspectives observed in IC's story at the beginning of data collection and after the IRT meeting. In particular, it shows some changes in her views about language learning.

Data collection period	After IRT meeting
Language learning	
'It was duck-feeding'; 'Tiring. Tiring. Exhausting. Mechanic…' 'I will probably say the passion to learning language (and creativity I guess) largely came from the time we spent at home - playing with the stuffed toys…' 'I am not confident in speaking in English in public but I was able to use English freely at home - that's what I would conclude myself the confidence built up from.' Yet she said that the 'classroom or book is to some extent necessary' because grammar is something 'that you need to follow and rules you have to do… into more systematic way'. But she realized that the classroom didn't teach you 'how to use the base' and you had 'to discover [it] yourself'. She added that a base was not enough because it neither provided a 'cultural' understanding of a situation nor took into account the need to 'diversify' usage according to the situation: 'These two cannot be separated because language learning is… you can't say that language learning it consists of	During the IRT meeting, IC reflected more precisely about her English language learning experience at school. She came to the IRT meeting with a graph, which showed she had intensively thought about this. First, IC talked about her most recent trip to England at a work conference. In front of an audience, she said she talked about changes she had observed in the Hong Kong market in relation to her line of work. After the conference, IC received a letter by her line manager 'criticizing' the way she had spoken. Her manager's perception was that she had talked too negatively about the HK market, which reflected negatively on the company. In the letter, her line manager invoked the need to offer positive solutions instead of only criticisms. IC was deeply shaken after receiving the letter, and she said this made her reflect about the 'power of influencing' and the importance of language training. She realized that her training in HK had not been good enough: -> 'we didn't learn anything [about this] in school or university' -> 'it seems I didn't get any skills to do this' -> by this she seemed to mean, learning to persuade without being aggressive. She talked about how her nephew who is currently learning English observing that language training at school has hardly evolved since she was in school. By contrast, she observed (as she is training manager) that many things have changed in staff training in her company since she started working there. For example, employees can now complete part of the training online so face-to-face training time can be used more usefully to address other issues than just regulations. Earlier in the interview, she had remarked about the need to learn rules in language learning (e.g. grammar) to build confidence. Now, she observed that in the real world people were less demanding about accuracy and that context was more important than accuracy although schools did not concentrate on that. She compared what she had learned about language training at school and at work

ABC, it's a mixture of many things so I can't say that doing these kind of mechanic things not helped me […] but what you learn in the future is not that kind of base, it's about the cultural, it's about the tone and intonation, it's about how you make use of the word into another way to achieve different meanings so… it's totally different…'	⇨ School: 'We're knowing the shell of the language but we are not really learning about the meaning about the language' => to her, this was a big gap. ⇨ At work: IC seemed to have gained the confidence to ask when she didn't understand the meaning of words or sentences (she gave the example of asking about Ramadan during a work meeting); she said that she realized that although everyone around her was 'nodding', most people around her were in the same boat as her i.e. often local people don't understand what is said because they don't understand the cultural underlining; yet, they don't dare asking questions because this would show their lack of competence in English.
About her French learning experience at uni, she said she realized that language learning was more than linguistics: -> 'actually learning a language is not something only about a technical thing, it's not something about remembering about masculine or feminine form, it's something about the culture itself'	Following this, IC presented a graph about language learning which highlighted the importance of self-confidence; she pointed out that she felt she had missed on confidence-building in her English education: 'It's kind of like a graph of two circles… overlapping together so I've done the spoken training at home and I've done all the written thing at school (i.e. the technicalities of the language) but what I lacked in the past it's the confidence in between… to utilize both at the same time so I think it may… lead me to have a tendency to further my language study…yeah… I… when I am reading this [IRT] when I think about myself in the past and that's why I…I have a fancy of working with foreign exposure… company because I thought I was missing the middle part between spoken and written and the part… middle part overlapping is all about the culture… is all about… the foreign exposure…. yeah it's quite cultural !…like how to utilize what you [have learned in spoken form -> pragmatics => social process!] or actually what you've learned during the written English learning [classes i.e. at school] may not be euh commonly used yeah so there may be some more colloquial or localized use of language so this is something I think I've missed and it takes me to a tendency to further my English study' -> She finally said that what still motivated her in continuing to improve her English was 'to fill that gap between spoken and written'

Appendix 14 - Summary of the field texts collected during the inquiry

The table below represents the summary of the different field texts collected for each participant including their date of collection.

***Date = day/month/year** (e.g. 10/02.2015)

	Field texts	Details of field texts (e.g. number of words; submission or post date*)
Candice	LLH	1,308 words; text organized freely (27/09/2015)
	Techno-linguistic report	1,160 words; open questions answered with a good amount of detail (26/11/2015)
	Interview 1 transcript	8,685 words; interview lasted 1hr30 (7/11/2015)
	Interview 2 transcript	13,186 words; interview lasted 2hrs15 (28/01/2016)
	Interview 3 transcript	7,052 words; interview lasted 1hr18 (17/05/2016)
	Artifacts (e.g. visuals, objects, postings on social media, email messages, pieces of creative writing, art work, etc.)	- Enquiry into Candice's FB status: 1) Two postings picked by Candice: a) Searching for Waldo cartoon (21/03/2015); b) Video from Operation Christmas Child UK (Angolan boy receiving shoe box) (18/11/2015) 2) Three photographs picked by me: a) Eiffel Tower with multilingual graffiti after Paris attacks (15/11/2015); b) Group photo during exchange in Switzerland (29/04/2015); Group graduation photo in HK (20/06/2013) - Visuals shared on FRENCHINHK FB group: a) IG posting by Bebe Cave: "Feelin chic af today (31/10/2015); b) photo OUI/ NON earrings (1/11/2015); meme with dialogue: "Say Something in French", "NO!" (7/11/2015) - Copies of our exchanges on Messenger (from Oct. 2015 to Apr. 2016) and on IG (from Oct. 2015 to Aug. 2016) - Various field texts linked to French uni course: a) end-of French class reflection notes (class task; sem. 1 2015-2016); b) reflective essay after the French course (assignment; Dec. 2015); three short creative dialogues in French entitled by Candice: 'Rex et la Porte', 'La Rose et Le Rossignol', 'J'ai un secret' (homework; Nov. 2015) - Post-interview email (10/11/2015)
Yasmina	LLH	1,424 words; text organized freely (22/03/2015)
	Techno-linguistic report	1,626 words; open questions answered with a great amount of detail including prints of nine photos with captions from her FB status (11/11/2015)
	Interview 1 transcript	7,302 words; interview lasted 1hr11 (2/04/2015); lost 40 mins of recording due to mishandling new iPhone recorder (made notes straight after the interview about the missing data: 1,549 words)
	Interview 2 transcript	19,490 words; interview lasted 2hrs20 (12/02/2016)
	Interview 3 transcript	8,978 words; interview lasted 1hr20 (16/05/2016)

	Artifacts (e.g. photographs, objects, postings on social media, email messages, pieces of creative writing, art work, etc.)	- Enquiry into Yasmina's FB status: 1) Two photographs picked by Yasmina: a) Two girlfriends wearing bed sheets on a trip to Taipei (6/09/2015); b) Yasmina with girlfriend and 'peace' sign in the background (3/01/2014) 2) Three photographs picked by me: a) Yasmina in Paris street (10/10/2015); b) Tomb stone of Pierre Langlois (Fondateur de la Cinématheque et Musée du Cinema) at Père Lachaise cemetery, Paris (25/10/2013); c) Yasmina and girlfriend (exchange in French between them as caption) (26/02/2014) 3) Visual shared on FRENCHINHK FB group: photo of two girls busking at Kowloon Tong MTR station (18/10/2015) 4) Copies of our Messenger exchanges (from Oct. 2015 to Jan. 2016) 5) Follow-up email after 1st interview (5/04/2015)
IC	LLH	1,355 words; text organized freely (22/03/2015)
	Techno-linguistic report	1,304 words; open questions answered with a good amount of detail (7/10/2015)
	Interview 1 transcript	11,450 words; interview lasted 1hr33 (16/05/2015)
	Interview 2 transcript	14,536 words; interview lasted 2hrs15 (20/02/2016)
	Interview 3 transcript	9,775 words; interview lasted 1hr08 (29/05/2016)
	Artifacts (e.g. photographs, objects, postings on social media, email messages, pieces of creative writing, art work, etc.)	- Enquiry into IC's FB status: 1) One posting picked by IC: a) a lengthy reflection on FB following the Paris 2015 attacks and generic French flag profile pictures on FB (16/11/2015) 2) Other element picked as significant by IC: her boss' comment *'What will you do in 10 years' time?'* (during 2nd interview; 20/01/2016) 3) Three photographs picked by me: a) international colleagues: a work group photo (4/06/2014); b) Paris 2015 attacks and FB generic French flag profile pictures (same choice as IC; 16/11/2015); c) a re-post from the Alliance of H.K Democratic Movement following Taiwanese presidential elections (4/02/2016) 4) Visuals shared on FRENCHINHK FB group: a) A French Breton 'galette complete' (4/10/2015); b) Mime Marceau as expression of Frenchness (31/10/2015); c) photo of a tram advertising HK French Film Festival (31/10/2015) 5) FB post (22/10/2017): McDonald ad with IC's comment: *'omg so French to me!'* 6) Copies of our Messenger exchanges (from Oct. 2013 to March 2016) 7) Follow-up 2nd interview: Messenger exchange related to her boss comment: *'What will you do in 10 years' time?'* (21/02/2016)

Nicole	LLH	1,438 words; organized her text according to suggested headings (22/03/2015)
	Techno-linguistic report	1,795 words; open questions answered with a great amount of detail including one photo with caption taken from her FB status (8/12/2015)
	Interview 1 transcript	10,892 words; interview lasted 1hr30 (4/04/2015)
	Interview 2 transcript	15,392 words; interview lasted 2hrs20 (17/01/2016)
	Interview 3 transcript	5,938 words; interview lasted 1hr08 (21/05/2016)
	Artifacts (e.g. photographs, objects, postings on social media, email messages, pieces of creative writing, art work, etc.)	- Enquiry into Nicole's FB status: 1) Three postings picked by Nicole: a) 'There was a young lady' poem (1/01/2008); b) Photo of Nicole with her painting 'There was a young lady' (4/01/2014); c) Group photo of fundraising team with cheque of 75000HK$ (12/06/2015) 2) Three photographs picked by me: a); b); c) (same as Nicole) 3) Visual shared on FRENCHINHK FB group: none 4) Visuals sent via WhatsApp to illustrate comments in 2nd interview about French being 'bold' (23/09/2017) 5) Copies of our Messenger exchanges (from Apr. 2011 to Jan. 2016) 6) Follow-up emails: a) Follow-up email after 2nd interview (28/02/2016); b) Two web links to explain the fundraising activities she organized for her company (24/05/2016); c) Message about her interim research text just before meeting to discuss it (27/08/2017)
Field notes from me as the researcher		1) Post-interview reflections about each participant. In total, I wrote twelve detailed post-interview reflections. 2) Detailed notes about participants' Facebook postings in preparation for 2nd interview (I called these notes, 'FB enquiry') 3) Personalized interview questionnaire and notes for each participant in preparation for 3rd interview 4) My postings in the FRENCHINHK Facebook group i.e. 31 visuals (including photos and video links) 5) Researcher memos: a) 'My experience of autonomy' (217 words; February 2015); b) 'Identity' (3,512 words; April 2015); c) 'French identity' (1,708 words; 21 May 2015); d) 'The influence of others in positioning my identity' (261 words; undated). 6) Various notes and reflections about the progress of my study in a series of notebooks I carried everywhere with me

Appendix 15 – A sequence of major events in IC's life

The table below presents major events in IC's life in connection to contextual issues and consequences, which represents my first attempt at reconstructing her story in note-form.

Sequence (chronological)	Contextual issues	Consequences
1. Learning English at primary school	**The ways she was taught English at school:** 'It was duck-feeding'; 'Tiring. Tiring. Exhausting. Mechanic…'	**This may have spurred the desire to engage with English differently. At home, she invented creative games (**incl. role playing and watching Sesame Street on TV every day) with her sister: -> 'I will probably say the passion to learning language (and creativity I guess) largely came from the time we spent at home' -> This made her realize that the classroom didn't teach you 'how to use the base' and you had 'to discover [it] yourself' **=>** Transition point
2. Learning English at secondary school	**Three role models in her life** (a secondary school teacher, the President of her university and one of her bosses)	**a. IC said they made her 'more all-rounded in terms of thinking' and widened her horizon.** **b.** She credits a secondary school teacher in particular for: -> **Her decision to engage in independent learning activities during her summer holidays** (learned Japanese, web design, astrology, *feng shui*) i.e. IC as a self-learner, an explorer of knowledge **-> The orientation of her undergraduate studies** => Transition point - ' when I was small I just… I thought I would be some of… sort of… …professional person… designing house, building things' - She changed her choice of topic from graphic design to English: 'if you study language you can do whatever you want as long as you can express yourself freely' **-> The role of language learning:** 'the more language you learn the more… the easier you understand the rest of the world apart from your place […] people who are able to speak different language[s] are having a broader sense in looking at things because language[s] do making you look at things differently'
3. Uni	**Enrolling in a variety of classes (especially language classes) helped her increase her perspective & knowledge:**	**a. Apart from continuing to improve her English, IC started to learn French** though she said she had 'no ambition' when choosing to learn a 'little language' such as French or Japanese to become 'very serious' about learning it; all she was aiming at was to satisfy an interest. **b. Through learning French**

	-> University is 'the time to expose yourself more' -> 'when I went to work and I share my university life with my other colleagues… I said that I learned a lot of things there, I learned French, I learned Tai Chi, I learned cinema, I learned movie studying…'	-> IC realized that **language learning is not only about linguistics**: - 'actually learning a language is not something only about a technical thing, it's not something about remembering about masculine or feminine form, it's something about the culture itself' - 'I studied French and I feel very interest[ed] and I studied cinema studies and I knew François Truffaut and he would become one of my favorite directors…it's interrelated somehow which made me to go to France' -> **She also gained new perspectives on her own culture:** - French people are 'open-minded' and 'proud of their culture' - 'French culture is more easy-going… it's more open for ideas' 'more oriented to arts'. By contrast, Hong Kong's focus on 'practical benefit', and making money ['if… not able to make money why bother doing it'] **-> Yet French and HK cultures have in common that** 'they are both...having their own popular culture… same as Hong Kong popular culture they [the French] have their unique way of presenting themselves'
4. Work for a Japanese then, an international British company	**Learning to fit in a different cultural work environment** => Transition point	**a. Gaining new perspectives through international exposure** during meetings, trainings, socializing moments + **learning about different work cultures:** -> British managers 'will talk something else apart from jobs' -> But HK Chinese managers 'don't feel we have time to talk about non-work stuff because it's busy it's working time' **b. Also learned about herself:** **-> Realized the importance of being more open:** - In the past IC tended to be 'cool, distant… not very friendly' with people, but she is learning to be more interested in people: it's 'part of relationship building' and 'very important' in human lives', and it can 'facilitate your work' and help you 'to know more about each other' **-> But there are difficulties:** - 'I sometimes may not be able to join the conversation or I may not be able to describe that into very entertaining way' - 'I'm just thinking if my personality is still really outgoing enough to…be working in a very diversified culture…'
5. The increasing presence of	**Changing socio-political landscape in HK** **->** Important transition point in IC's story	**a. Negative perceptions of mainland Chinese culture and Mandarin language:** -> 'Mandarin is just an official language it's not really a language associated with a culture so as far

Mainland China in HK		as I understand in Chinese history, China is a area with...different races or… different ethnic groups or different...areas of people who speak their own language or dialects… and Mandarin is just a way to unify' -> Mainland Chinese are 'rude to our Hong Kong culture actually, it's rude to our area actually. ...they' re not respecting others' culture' **Including economic and social issues:** -> Mainland Chinese in HK: 'I'll consider they are getting the job from us…' -> 'everyone is equal but some are more equal than others' **b. Increased appreciation of Cantonese culture and language:** -> 'We welcome different cultures...to be in our society, we love to embrace...good culture positive culture from...other areas…' -> Hong Kong people are 'flexible', 'willing to try new things' and 'open-mind[ed]' -> Hong Kong people didn't mind changing environment ('moving [on]') -> Cantonese is 'full of variety', with a 'very high degree of adaptability', 'playful' and 'funny', albeit 'difficult' **c. Yet problems in communicating to others what HK culture is**: -> 'we are also born in Hong Kong and we understand Hong Kong culture, but when we trying to promote it to other it's always hard. Because first it's a popular culture, it's not highly appreciated by sophisticated people' -> The use of Kongish (mix of Cantonese & English) is a way to differentiate HK from the Mainland: 'it's to distinguish between local Hong Kongese and immigrants' -> 'the westerner regard Chinese culture in a very surface way' -> Having to explain HK to foreigners: 'I will…we'll [take] some time to explain the difference between HK and China'
6. The Future	**Difficulty in imagining the future for several reasons:** **a. Socio-political considerations:** -> 'it is my hometown I don't see why I have to go because of <u>threat</u>…' ->'I don't want to say I'll move out because …I know Hong Kong is	**a. Linked to the socio-political environment, IC sees staying in HK as a way 'to contribute':** -> 'It is about what I am ... behaving to contribute or what I am taking actions to contribute to this society […] I don't know maybe just move out or something else, it is not the right way to contribute to the society you are…being raised by' -> 'And plus…it is my home somehow I'm still insisting that why I have to leave my place to somebody from outside make my home…worse? ((laugh)) there's no reason for that, so from this moment I will have the same feeling about last time

	getting worse so I'll move out no' **b. Other considerations:** -> 'In the past I have quite a strong eager or strong will if I can move to overseas to work and the States will be great!' -> 'I'm getting old and… I start realizing that [am I] really… capable to cope with the cultural diversity or the cultural difference between Chinese and Western style?' -> '[I] don't think overseas is as good as you expect because they're still competition and the competitions are more furious because you are not competing with Chinese mainland locals but you're competing any people from European countries or rest of the world...' -> 'So… and discrimination is getting more serious and serious, towards Chinese?' **c. Also, IC now sees herself at the junction of two worlds:** -> 'I have a different...point of view of this… because I think more Westernized or I think more greedy or I think it is the basic right […] we [HK people] are very good, to the employers sometimes, but we sometimes forget our rights'	that I'm…happy to be here and I want this place to be better and better, not by moving out but staying here. Maybe influence in a positive way to the next generation' **But she faces a dilemma:** -> 'I really don't know… I want to stay in Hong Kong, but on the other hand I can't see Hong Kong is a better place to stay, or for my retirement.' **b. Throughout this questioning, her identity as a HK person is reaffirmed:** -> 'I will use the word local I understand what peoples are referring [to] when they talk about some secret codes in Cantonese…so…pure local Hong Kongese I'd say' -> They asked "Where are you from?" and "We're from HK" and then "Yeah, it's China… it's part of China!" "No, it's not part of China!" (dramatic voice) blablabla like this… so we have a strong identity… myself yeah' **c. But her identity as IC is more complex:** -> 'I'm not a Chinese traditional person yeah… …I'm quite o-p-e-n (said slowly) in terms of thoughts yeah… positively I'm opened to change' -> 'I can, behave like a very Western [person] but dress like a very Japanese for example' -> 'I'm born in Hong Kong and I'm born to be a multicultural person. So my lifestyle is totally a mixture…' -> 'for lifestyle, I think it's a mix of Hong Kongish and Western' **d. The way French fits into IC's identity definition:** -> In her British company, IC used French alongside English with her HK-Scottish boss who spent time in France: *"Au revoir" "Bonjour" "How does it feel?… Comme ci-comme ça".* -> She said about this practice: 'yeah… it makes your language into more fun, it puts more elements into it and makes it more… diverse…' -> Thus, using French alongside English is a way to assert her difference as a person, but it also serves to affirm her identity as a Hongkonger: 'if it is the way that [British people] speak … then it is… just like code mix between English and …Cantonese in HK … but for example like Mainland immigrant … they won't so… so you can differentiate between how localized you are' -> In this way IC cannot imagine giving up learning languages: '… my language study journey didn't stop, and will never stop as it is always interesting to me.'

Appendix 16 – Instructions regarding what to do with the Interim Research Text (IRT) before the IRT meeting

Dear _____

As discussed, attached is a tentative narrative account put together and organized according to my perception of your story. It is based on any or all of the following: our interviews, your language learner history, your techno-linguistic report, emails or messages on WhatsApp and/or Messenger, comments on the FRENCHINHK Facebook group postings or on the Instagram account @frenchinhk, and notes I made during the time I collected data from you between 2015 and 2016. The quotes come from these data sources.

This document will be the basis of our next and last meeting towards the end of August. I will be back in HK on 19 August. Please let me know any convenient time for you between Monday 21 August and the first week of September.

I would like you to read the narrative carefully and make notes of any comments, questions or observations you have. The purpose of the meeting is to talk about your perceptions of this version of your narrative account.

Please feel free to make as few or as many notes as you feel necessary. I have not set a time for the length of the interview, but a rough guideline would be between one hour and one hour and a half. This meeting will be recorded so that I can go back on points we discussed.

I look forward to seeing you soon.

A bientôt

Lorraine

Appendix 17 – IRT SENT TO IC + NOTES DURING AND AFTER THE IRT MEETING

NOTES AFTER the IRT meeting:

- ➔ IRT meeting with IC organized 3 Sep. 2017 at Café Causette, Mandarin Oriental.
- ➔ I made some notes directly onto the computer during the meeting (see inserted notes in the margin) and edited them immediately after; there is a recording of our conversation.
- ➔ I read through sections of the IRT chosing sections which focussed mainly on how I interpreted her story.
- ➔ IC had also made notes and drawings onto her copy of the IRT and talked about them. She gave me her notes at the end of the meeting.

IRT SENT TO IC:

1. IC and me
2. My meetings with IC
3. Learning English : creative games
4. Learning English at primary school
5. Secondary school
6. IC the-self-learner, the explorer
7. Uni and learning French: 'the time to expose yourself more'
8. Knowing French is to know English better and it is to be 'more localized'
9. French: 'it's like a secret code'
10. What learning French means for IC: other reasons
11. Views of French language and culture
12. A sense of self
13. Gaining new perspectives through international exposure
14. Work : a further revelator of self
15. IC's attachment to HK
16. IC's concern about Hong Kong's future
17. Mainland China in IC's stories
18. Economic and social issues
19. The meaning of Cantonese in IC's life
20. IC's view regarding her identity

1. IC and me

IC was 27 at the time of the research between April 2015 and June 2016.
I met IC for the first time in the academic year 2006-2007 when she enrolled in my French beginner non-credit bearing classes during the second year of her English major undergraduate degree studies at a Hong Kong university. At the end of that year, she took part in a one-month summer programme in England before going to France, where she studied French for a week in an intensive summer course at Alliance Française (AF) in Paris. She has traveled since several times to Europe for work.

Commented [Ld1]: IC remarked that a lot of time had passed since I collected my data suggesting that a lot of things had changed and that she didn't see things in the same way now: 'I'm 31 now and it's been so long!' so some of the points may have evolved 'so it's quite hard to capture' the reality. A lot of things have changed.

After graduating in June 2008, IC's first job was with a popular and well-established supplementary education provider in Hong Kong, where she started as a teaching assistant in one of the franchised centres. After recommendation, she moved to the Head Office and worked in field development. This involved visiting the company's centres to 'give some advice to make them grow, develop'. Later on, she transferred to a department that specialized in new franchisee training, and she became a corporate trainer. Her job involved 'talking about our exercise, what is our values, what is the company's mission, what should franchisee behave' and supporting new franchisee intensive operations by, for example, liaising with parents and students to monitor levels of satisfaction.

IC now works for a well-known British international food chain, as a corporate trainer. At the time of our first meeting, she was responsible for training new staff in safety and hygiene regulations, and was also involved in recruiting and interviewing new staff. IC's role has recently evolved since her company introduced an e-training platform in 2016. After attending several training sessions in London, where she was trained using the new system, she is now responsible for training and monitoring Hong Kong as well as Shanghai staff. She regularly travels to Shanghai to inspect the company's shops as well as recruit and train staff members, informing them about 'the company's values' and about the company's products. Apart from setting 'requirements' and monitoring standards, she also monitors staff development so that 'the team feels positive working here as a career'.

Whilst starting her professional career, IC also enrolled in a part-time M.A. studies in Language Studies at another Hong Kong university. She graduated in 2013.

IC was born in Hong Kong and has Cantonese-speaking parents. The language they speak at home is exclusively Cantonese as her parents speak neither Mandarin nor English. Apart from French, IC also knows a little Japanese - which she learned by herself - and Italian, which she has picked up during her travels.

2. My meetings with IC

During the research, all my meetings with IC took place in English. My first meeting with her was in 16 April 2015. It was her day off and a little early, but she said that she did this anyway on her days off. We had not seen each other for a long time, but had kept in touch via Facebook. I knew for example that she had recently been to Italy on holiday and had been to London for work. I commented a couple of times on her FB status and she responded from time to time.

We were meeting at IC's suggestion in one of her company's shops not far from where she lives, but it was noisy and hot and so after thirty minutes, I suggested that we move to an outdoor sitting area nearby. We sat down with coffee and cakes, which IC had insisted to pay for, and we talked for one and a half hours without further disruption.

Before starting the interview, we talked about her former university for a while as she keeps in touch with a retired Professor there and knew about the latest gossip and news. She also knows my husband, who was one of her teachers.

My first impression of her after having seen her only once since she graduated from university in 2008 was how much she had grown into a professional woman. She looked nicely groomed and I could observe from the way she addressed the staff at the café where we met that she had gained self-confidence. She also looked more mature and had an air of someone who is successful. Other than that, she was as talkative and vivacious as I remembered her, and our conversation developed easily.

At the end of the interview, during the debriefing when I asked her about her experience of the interview, she said that it was very interesting for her because I was asking her questions (such as "Where do you see yourself in 10 years' time?") which she sometimes asks others in recruitment interviews. She also commented that it was interesting to go back on events in her life and to look at all the experiences she had had and actions she took. She felt she had accomplished quite a lot.

Our second meeting was in 20 February 2016 and lasted for two hours and twenty minutes, which was longer than the original two hours I had asked of her. IC said she didn't mind, that she had her whole afternoon free and was happy to see me. IC was still in Chinese New Year spirits and was meeting her family and relatives later on for a big family gathering when she was hoping to receive more *lai si* (traditional red packets containing money). I had suggested a hotel lobby, as I thought it might be quiet. We settled around a cup of tea and cakes.

First we caught up about work and how busy IC was. She was going to the U.K. for a period of induction training and then was going to visit the Northern Lights in Iceland with a friend. She was also going to Shanghai in May to further her training process. She said she was happy about these plans. As she was telling me all this, I thought that she was still feeling professionally fulfilled in her job and that she was happy with her progression in the company.

Our third interview was in 29 May 2016 and lasted a little more than one hour. It took place in a famous Hong Kong hotel in its well-known café for French patisseries, called "Câfé Causette". This time IC had chosen our meeting place (which she had tried and tested) and had booked a table for brunch.

IC was her usual dynamic and bubbly self. Before the interview, we talked a little bit about her dad's sudden illness (he's better now) and her recent travels. She had been away from Hong Kong for a month or so, first to London for a week's training in April, then to Rome, Denmark and Iceland. In May she was in Shanghai training the company's shop staff.

During the course of our conversation, I remarked to myself that one characteristic of IC was her commitment to what she did as well as her sense of purpose: when she set out to do something, she did it fully. For example, when she decided to take part in my project, she made herself available, kept in touch and asked questions. For example, at the end of the interview, she wanted to know more about the progress of the research including my preliminary findings and themes. When I asked her how the research project had benefited her, she said that she was really interested in seeing where it would lead and what it might reveal and also said that she was happy to help.

3. Learning English: creative games

IC's best memories of learning English are associated with home as well as with watching the children TV programme 'Sesame Street' and playing games in English with her sister. Reading IC's language learner history (LLH) and listening to her speak about her English language activities, I was struck by how these memories still hold a particular place in IC's mind; they were vividly recalled and enthusiastically shared with me.

Commented [Ld2]: IC said that she still watches YouTube Sesame Street videos to re-experience her happy childhood memories. She said that Sesame Street had changed a lot. IC was wondering how children now days experience Sesame Street because she said that the topics are quite different and the formula quite different from when IC was small => richer content now => this is also in opposition to what she later said about school (see next comment)

About Sesame Street, IC wrote in her LLH that she couldn't finish her homework fast enough; all she wanted to do was watch her favorite 'cartoon show':

> 'I switched on the TV, turned to TVB pearl, and wait until I could hear the song "how to get to Sesame Street..." I don't know when I was hooked on this but I was surely fascinated by the characters and the songs, even though I had no idea on what the characters are talking (or singing) at that time.'

She said however that watching Sesame Street every day had 'minimal influence on [her] English' at school 'as reflected by school exams'. Yet, she wrote she still 'enjoyed' watching the programme and trying to understand 'what Elmo and Cookie monster were arguing [about], or how Ernie and Bert make their reconciliation after a stupid misunderstanding of each other'. She wrote that Sesame Street triggered her motivation to get a better command of English:

> "I can say the show aroused my interest in bettering my English, so that I can finally understand what they are saying."

The other activity, which IC described as playing an important role in learning English, was her soft toy games with her elder sister. Her sister, who was 10 years old at the time, had been encouraged to help IC with her studies by their parents, who did not know English. IC described her sister in her LLH as 'a top student at all times' and as a 'good teacher' who 'is now working as an accountant, a popular role that perceived as one of the future-guaranteed jobs in Hong Kong'. The two sisters shared a deep interest in English. In the first interview, IC said:

> 'We share the same thing that we like watching some programmes in English. Her favorite TV programme is Pride and Prejudice from BBC, she has the whole set of books in VHS video tapes recorded from TVB Pearl and my favorite is Sesame street… it is the same way that we emerged ourselves into English'

The activity the two girls particularly enjoyed was immersing themselves in English roles and role-playing them. IC would become one of the characters in Sesame Street and her sister was 'trying to copy from Pride and Prejudice […] Mr. Darcy or something else'. They took this further by inventing English dialogues and role-plays with 'a family' of soft toys, which became very important characters in the English world they created at home. As a preparation for the first interview, I had asked IC to bring an object, which symbolized her language learning experience; she brought with her 'Frightened Bear', her favorite soft toys. She described it as one which represented her side (i.e. not her sister's side in their conversations and perhaps arguments) and which she still keeps at home although her mother regularly threatens to get rid of it. In her LLH, IC wrote:

> ‘I will probably say the passion to learning language (and creativity I guess) largely came from the time we spent at home - playing with the stuffed toys. Every night we will have our own stuffed toys - with different character and with each other - and did role-play having daily conversation - all in English. We introduced each other the name of the stuffed toys, their personality and background - all in our imagination. This was the happy moment I had before my bedtime - and surprisingly I didn’t take English a burden during play. Whenever I made up some stories about one of my ‘characters’, I tried my best to describe, sometimes aided with some Cantonese, the happenings around them.’

In her LLH, she wrote that her language learning activities built her confidence up:

> ‘I am not confident in speaking in English in public but I was able to use English freely at home - that’s what I would conclude myself the confidence built up from.’

4. Learning English at primary school

It was striking to me how IC’s description of learning English by herself and with her sister through their games, contrasted with what she told me about the ways she was taught English at school. In her LLH, she wrote that English language homework was ‘only composed of copying sentence or simpler log guessing in grammar questions, as similar to other conventional duck-feeding primary schools’. She added that even if this ‘sound[ed] boring’, she was ‘happy with it’ because her only target was to complete her homework as fast as possible so that she would have finished it by the time Sesame Street started on TV [‘as a homework-completer-only, I was happy with it’].

In the first interview, when I asked her to describe further her experience of learning English at school, she said:

> ‘It’s duck feeding. Textbooks. First half, vocabularies for this chapter. Part B, grammar. Part C some reading exercise. Part D, it’s a comprehension, it’s a fill-in the blanks, try to make use of what you learned into this chapter into one passage, stuff like this. Supplementary exercise would be a small book bought from… I don’t know where it is, it’s called P.E.U., Practical English Usage book, full of grammar exercise, you have a grammar table, you have to do a dictation on grammar table every week and… yeah and try to memorise every vocabulary, you have to learn the spelling…’

She added however that it was also the way her sister supervised her homework at home: ‘This is how my sister trained me to get 100% in my dictation as well.’ When I asked her about her feeling towards this way of learning, she answered:

> ‘Tiring. Tiring. Exhausting. Mechanic and… as long as you know the trick then you just put yourself into spelling or vocabularies and you put yourself into memorizing the whole passage, it’s done.’

I wondered if IC associated the activity of learning English more with school learning or with her language activities at home. When I asked her, she said that the two were complementary and that the school way provided ‘a base’. However, she added that a

Commented [Ld3]: IC summarized again how she had learned English: written training at school; oral training with her sister.

IC remarked how surprised she was to see that her nephew was still being taught in the same way -> learning methods have not change despite the use of technologies and more interactive ideas about learning. IC said that technologies/resources had improved but the fundamentals of learning a language had not changed => in saying this, it seems that IC is aware of how power and control limits her own development although she did not articulate what or why. She ventured an explanation saying that maybe it was because the grammar way of learning is seen as the ‘most useful way’, ‘the most traditional way’ … RECORDING (section 1, 8’17’) => power of ideologies

Yet, she compared this with the way training has evolved in her company suggesting that school had hardly evolved at all.

base was not enough because it neither provided a 'cultural' understanding of a situation nor took into account the need to 'diversify' usage according to the situation:

> 'These two cannot be separated because language learning is… you can't say that language learning it consists of ABC, it's a mixture of many things so I can't say that doing these kind of mechanic things not helped me […] but what you learn in the future is not that kind of base, it's about the cultural, it's about the tone and intonation, it's about how you make use of the word into another way to achieve different meanings so… it's totally different…'

Since she had told me so much about her self-learning activities at home, I asked her what she thought of classroom English learning activities for learning 'the base'. She answered that she thought that the 'classroom or book is to some extent necessary' because grammar is something 'that you need to follow and rules you have to do… into more systematic way'. Yet, she added that the classroom didn't teach you 'how to use the base' and you had 'to discover [it] yourself' such as 'by speaking to foreigners or by meeting new friends' and by 'traveling around to western countries to discover, to realize how you can make use of the base you've learned in your primary school'.

5. Secondary school

In the first interview, I asked IC if she had any role models. She said that she had three including a high school teacher, with whom she still keeps in touch. She said that this was a person who shared 'a lot of thinking' with them and with whom she and her classmates 'could talk to' and had 'a relationship' with.

IC wrote in her LLH that her initial idea was to study ~~web~~ graphic design ['I put myself to design-related major'] at university. Yet eventually, she chose to be an English major. When I asked her about this, she told me that she had acted on the orientation teacher's recommendation:

> 'after result A level is out, my secondary career teacher just put me all into language subjects because my language subjects [were] relatively better than the other subjects and what she suggest is if you study language you can do whatever you want so that's why "Oh yeah, you're right!"

Her mother had initially been surprised by her change of mind and had challenged it: 'Why don't you decide… why don't you stick to design, isn't that what you want?', her mother said to her. IC told her mum that study design was something she could still learn after she graduated and argued for studying English at university in those terms:

> 'language is something… it takes time to immerse yourself so… and [what] my career teacher says is right: if you study language you can do whatever you want as long as you can express yourself freely'

IC's answer somewhat reflected what she had said about the importance of her three role models in her life, in the first interview. She told me that they had made her 'more all-rounded in terms of thinking' and that they had widened her horizons:

Commented [Ld4]: IC said that in the real world, in reality, people are less demanding about accuracy. **But she said that grammar helps to build your confidence => However, she feels she has changed her perspective** (14'30" section 1) => **she now thinks that context is more important than accuracy** and observed that school does not teach that: **'We're knowing the shell of the language but we are not really learn about the meaning about the language'** => she said that was a big gap. Yet does IC realize that a foreign language could never be totally acquired because contexts change all the time. Yet, she seems to have gained the confidence of asking when she doesn't know (she gave the example of asking about Ramadan; she said that she realized that although everyone around her was 'nodding', people were in the same boat as her, they still did not understand the context i.e. **often local people don't understand what is said but don't dare asking what it means because this would show their lack of competence in English.**

Commented [Ld5]: ⇨IC talked about how **confidence was missing at school.** She described the graphs she drew on her notes (see printscreen IC-IRT-graph 2)

> ‘you’ll look at different aspects from… on the same issue and it makes you more “Oh yeah!” you can see the same thing from the other point of angle and you will feel it … in another way so you’ll just feeling inspired and enlightened… really!’

6. IC the-self-learner, the explorer

Perhaps because of the influence of her secondary school teacher who encouraged her to do ‘a lot of thinking’, IC gave herself the task of devoting her two-month summer holidays to self-learning, during her secondary school years:

> ‘When I was in secondary 2… we used to have a summer holiday in every end of secondary year and during the two months summer holiday I used to go to the library, pick a topic every year so one year, I study about horoscope which is very funny, one year I study about website building’

Her self-discipline was displayed in this description of her daily schedule:

> ‘so when I get up around 10 or 11 I have my late lunch and I spend the whole afternoon on that particular topic and until 5pm, I watch my cartoon and then, dinner and then after dinner when I have time I play with my sister with my toys, if not then I would keep reading books or design my website. Yes.

She also taught herself some Japanese and *feng shui* in this way. It was the discovery of website design which prompted her initially to want to study this subject at university. She had chosen to learn about web design because it was ‘very popular’ at the time and because she enjoyed doing it, but also because her classmates and high school teacher’s online comments on her website prompted her to do more. Thus, something which started out as a ‘commitment’ [‘this is my commitment somehow’], became a ‘pastime’.

I thought that this creative way of learning out of the classroom, at her own initiative and for her own interest seemed an endearing trait of IC’s character. Her curiosity and taste for self-learning had continued at secondary school level since her early English learning activities at home, at primary level.

7. Uni and learning French: ‘the time to expose yourself more’

IC’s quest to go forward and explore new things continued at university and further. She enrolled in an English major programme at a local university and then in a M.A. programme, after having saved for her studies by working for two years. Her programme of bettering her English skills continues to this day. In the first interview, she told me that she was learning to use English in a more playful way by learning colloquial expressions from her Scottish boss in her current job; this made her feel that she was continuing to progress:

> ‘I’m confident to express [myself in English]… compared with other working people around me … it makes me understand more about language, you can play a little bit [with] it… yeah because my boss is an English, he’s a Scottish and… we know a little bit… how d’you say? those kinds of… metaphors? or… we know a little bit play about English so I think it is a way to express myself into a more advanced way or into another way’

In the third interview when I asked her what it meant to know several languages in Hong Kong, IC said it would 'broaden your way of thinking' and she added:

> 'the more language you learn the more… the easier you understand the rest of the world apart from your place […] people who are able to speak different language[s] are having a broader sense in looking at things because language[s] do making you look at things differently'

With the same desire to expand her knowledge and discover new things, IC enrolled in French beginner courses at university:

> 'just take French…because the university time is the time to expose yourself more'

In the first interview, IC recalled her experience of hearing only French being spoken in classes at university in Hong Kong and in France, which surprised her and unsettled her, but which she seemed to enjoy:

> 'I still remember some of them and… we just figure out "Euh? What…What's she saying?" … and at that time the teacher tried to call us but because of the Chinese name, the surname and the first name is different from what Western people have so he mistook my name as Cheng as the first name so at the beginning I don't know he's calling me […] [I] make some friends […] we can talk to each other when we're class, during breaks and… that's a very good experience actually'

Yet IC's aim in class was not related to a desire to master the language. She said she had 'no ambition' when choosing to learn a 'little language' such as French or Japanese to become 'very serious' about learning it; all she was aiming at was to satisfy an interest:

> 'I didn't put too much ambition on this…I just learn by my interest, I just learn to… want to know more about the language… and its culture itself so I didn't take too much serious about learning about one particular language'

IC's current knowledge of French dates back to 2007. Her French has thus started to feel a little distant and blurred although she said in the first interview that she was still able to spot French being spoken in the street ['I can differentiate']. However, in the same interview, she said that when she tried to make use of her 'limited French' in a Parisian shop one day, she misheard a price (5 euros instead of 15 euros). In the second interview, she also said that she thought she heard French spoken in a Hong Kong street, but realized that it was another language ['I thought it's French, so I ask "Française?" and then she seems not happy that because she's from Romania or somewhere else']. Breakdowns in communication however did not worry her because she said that what was important was the intention to reach out to other people and to try to immerse oneself in the country ['to become more localized'], and for that she felt she did not need to be fluent:

> 'I'm the person who likes to use different language so even when I went to Italy… before I go to a trip I went on a website and I learned some Italian and trying to use it, become more localized because I think if you go to some

> country, if you go to other people's place, if you learn some other people's place, it shows you're friendly and it shows you're… willing to get into themselves so… I think [one] of the purpose to go traveling is to know more about that country so… I'm the person who likes to know… different language[s] but not in a very fluent conversational [manner]'

In the second interview, she repeated that she did not have the intention of continuing French 'at this stage'. She said that English was still her 'first priority to study at this point' and that she might consider other kind of courses for her 'work bettering'.

8. Knowing French is to know English better and it is to be 'more localized'

In the first interview, I asked her further about her reasons for choosing French. She mentioned that one of her friends from the English B.A. programme 'knew French a lot' and was one of the people who 'recommend[ed]' her 'to go on with French'. When I asked why her choice of language had not been Japanese (which she had some knowledge of after her summer self-study efforts), she said that French was easier because of its connection with English:

> 'for French you have some knowledge in English so it is quite… it is easier to pick up. So for example television is more or less the same but just the pronunciation is different'

IC spoke of French in a way which suggested that she considered it an extension of the English language. In other words, knowing French would mean knowing English better:

> 'I studied English and we studied about the cognates between different European language, and French and English share the same cognates so French would be beneficial for my study so that's why I took French'

When I asked her what knowing French (as opposed to knowing Japanese) in Hong Kong would represent, IC started by saying: 'I won't say French makes me more… superior than the others'. She then explained that adding some French made communication first of all more 'fun'. Then she explained that adding French would be a sign that the person had a wider vocabulary in the English language, which I interpreted as meaning more flexible or varied:

> 'I won't say French make me more… superior than the others…but… the more… how to say… I think using English and French… I think French can use along with English… for example…in the current company I'm working with sometimes we'll speak French *"Au revoir" "Bonjour" "How does it feel?… Comme ci-comme ça"* yeah, they know each other but it makes your language into more fun, it puts more elements into it and makes it more… diverse…'

In the third interview, she also underlined the usefulness of French in that she thought it would help her to read menus in any European country ['French will be easier for you to understand some menus or stuff because English and French are quite interrelated… so I think it would be good as a tourist to go to any European country'].

Commented [Ld6]: From a linguistic point of view-> **French as a 'supplementary tool'**

Commented [Ld7]: IC added: 'Also from the historical connections between the two countries'. IC said that using cognates between English and French is not a sign of lack of proficiency in the same way as using cognates between Cantonese and English which would show lack of proficiency on the part of the user (section 26') i.e. **by using French to replace English, one shows one's learned/elevated quality or sophistication.** (-> refer back to the interview where IC suggests the use of Cantonese by HK people to replace English words they don't know)

Commented [Ld8]: French useful across Europe -> e.g. 'cappucino'; mentioned use of French in Japan e.g. 'pain' 'café au lait' -> She asked: why do they use French because they're quite pro-American? (29') => i.e. IC questioning language practices => links with translanguaging (there's a lot of French in Japan; see Blommaert)

When I asked IC to explain why she had used the word 'superior' in connection with French (previous quote), she explained by drawing a parallel with Cantonese mixed with English, which is part of Hong Kong people's every day way of expression, and which she seemed to say reinforced Hong Kong's local identity ['maybe more localized']:

> 'It may not be better but maybe more localized… so… if it is the way that they speak … then it is and if you know how to speak like this then you just practice and… if they understand that then it means that yeah this is the way they speak… like this… yeah….just like code mix between English and …Cantonese in HK …so for local…for local HK people, we may experience some sort of code mix but for example like Mainland immigrant they… they won't so… so you can differentiate between how localized you are'

In this explanation, the fact that she mentioned mainland Chinese (who are not perceived to engage in code-mixing practices) seemed to suggest that mainland Chinese could not easily reach Hong Kong's 'localized' authenticity. It also seemed to mean that mixing French with English and Cantonese was a way for Hong Kong people to differentiate themselves from mainland Chinese.

Commented [Ld9]: IC: 'I have a different opinion right now'
IC: 'mainland Chinese may code-mix but their way of code-mixing is different to what we do in HK'; **it is more to 'showcase' their ability as a way to show their 'integration'. =>** IC suggests that Mainland Chinese wish to be part of HK i.e. she changes the dynamic of the problem i.e. other Chinese would like to be integrated in HK which gives some value and attractivity to HK => interesting agentic perspective

She said that there were two different groups of mainland Chinese: rich tourists who code-mix in English and mainland Chinese who are married to HK men but who don't speak English.

+ it's 'a sign you adapt' -> showing that you can adapt to British people. (53') 'That's why HK people are so resistant to speaking Mandarin' = because it's imposed => doesn't show respect of other people. Gave example of a French person giving her directions in French only in response to a question she asked in English -> she said it was a sign he understood English but wanted her to respect his language… i.e. a form of resistance

In the third interview, I probed into this topic further and asked IC how she thought mainlanders who could speak Cantonese or English were perceived in Hong Kong. She answered by highlighting the difference which in her opinion existed between local Hong Kong people and mainland Chinese who would mix English and Cantonese:

> 'my opinion is the local people who code-mix English and Cantonese is a reflection of incapability of two languages because we are lacking something in Chinese Vocabulary and English Vocabulary that's why we code-mix, however I don't know… [if] people who code-mix Mandarin and English is a reflection of showing their sophisticated side… you are showing that you are educated'

To me it seemed that IC meant that she thought mainlanders were showing off when they used English in their conversations ['if they code-mix Mandarin and English somehow I would feel that you are show showcase you are showing something'] whilst when Hong Kong people used English, they were doing so as a matter of necessity.

By saying this, I had the impression that IC was reinforcing the legitimacy and naturalness of English use in Hong Kong society, which at the same time reinforced Hong Kong difference and identity.

There were other reasons, which IC mentioned related to learning French.

9. French: 'it's like a code'

Another reason IC gave for learning French was connected to online use and social media use although she said she rarely used French online ['maybe one or two words in French only to supplement'… *'Merci', 'C'est bon', 'Bravo'*].

In her LLH, IC wrote that by using French [a 'less widely accessed language'], she could 'express [her] inner feeling online'. When I asked her about this in the first interview, she said that this was because not many people could easily understand that language:

> 'I want to speak something for myself, as an inner feeling, and I don't want others to understand it straightly from the post that I have in Facebook'

She added that although people could translate, there were not many people who would go to that extent unless they really wanted to understand her:

> 'for those people…who really want to understand me, then they will do the translation then they will try to understand it'

After thinking about what IC meant by 'inner feeling' and deciding that I was not clear about what she had meant, I asked IC again about this in the third interview. She started by saying:

> 'so you want to express it online but you don't want to make it too explicit so you will think of some… tactics or techniques'

Commented [Ld10]: IC added: used to show 'emotions about personal life' (e.g. not very happy with my family… about my work… about political') (section 1 40') -> i.e. French as a tool to vent emotions

She went on explaining that using French was a way of screening people:

> 'So if you use Chinese English everyone can see it ok? But if you use…some other languages …people are interested to know what exactly it is… they do translation… people who are very special that they understand French because I know not many people or not many friends of mine know French they may understand it and if those people who are not interested to bother what it is then they will just ignore it… so it will be good for people who really want to know me or know what exactly is happening'

Commented [Ld11]: 'I can see some of my friends are doing the same on Facebook' e.g. Italian -> But now the 'see translation button' is changing this! Not such a good technique anymore! => that means IC is using French less now but she also mentioned that this was because her 'maturity' had evolved -> IC: 'I tend to post less' => she said that now FB had 'become a tool to advocate something' e.g. posting news to 'influence your peers' or you're trying to promote things that you like (e.g. her favorite tennis players') -> it has become a 'strategy' => i.e. posting in Facebook is more a militant act now

IC added that using French (or other ''less widely accessed language') was her way to 'differentiate' between a 'minority' of people 'who want to understand you' from a 'majority of people who are not interested to bother', and she concluded:

> 'I use the language as a way…it's like a code'

When I asked her how many Facebook friends she had and how many of those could understand French, she answered that she had approximately 300 friends and that among those she knew those who could understand French ['I generally know who understand French']. She added that she was directing her French posts to those special friends:

> 'if they know it [French] that's ok that's good for me because I would consider they are part of the friends that I think they deserve to know my inner feelings'

10. What learning French means for IC: other reasons

IC also said that learning French was a way to know more about French culture and in particular French cinema, in connection with a course in cinema studies which she was also taking at university. She said:

> ‘at that time I studied French and I feel very interesting and I studied cinema studies and I knew François Truffaut and he would become one of my favorite directors…yeah it’s…it’s interrelated somehow which made me to go to France [to study on an intensive summer course]’

In the first interview IC recalled a class assignment at university where she had prepared an oral presentation in English about one aspect of French culture which interested her and for which she chose to present François Truffaut and his iconic movie, *Les 400 coups* (‘400 Blows’), which she had really enjoyed. She said that through this exercise, she had realized that learning a language involved a lot more than just language:

> ‘if this is not the presentation I’d never know why it’s called… the name of that movie… actually there’s some meaning behind French so at that time I start realizing that actually learning a language is totally different from what I learned in language’

In particular, she added that through this exercise she understood that language was also a way to access a culture:

> ‘actually learning a language is not something only about a technical thing, it’s not something about remembering about masculine or feminine form, it’s something about the culture itself’

And IC said that learning the culture would ensure she would survive in any situation in France, even with limited French:

> ‘I imagine one day if I’m left in Paris with… with nothing, with no passport, with nothing else that I’ve to force myself to stay in Paris for some time later even though I didn’t attend any class I can still speak French… because of the cultural, because of the things surrounding by itself’

I took this to mean that through learning French IC was learning another way to survive in the world through cultural knowledge, and with this knowledge she was gaining self-confidence.

11. Views of French language and culture

In the second interview, when I asked IC to describe the French language with adjectives, she said ‘very sexy’ which she said was linked to ‘the linking sound’:

> ‘the tone and the linking words make the language or make the speaking very vibrant, so very jumpy, so that's why I find it very attractive and romantic’

When I probed about her choice of the adjective ‘romantic’, she said that it was what she perceived ‘from advertisement’ and ‘in videos’. She said:

> ‘usually they speak about love, they speak about...the moments of life, how they treasure or how they enjoy their life, so it seems like they are very passionate about...their life and their people’

Commented [Ld12]: ‘yes because you’re building a connection to that area’ => building confidence.

Commented [Ld13]: 48’: ‘And I think it’s very generic’ because it’s only based on cinema, etc… **‘it’s just a creation… a perception’ and that creation may not be the same for French people as well… e.g. Agnes b. : ‘sometimes I wonder is that very French’**

=> what is ‘authentic’ French culture?

IC also added that she chose the term 'very European' to describe French because she 'confused' it with other European languages such as Romanian, Spanish and Italian. She said it was because European languages shared 'roots' and had 'similarities of structures'.

When I asked her what impression speaking French would create for Hong Kong people, she said:

> 'They will be impressed that you can speak a third language…they… will keep giving you some French… to ask you to translate it… they may ask you is *Agnes b.* pronounced as *Agnes b*…'

IC's main images of French culture seem to mainly come from the cinema and also from music. In the first interview, she mentioned François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard and the French band, *La Nouvelle Vague.*

In the first interview, she said that she could instantly recognize that a film was French from the impression it created:

> 'sometimes it's quite… artistic that makes me fall asleep yeah but… but it's really quite fun especially from movies, you can see how different French movie is different from other English, American, different types of movies and… even though if you don't see the subtitles, even you don't listen you just see from the screen what it is you will know it is French'

When I asked her to be more specific, she went on describing a scene between father and son in detail saying that the whole impression was uniquely French ['It's slower… the pace is much slower… the angle is more first person… yeah?... […] it's some technique that I couldn't see from other types of movies… and it is quite slow, it's quite casual']. Although she added that she 'sometimes' felt ' a little bit bored' ['you yawned'], she said that was interesting because:

> 'from the movie you can know how French people interact because it feels so real that you'll think that it is the real French parents talking to their son or daughter'

She went on describing how from a scene of children playing in a forest she had a perception of French culture and by contrast, a perception of her own Hong Kong culture:

> 'the second scene after that I experienced is the children, they play in the forest which is total… which will never happen for Chinese children like us, we play into a playground in the city centre […] there's a forest like with a lot of trees, no buildings and yeah… it's a big playground and they just run and… with a lot of greenery and…yeah it is what I perceived about "Oh how great French children can play in a big greenery forest… but we can't!" yeah! … that's what I perceive about French culture somehow'

To describe French culture in the first interview, IC first used the adjective 'open-minded'. In the second interview, IC also said that she perceived French people as being 'proud of their culture' and that this would be a reason for her to decide to apply for a working holiday in France:

Commented [Ld14]: 51' **I asked her if this perception was important for her: 'Yes and I want to have this in my own culture too' -> it takes time… it's about 'a collective' effort over time => it's about 'preserving' our own culture.**

> ‘my perception is, French people they are proud of… they’re proud of their culture, they’re proud of their language…wherever you are in France, when you ask for directions in English even though they understand in English they can speak in English they will still speak in French…’

12. A sense of self

IC’s sense of who she was seemed to me quite clear during our first interview. She gave me an impression of someone confident and at peace with herself. IC also did not seem overly concerned about what other people thought of her. Rather, she took on board others’ comments and advice with interest and used them to effect some changes if she thought they were useful.

In this interview, IC had told me that one of her secondary school friends had described her as ‘cool’ (meaning, cold), but after knowing her better, this friend had changed her mind and thought IC was ‘cheerful, crazy, active, blablabla’. IC commented that this was how she was also perceived at work when she started:

> ‘I know that when people didn’t come close to me they will think I am cool, distant… not very friendly somehow so I’m trying to adjust myself little bit so… keep smiling, say hi!’

IC’s coolness may have also come from a form of difficulty in engaging with people. She said of herself:

> ‘I’m not a good person who can start a conversation that naturally and can talk to each other’

When I asked why she thought it was important to be friendly, she said that it was ‘part of relationship building’ and ‘very important' in human lives’, and that it could ‘facilitate your work’ and help you ‘to know more about each other’. She also added that some people experiences were ‘very interesting so the more you know the fuller… your life is’ and illustrated this by telling me about how much she was learning from the Nepali staff she worked with in Hong Kong:

> ‘when I’m working here I know many Nepalese which I’ve never met any before so by listening their experience which they’re willing to share with me I know ‘Ah! I know what Nepal is! I know what their life is or it makes me more…it’s more enriching to your life…’

As I was listening to her, I thought that her current efforts at self-improvement closely resembled the picture of IC-the-self-learner that appeared to me during that first interview. Her quest this time was to know more about other people. Although the reason why she was learning to be more friendly was initially related to work, I also thought it was characteristic of IC to find something in it for her own benefit. She said in the first interview:

> ‘I was a trainer here so having a relationship with the delegates or the staff is very important but my first step of having a good relationship is letting them to trust me at first, by just talking carefully is my first step to having a good

> relationship to them yeah so I think this is my strategy somehow but of course it's my interest as well'

Thus through this first conversation, I could believe the picture of this 'brave' person who was not afraid to 'challenge people' and who would 'speak out' if she thought she was right. She appeared confident and actually said that those qualities had landed her the work she had ['this is the thing that…I'm good at']. At the same time, she also acknowledged that over-confidence and out-spokenness could be seen as 'offensive to some people' and she was trying to be more careful than before in the way she behaved around people since she started work.

Commented [Ld15]: Her last trip to England at a conference. IC received a letter by her line manager (56') criticizing the way she spoke about the challenges in the HK market=> being seen as criticizing but not finding solutions to the problem => suggests that she should find a better way to explain disagreeable truths => makes her reflect about the 'power of influencing' and the role of language training -> 'we didn't learn anything [about this] in school or university' -> 'it seems I didn't get any skills to do this'

=> might be related to her decision to change job. Because her current job being in a local company, there might not 'be the language barrier' -> is asking herself a lot of questions about her motives.

13. Gaining new perspectives through international exposure

As we spoke, I thought that IC's confident sense of self was partly linked to her increasing international exposure. Through our conversations, she referred again and again at what she had learned or seen from working for an international company and from her travels, including exchange programmes abroad in France and England.

In the first interview, she reflected on how far she had gone since her study-abroad experience in York during her second year at university, where she had experienced some adaptation difficulties whilst staying with a British family:

> 'sometimes I'm just wondering…if I go there again at this age what would I be? Would it be better or would I be more considering … or is it because of what I [was] exposed [to was] not as much as what I'm now so I can't understand others' living'

IC's description of one of her Spanish colleagues' career progression in the second interview seemed to tell her own story and highlight the way she projected herself in the world:

Commented [Ld16]: IC added that this person left XXX 2 months ago telling the company that he was going back to Spain; IC: 'But in fact he's working for Amazon UK and 'I'm quite surprise because westerners are more open about changing jobs' => 'I'm quite surprised we share similar practice when we talk about career change' => thought western culture was 'more open-minded' (1hr 05)

> '[IC's company's name] allows him to work with different people…people from different culture and nationalities and then he becomes more confident […] when he arrived London, and he said the second day in London he was crying and wants to go back to Spain but right now he can speak very fluent English, and there's no Spanish accent which I'm very impressed, and he just spent four years in London'

Apart from being impressed by the possibilities offered to her colleague and by extension to her, IC also seemed to relish what she was learning from working in an international environment. She said that she had learned that people are much the same across national barriers:

> 'I met people from Spain, from Italian from British, Scotland…Mexico, a lot of different people but I think they're more or less the same they are all friendly, …they are all nice and, whenever you are true to them they must be in return true to you so I think, the formula is the same so…there is no such there is no such thing about different nationality will have different reactions or…comments'

IC's international exposure sets her apart from the other members of her family, to some extent. When IC described her mum in the first interview as 'a very Chinese

traditional lady' (although she said she also liked 'trying things'), she said that she was herself not like that:

> 'I'm not a Chinese traditional person yeah… …I'm quite o-p-e-n (said slowly) in terms of thoughts yeah… positively I'm opened to change'

About her sister, IC described her sister as having a mostly Hong Kong outlook compared to her having a more varied outlook:

> 'Compared with me she has a relatively… not limited but her social life is… more localized because … I [am] used [to] hang out with different people, my friends, my boss is Chinglish and my colleagues are from somewhere else but where she works is a… it's an international company but the colleagues are local people so… perhaps her personality or… her cultural diversity or… oh her exposure is relatively more limited.'

When her sister joined her in London, IC noticed the effects the lack of 'international exposure' had on her sister; she mentioned her sister's inability to grasp the humor in a situation and her stress when, for example, English 'cashiers' bantered with her as she did not know how to respond or simply did not understand the situation:

> 'she's not interested in it, she's not…it's not her cup of tea so I… yeah…yeah.. I think… yeah… I can see a big variance, diversity between local Chinese and Western style'

Yet IC also pointed out that throughout her stay, her sister was gradually growing in confidence and changing her perceptions of westerners which was beneficial to her ['so I think this kind of exposure makes her to clear some misunderstanding or some misconceptions about Western people as well'].

14. Work: a further revelator of self

Some stories that IC shared with me in subsequent interviews served to refine a little bit my initial image of IC as a person with a clear sense of self. These stories were mainly related to work.

When we spoke about her international experience at work, IC shared how enthusiastic and happy she was to have such an opportunity. She pointed out first of all that her company was multi-cultural: 'but we do have British managers we do have Nepalese managers… we used Italian managers… Columbians'.

In the first interview, she said that she enjoyed most working with 'expat managers' and especially working with British managers because they 'will talk something else apart from jobs' meaning that they engaged in small talk such as talking about weekend activities. Although she did not say so explicitly, I thought at first that IC might be suggesting that the British way of doing things was somewhat better than Chinese ways because it was more relaxed.

Commented [Ld17]: 1hr 13': Now she's got the reverse experience in her new local company' in Chinese culture, 'if you talk about your personal life it may become gossip… you might be attacked '

In the third interview, she explained that Hong Kong managers would make a clear difference between work and social times and that at work they only expected work talk ['they don't feel we have time to talk about non-work stuff because it's busy it's

working time'], but through working with a British manager she discovered another way of behaving:

> 'but for non-Hong Kongese it's just normal and it's good to start with something non-work because they will feel … more relaxed to talk about work later on they will [be] less oppose to the things you are trying to bring them'

When I asked her if she sometimes felt culturally out of place, she said that she would take a positive stance on any incident with foreigners because she was primarily interested in understanding people's lives and cultures ['I'm trying to understand their cultures by understanding their life more']. For example, she said she was interested to hear her British boss' wedding anniversary plans even though he interrupted her work ['during 15 minutes']. She said that instead of judging people ['instead of feeling they are arrogant about their lives'], this example helped her reflect on different cultural notions of 'happiness':

> 'for example…perhaps people like the shop manager will be happy to talk about [how] he can manage to get a very quiet seat in Sheraton hotel […] but for us maybe happiness is winning Mark Six or… get a seat to fly to Japan or…it's not really that tiny little stuff they're having in their lives'

When I asked her if she was sometimes offended by talkative foreigners, she said that she was 'not offended' if it made them happy ['it seems to make them happy']. Yet, she added that happiness was something else entirely for Hong Kong people and that Chinese people would never talk about such things at work ['for Chinese it's quite 鬼佬 (foreigner)'].

Throughout our conversations, I wondered if I was catching a glimpse of change in IC's perception of herself in relation to her international exposure. Although in the first interview she had described herself as direct, a little impatient and not really bothered about coming across as a friendly person, in the second interview it seemed that IC was growing less certain of herself when talking about culturally-diverse situations, especially in social settings when she was in the presence of different nationalities. She said:

> 'I'm just thinking if my personality is still really outgoing enough to…be working in a very diversified culture, I'm quite not sure because every people looks like very outgoing sociable you know drinking and…can communicate quite confidently but I'm yeah I'm still hesit[ant] whether I can be really that…kind of person when I really work overseas'

In the third interview, I perceived IC's self-doubt a little more when she told me about situations with her foreign colleagues when she was trying to join in their out-of-work conversations around a drink. She explained first of all that foreigners seemed to have a lot to say about their personal lives ['European[s] are very keen talking and they are very keen sharing their life experience']. Although she said she enjoyed listening to them because she did not have that many chances of socializing with expats in Hong Kong and she could learn a lot from that ['it's the chance to understand more about the European life'], she said that she herself was:

> 'not confident to talk about something very personal that make people interested to listen to me further'

She said that listening to foreigners make them appear to have a 'rich personal life'. Somehow, I felt some regret in this comment; regret at not quite meeting the social expectations of the group she was with. These expectations seemed to be that she needed to join in the discussion by providing ample and entertaining details about her life, in order to be accepted by the group. And IC felt that she was failing to reach the expected standard:

> 'I sometimes may not be able to join the conversation or I may not be able to describe that into very entertaining way'

And she added that in these situations, she mostly sat quietly and observed:

> 'I can still see myself not as talkative as the other European[s] […] we start drinking and… I don't know it's just they are just naturally talking to each other quite easily and I am observing this'

When I heard IC speak about Hong Kong culture in the third interview, I wondered if her self-doubt in social situations was perhaps related to her perception that westerners could not easily understand Asian culture. IC told me that she thought that outsiders could only have a superficial understanding of Hong Kong culture ['I think the outsider is able to appreciate the surface of Hong Kong culture'] and that therefore:

> 'it may be a little bit…hard for them to imagine what exactly I am talking about'

Her experience of trying to explain her culture to westerners (for example, 'giving tips') made her think that there was 'a barrier between western and Asian people', which could not easily be removed:

> 'the westerner regard Chinese culture in a very surface way …not superficial but in the surface they just think of Bruce Lee they just think of tea they just think of something very superficial'

All these remarks made me think that IC was perhaps at the cusp of two worlds: one foot out of her Hong Kong Chinese world where she was not seen as fully 'localized' anymore and another inside a world which she still did not understand fully and in which she was still trying to fit. In parallel to this, IC repeated in all three interviews that she was more and more attached to Hong Kong, and I wondered in what ways these two aspects were related.

15. IC's attachment to Hong Kong

IC started her LLH with these words:

> 'I was born in an ex-British colony so not surprisingly English is my perceived second language in my surroundings, including signage in the park, textbooks used in schools, names of my stuffed toys etc. I have no idea on how and when I had my first exposure in English (probably in kindergarten as my parents know little of it), but I can surely tell my English is not just learnt from

Commented [Ld18]: IC talked about her last trip to London. During a socializing event, IC was observing without talking and somebody challenged why she was quiet.
IC: 'I didn't realize that if I did not talk this might be interpreted that I didn't agree with them' -> IC said that she learned something new on that day (1hr 10'). 'I FELT A LITTLE ODD' but when I suggested that she perhaps felt this person was being aggressive, she said that she thought his intention was to try to involve her in the conversation more.

Commented [Ld19]: Beginning of Section 2, IC explains this point more with drawing (around 2/3'): 'when you step up outside you can see the reality differently' => but she also suggested that there was a conflict: 'you want to be in the outside world…but you may feel that may not be able to adapt to the outside world or the outside world may not accept you because of the confusion (?) to us Chinese'. She said that this made her feel like 'a naughty girl' who went out of HK but would like to go back home 'because home is your final destination or is your safe place'. She said because of 'some dark sides to the world', someone might take a 'more protective approach'. She said that perhaps this explained why she might want to go back to HK -> 'because it is my hometown'. She also suggested that she started seeing that the outside world had the same situation as HK (she said 'the outside world might also have some dark sides like news or political stability so it does not seem that the outside world is better than your hometown')

> schools, but the TV show Sesame Street and my conversation with my elder sister at home.'

These first words rung again and again in my head throughout our conversations. Coming from an 'ex-British colony' and being surrounded by English daily in the course of her every day life seemed a very big deal to IC. To me, there was clearly a kind of attachment to the prestigious colonial past of Hong Kong. IC chose the word 'royal' to describe English and also was keen for me to understand that she held a British BNO passport, which made her a 'real Hong Kongese':

Commented [Ld20]: (section 1 4')IC: 'One of my trip in the UK, an immigation officer said: 'Oh! HK passport!' = IC said: 'it's a sign of identity', that people outside of HK have the same feeling as her i.e. they recognize the HK passport as being different to a Chinese passport. She said: 'This quite amazed me (laugh)'

> 'So I for example I get a BNO passport that means I'm born in Hong Kong before 1997, which is still under the colony of Britain. And…those local people like me will regard having a BNO passport is a real Hong Kongese more than getting a Hong Kong passport...'

When IC spoke about Hong Kong culture in the second interview, she used the terms 'useful', 'true to our neighbourhoods', 'flexible' ['flexible with ideas'] and 'multicultural'. When I asked her about this term, she said:

> 'we welcome different cultures...to be in our society, we love to embrace...good culture positive culture from...other areas so you can see we have a lot cuisine from different cultures in Hong Kong and we love to try them we love to understand more about those cultural things, that's why we have French May every year, that's why we have some food festival, food fair [for] which suppliers from all over the world…come to us'

As we spoke throughout the three interviews, I thought that IC wanted me to understand her strong attachment to Hong Kong. For example, she told me that she did not have any intention of leaving Hong Kong. Even though she had gained a wider exposure to the world and now benefited from a better understanding of other cultures, she said she preferred being based in Hong Kong. She said that though she had considered working abroad (especially in the U.S.) 'a bit' at some stage, she realized that she had missed home too much after staying in England for a few weeks:

> 'I miss home and I miss some local food and sometimes I feel that… and there are… recent news or some pieces of news talking about discrimination. So I start feeling HK is very convenient and… I'm getting old and… I start realizing that I'm really… capable to cope with the cultural diversity or the cultural difference between Chinese and Western style'

In the second interview, she also talked about getting old and how 'comfy' she felt it was to live in the place where you were born, and she also mentioned the hard work it would represent to adjust to a new culture suggesting she really did not fancy such a change:

> 'you have to adapt to other culture you have to meet new friends you have to build your social network, you need to gain support from others sometimes you need to ask for support so…there are a number of challenges'

However, she was interested to know about my own experience of leaving home to live in England. She asked me if I had been on my own and when I said that I had and that it had been a challenge at first to live in a different culture, she responded:

> ‘yeah because…UK or London…is a society with diverse culture, that sometimes…it’s the its diverse culture makes you feel a little bit lost sometimes’

When I revisited her motivation about living abroad in the third interview, IC suggested that competition was another reason why she did not want to work or live abroad:

> ‘[I] don’t think overseas is as good as you expect because they’re still competition and the competitions are more furious because you are not competing with Chinese mainland locals but you’re competing any people from European countries or rest of the world...

She also added that she would not ‘move out’ of Hong Kong because of the situation in Hong Kong:

> ‘I don’t want to say I’ll move out because …I know Hong Kong is getting worse so I’ll move out no’

Commented [Ld21]: IC repeated: ‘No!’

When I asked her what this was linked to, she repeated that it was about ‘the uncertainty of the Hong Kong’s future’.

These reflections suggested to me that IC’s interests in different cultures and their people were not necessarily connected to dreams of moving abroad, but also had other dimensions.

16. IC’s concern about Hong Kong’s future

Commented [Ld22]: ‘I think it’s a dilemna’ -(section 2 6’) ‘It’s a dilemma because why ME moving out because of other people ruling my country or my place’ versus ‘I can’t see myself a chance of moving out… an opportunity of moving out … the financial stability of able to move out… the adaptability when you move out to another country’ => describes pbs linked to moving out of HK.

IC said that quite a lot of HK people were the same i.e. ‘wanted to move out’. She added that from what she could see on FB or her feelings were that people wanted to move out as ‘a way to escape’ but also as a way to show that they had ‘better living than you’ because they had ‘the money to move out… education… the understanding of moving out’).

She said that on the one hand she felt angry that other people (i.e. China) were pushing her out of her home but on the other hand she ‘can’t do anything about that’ and this made her feel quite ‘hopeless’: ‘You want to change the current situation but you can’t stop the government doing pro-Chinese activities, you can’t stop mainland Chinese move to your place every day’ and you ‘can’t stop yourself doing business with the Chinese people’.

A sense of uneasiness began to come across as I heard IC speak. This picture was created by several descriptions IC made of Hong Kong during our conversations, and also about what she said about Mainland China and Mainland Chinese. I will first talk about IC’s uneasiness about Hong Kong.

In the second interview, IC’s uneasiness about HK surfaced when I asked her to share with me a picture or a posting from her Facebook page which would best describe who she was. She chose her written reaction in Chinese on Facebook about a random talk with one of her line managers who had asked her the question “Where do you see yourself in 10 years?” and had suggested that she might want to move to London.

IC shared with me her complex reaction when she heard this suggestion which shook her so much that she had posted on Facebook about it [‘I have another posting about...my conversation between my boss and me, on the 22nd of Jan. And....I'm quite...surprised or I'm quite impress[ed] my first reaction in replying my boss actually at that time so that's why I record it down’].

What shook her was not what was asked, but I think it was the intention she thought she perceived behind the question which bothered her, and this seemed to be because of the heavily charged political context in Hong Kong. She said:

> ‘first I didn't really decide myself has to move out, but if there's a chance yes I'll try but I didn't decide to move out because...of the uncertainties here

> because it is my hometown I don't see why I have to go because of threat but...but a lot of people are thinking to...moving out or to emigrate to other countries, which is...a smart move if they want a better life, but if you don't have a chance then it's not bad to stay here still, because this is your hometown'

As there was an exchange in Chinese under her post, I asked her to tell me about it. IC said that a friend had reacted to her post with the following words:

> 'It's cool! But I'm already doing the moving out'.

IC explained that this friend was about to be married to his Singaporean girlfriend, and she continued translating their exchange as follows:

> IC: "so this means escaping… Are you escaping? You are Hong Kong person why do you need to escape?"
> Her friend: "I want to know why too"

When I asked her if her answer signified that she was sad, she answered that she was.

Thus, I decided to ask IC again about her reaction to the question 'What will you do in 10 years time'. First of all, after the second interview, I felt that perhaps IC would have liked to have my view about this question so I sent IC a message through Messenger to tell her how I interpreted this question from a westerner's point of view. IC answered:

> 'Yes, you are right perhaps she wanted to see if I will be long term staying in the company however I took it quite personal. This is such a hard question!

In the third interview, when I broached the subject again, IC said that she had reacted quite strongly because this question was asking 'something' about her 'inner thinking' ['it's like jumping into the very inner wall of yourself']. She suggested that although her manager seemed to think that moving abroad was no big deal (she herself was planning to retire in Spain), for IC it was a big deal. She explained:

> 'I just simply don't want to have her have that feeling about the [HK] people of this generation have this similar feeling of moving out somewhere you don't like…there are quite a lot of people who tried to use different ways to move out. Buying a house, getting a job…[…] They move to UK quite a lot, to study and then get a job and then live permanently. […] so… I don't want to say I'll move out because yeah I know the… I know Hong Kong is getting worse so I'll move out no'

In other words, she seemed to be saying that she felt a responsibility towards Hong Kong as expressed in the next comment:

> 'it is about what I am…behaving to contribute or what I am taking actions to contribute to this society […] I don't know maybe just move out or something else, it is not the right way to contribute to the society you are…being raised by'

I wondered what IC meant by 'contribute' and if she considered that it might be achieved by remaining in Hong Kong rather than going abroad like her friend did, for example. Also perhaps, sharing details about the political situation in Hong Kong with me (without it ever being explicit) was another way to 'contribute'. IC said in the second interview that she had recently decided to post in English on Facebook because she wanted other people to know what was happening:

> 'I want those non-Hong Kongese people to understand so for example I have friends from France, Taiwan, Britain, somewhere else, I want them to know what exactly is happening in Hong Kong'

To me this explanation meant that leaving Hong Kong would be abandoning Hong Kong to its fate. It suggested uneasiness and concern regarding both IC's future in Hong Kong and Hong Kong's future. The question of course was: who would IC abandon Hong Kong to and why? At the end of the third interview when I asked her how she imagined herself in the future, IC suggested she was in a conundrum. She said:

> 'I really don't know I will I want to stay in Hong Kong, but on the other hand I can't see Hong Kong is a better place to stay, or for my retirement.'

17. Mainland China in IC's stories

Mainland China came up frequently in IC's conversations and not only because I was sometimes directly asking her to compare Hong Kong with other cultures. As we spoke, I began to think that referring to mainland China and mainland Chinese was IC's way to further explain to me who she was by highlighting who she was not.

In the third interview, when I asked her about the differences between training Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese staff, IC said that the Shanghainese team behaved very differently although she thought she trained Hong Kong and Shanghai in the same way about company requirements since they were 'in the same company'. She explained that although she teaches Shanghai staff 'ABC', the result was often 'ABEF'. This required constant checking, patience and insistence ('you have to patient and you have to be very insistent to say that no it's not the right thing'). She mentioned some reasons for these differences. She said,

> 'the Shanghainese team has a lot of reason that they have to do their own way and secondly they interpret something in very differently maybe it's part of language barrier because my native or my first language is not Mandarin'

As I probed her answer, IC more strongly emphasized that there was no reason (even the 'equipment' was the same) to explain why differences remained since they were all Chinese ('I'm still a Chinese somehow so it's more or less the same'). For her, it seemed obvious that everybody should all be on the same line after training. When I asked her if she thought the difference was cultural, she said she wasn't sure:

> 'I am not sure because it is the cultural difference or because the company is a British company and the culture shock… or the culture difference that make the way of working different'

Commented [Ld23]: **'It's not about doing something great… it's about conserving the language or conserving the culture same thing…. So imagine if no one is using the language so Cantonese will be replaced or if we all move out so no one will understand the root of the Cantonese culture for example and it will be replaced or… be mistaken somehow' (section 2 9') 'so [contribute] is not about your work or is not about how beneficial HK will be financial wise or in any other aspects… but it's just about how to conserve our identity'**

Commented [Ld24]: IC commented: "Yes'

Commented [Ld25]: **IC commented that the 'dark side of the story' was that it seemed to be a 'strategy' from 'the Chinese govt?… I don't know!' is their way to 'wash away the colonial culture in HK so one the one hand they are trying to manipulate the media, they're trying to manipulate the general opinion of the public and it feels like it's threatening your life […] and it makes Chinese immigrants come to HK to rebutt the culture of HK… and it's not something I would like to see' (12')**

She then described Shanghai managers' culture as very strong-minded ['they have to have their very strong mind is part of the reason'] and said that the problem was also linked to them not being able to judge the situation for themselves and make the necessary adjustments by contrast to Hong Kong managers:

> 'I am… not trying to be discriminative but they [Hong Kong managers] are more smart in knowing how to achieve the target with their own way ok?'

In the third interview when I asked her to give me some news about her Shanghai team and we discussed her Mandarin proficiency again, she suggested that perhaps it was part of the problem:

> 'you have to make a lot of time in making sure everybody is on the same page… because of the accent they may not 100% understand what you are saying'.

This made me wonder if IC had experienced more stress related to her Mandarin proficiency than she let on.

In comparison, her work with her Hong Kong teams in English and Cantonese seemed a lot easier. She said of Hong Kong managers that they were 'more flexible':

> 'if I tell my [Hong Kong] shop managers "ok! We want to achieve A ok? And … I don't bother about the process" then they will be very flexible in doing the process to achieve target A'

I thought back at what IC had said about both cultures. In the third interview, for example, IC repeated that Hong Kong people were 'flexible', 'willing to try new things' and 'open-mind[ed]' and said that Hong Kong people didn't mind changing environment ('moving [on]'). To describe Mainland Chinese culture, IC had chosen the adjective 'rude', adding that many Hong Kong people thought so as well. She said:

Commented [Ld26]: CHECK RECORDING Section 2 14' where IC describes HK's flexibility -> 'HK is opened to the world (e.g. October Fest)… Mainland China does not portray foreign cultures as 'international'… they behave in an 'arrogant' manner

> 'I guess… most of us understand it why, because of how they behave in outside China, as tourist… how they speak, how they behave how they react with the conflict, how they think about themselves, that makes...us feel...very rude to it's not rude to us it's rude to our Hong Kong culture actually, it's rude to our area actually. Euh...they're not respecting others' culture'

Yet, IC also said in the second interview that when going to Shanghai, she was treated 'very well' and was regarded 'as a friend'. She said 'the Shanghainese people were not really discriminating Hong Kong people' but added: 'at least in my team'. As we were discussing her Shanghai team again in the third interview, I was interested to hear something new she said about this team:

> 'the Shanghai office the country manager is a British and the rest of them are Shanghainese I am not sure some of them are Shanghainese some of them are coming from other parts of China Mongolian, Xinjiang everywhere of the world everywhere in China so…and… some of them studies overseas before so have some western exposure so…so we are doing quite well [with] each other and I found that the Shanghainese is quite good at treating friends if they treat you if they regards you as friends they will treat you very very well'

Aside from work and related cultural issues, there was another aspect of IC's opinion of China and mainland Chinese, which was clearly linked to political issues and to the political situation in Hong Kong at the time of my research. At the end of the third interview, IC asked me questions about the progress of my thesis. As she was interested and as she had studied an M.A. in Language Studies, I told her a little bit about the theoretical background to my study and mentioned Pierre Bourdieu's views about language as a tool of power. IC responded immediately by saying that this described what was happening in Hong Kong at the moment; she said that Mandarin words were used on Pearl TV or other TV channels when there was 'no need for it'. I took this to mean that she thought that this was a way to make Cantonese disappear.

Commented [Ld27]: IC said it was 'cultural brain-washing'... She gave an example: the sequence of language announcements on the MTR is Cantonese, Mandarin then English when English was before Mandarin ... -> IC sees this as a sign of an attempt to 'brain-wash' the HK people

This seemed to confirm my perception that her decision to stay in Hong Kong was linked to a perceived threat coming from the outside. In the third interview, she said:

> 'And plus…it is my home somehow I'm still insisting that why I have to leave my place to somebody from outside make my home…worse? There's no reason for that, so from this moment I will have the same feeling about last time that I'm…happy to be here and I want this place to be better and better, not by moving out but staying here. Maybe influence in a positive way to the next generation.'

After the third interview was finished, IC continued talking about how sad she was to see that new generations would slowly become unaware that they were manipulated and said that she felt 'threatened in her own home'.

18. Economic and social class issues

As I was listening to IC talk about her views of Mainland China and mainland Chinese people in our interviews, I started to think that her issues with Mainland China were perhaps not only linked to cultural and political issues, but also to economic and social class issues. When IC referred to mainlanders who were also English speakers in the third interview, she remarked upon their privileged financial situation and the increased competition they represented for Hong Kong people. She said:

> 'we do have a branch in Elements [name of a big shopping mall] and we have quite a lot of customers who are mainland Chinese … who are able to speak English a little bit quite well I think they work for some ibank or they are very rich in living upstairs in Elements (apartment blocks above the shopping mall) we… I don't say we but I think that they are…very lucky that their family is rich to send them overseas and…they manage to secure a job in Hong Kong with a very good pay as well so … I'll consider they are getting the job from us…but if they are really capable in that then…that's a competitive market and I can't change anything'

Commented [Ld28]: 'yes because a lot of companies they rely on relationships (guanxi)...' -> CHECK RECORDING section 2 18' => HK locals have become 'less competitive' but 'it's not related to business performance' => according to IC, it's because of unfair competition

At the end of the third interview when we were loosely chatting, IC also told me that she felt it was a lot more difficult for a working class girl to move 'upward' socially and that she particularly liked the phrase 'everyone is equal but some are more equal than others', which I thought was another important aspect of her story.

19. The meaning of Cantonese in IC's life

In the second interview, as I was trying to understand what she meant by 'culture', IC suggested that Hong Kong did not have culture in the form of a 'sophisticated' or high type of culture, as she thought I meant it. She was not sure whether this was her perception or if it was perhaps due to a more general lack of cultural awareness:

> 'we don't have a really Hong Kongese ah we have a Hong Kongese culture in… popular culture. But for other cultures like…music, like writing style, …I mean the very sophisticated aspect of culture… I'm not really exposed to a very Hong Kongese culture… we are not really exposed to art quite a lot we are not exposed to creating music quite a lot, we are just trying to learn from others and trying to adapt and copy from others, so that's why it's hard for us to build…our creativity or creating our own cultures'

The only form of culture Hong Kong had in IC's view was popular culture. When I asked what HK popular culture was, IC said that it was therefore difficult to explain; she also seemed to suggest that it was of little interest to outsiders (which she qualified as 'sophisticated people'):

> 'we are also born in Hong Kong and we understand Hong Kong culture, but when we trying to promote it to other it's always hard. Because first it's a popular culture, it's not highly appreciated by sophisticated people'

In the third interview when I probed into IC's view of Hong Kong culture and asked IC to compare French and Hong Kong cultures, she said: 'French culture is more easy-going… it's more open for ideas'. She mentioned French culture as 'more oriented to arts' and contrasted it with Hong Kong's focus on 'practical benefit', and making money ['if… not able to make money why bother doing it']. Yet this description seemed to be inadequate, and she added:

> 'sometimes I feel struggle because when I think about the thing what I've said it's in terms of Hong Kong culture it's not fair when I think about popular culture in Hong Kong it's also fun is it also very open to ideas it's also …not romantic but sometimes it's touching'

IC added that being practical was an inescapable aspect of Hong Kong culture ['in Hong Kong culture or in terms of parenting structure in Hong Kong, they'll always think that businessman doing office job is the most guarantee']. Yet, when I asked her about Hong Kong culture in comparison to French culture in the second interview, IC thought French and Hong Kong culture shared similarities in the 'popular' aspect of their culture. She said:

> 'they are both...having their own popular culture… same as Hong Kong popular culture they [the French] have their unique way of presenting themselves'

Although IC seemed to be proud of Hong Kong popular culture, she found it hard to describe it. In the second interview, she said that Hong Kong popular cultures were very 'closed' mainly due to the language barrier ['Cantonese is so difficult to understand']. She gave an example:

> 'For popular cultures… some of them are very closed. So for example we have a lot of slangs'

Commented [Ld29]: IC: 'French culture is quite imaginary… you may think about colours… about brands'… 'when I think about HK culture I can think about music'… words so it's more about 'colloquial'. I can't think of a generic object to describe HK culture maybe because we don't promote HK culture as often as French culture or we may not have a definition of HK culture either' -> CHECK RECORDING 24' section 2

So I asked IC if part of what she meant by popular culture was 'language', and she said:

> 'what…popular culture means…language yes…yes how we interact with others yes …our view on something'

As I was trying to further understand what she meant by 'popular culture' as opposed to 'sophisticated' culture, I mentioned the term 'Kongish' to IC and asked her if this was part of Hong Kong popular culture. She said she knew about 'Kongish' and mentioned 'a Facebook page about Kongish'. She described it to me:

> 'It is a funny mixture of Cantonese and English. And…and we are trying to use it more…popularly because…because… I guess or from my feeling, it's to distinguish between local Hong Kongese and immigrants'

She explained that she would use Kongish 'as a way to engage, to make it more close relationship, to make it more funny conversation… just to make the conversation more comfortable and more casual'. I asked IC if Kongish worked similarly to what she had said about French in her technolinguistic report i.e. that French was used 'to express [her] inner feeling'. She said that just as the BNO passport 'is a sign of a really local born… Cantonese Hong Kongish', Kongish could only be understood by local people:

> 'only those local, born and local raised people can understand and use Kongish'

When I confirmed my understanding of Kongish as something uniquely Cantonese, IC said:

> 'yes yes it's something that you can only find in this area'

Thus, my perception was first that IC was very attached to her language, Cantonese which she viewed positively as 'full of variety', with a 'very high degree of adaptability', 'playful' and 'funny', albeit 'difficult'.

Commented [Ld30]: IC said that these characteristics of Cantonese were true to describe HK culture as well: 'It relates to the nature of HK culture as well' (see 26' section 2) -> 'Cantonese culture borrows from a lot of other cultures…'

Secondly, one important value of Cantonese for IC was that it was the emblem of her culture. I thought of what she had told me about her perception of Mandarin in the second interview. She had said:

> 'Mandarin is just an official language it's not really a language associated with a culture so as far as I understand in Chinese history, China is a area with...different races or… different ethnic groups or different...areas of people who speak their own language or dialects… and Mandarin is just a way to unify'

IC seemed to say in this extract that Mandarin was empty of a real cultural meaning whereas Cantonese was the emblem of a living culture, which created barriers to entering Hong Kong culture; and because many language-related phenomena (Kongish; the use of English mixed with Cantonese, sometimes with added French; and the many new words which were created daily), it was difficult to penetrate these

barriers. In other words, from IC's perspective, language was central to the continuation of Hong Kong's existence.

20. IC's view regarding her identity

When at the end of the third interview, I asked her how she would define her identity, she clarified if I meant identity 'in terms of nationality or 'in terms of professionalism'. As I was reluctant to give her any more hints, she replied that she was first of all a 'local' 'Hong Kongese':

> 'identity (pause)…I will use the word local in Hong Kongese… I am born in Hong Kong I am raised in Hong Kong …I was the last batch of the old education system… I study university three years in Hong Kong definitely I am a very local Hong Kongese I used the word local because …because I am local I am exposed to local popular culture I listen to local songs I watch local movies…I am able to speak colloquial Cantonese…I go to those …Cantonese…gossip websites so… I understand what peoples are referring [to] when they talk about some secret codes in Cantonese…so…pure local Hong Kongese I'd say'

This description also resonated with what IC had told me about a conversation with a French waiter in the first interview:

> 'I think it's a French waiter, when we had a… coffee just opposite to the Notre-Dame… yeah? We have a coffee and then they asked "Where are you from?" and "We're from HK" and then "Yeah, it's China… it's part of China!" "No, it's not part of China!" (dramatic voice) blablabla like this… so we have a strong identity… myself yeah'

She said that whenever this mistake occurred, Hong Kong people would take time to correct the perception that Hong Kong was like the rest of China ['I will…we'll have some time to explain the difference between HK and China']. In the second interview, she again explained that explaining Hong Kong's differences was important partly because of negative attitudes towards Chinese in Europe ['what I know is some Western people they don't like to have Chinese people in the neighborhood']. She told me about an incident involving mainland Chinese tourists and herself in a queue in Florence, during which IC perceived that the server showed annoyance at Chinese tourists. She realized during that incident that to a westerner, she was simply another Chinese:

> 'I think it's the trend and I can understand so if I am a Westerner… if I am being disturbed by the Mainland Chinese, so no matter who you are as long as you look like a Chinese I would have some… perceptions … how you are… so… discrimination… perception, bias yeah'

Perhaps because of these kinds of experiences, IC described herself as not only 'local' 'Hong Kongese' in the second interview. She instead described herself as being 'multicultural':

> 'I won't have the definite...nationality of culture here [in Hong Kong] because we are… I'm born in Hong Kong and I'm born to be a multicultural person. So my lifestyle is totally a mixture, but I think mostly I think it's Hong Kongish,

Commented [Ld31]: 29' section 2 -> **'it's quite a trend of what HK people are'** => I asked IC about how she would describe her identity now -> 'we're not taking a resisting side of resisting other cultures' -> by this she meant that HK people were open to the outside as opposed to Mainland Chinese (-> see this in Yasmina too when she describes mainlanders and Mandarin => I think I omitted this aspect in Yasmina's IRT)

because most of my time is in Hong Kong, so my Western culture...euh influence may be from euh...TV programmes, maybe from...schools, people I met from work definitely, and also...from the Western... I don't know… for example like the exhibition […] that we have are trying to touch and trying to [be] expose to it ...and...become more...Western like people. Yes'

NOTES AFTER THE MEETING:

At the end of the meeting, we talked more about the IRT and the possible implications of the study. The following points were made:

- I told IC that I thought one of the implications of my study was that it challenged the view of standards/ language standards and a certain idea about normative education.
- IC answered that it was important not to forget that the main reason for learning languages in HK was to get good scores, pass tests in order to get on in life ; in other words, instrumental motivation was the main reason why people like her took on languages.
- By this she implied that HK people did not mind or worry about the fact that education might only be about reaching fixed standards.
- She also spoke about the social value of English as one of the overarching reasons for taking languages -> she said : 'to be fluent in English is to be a good person' in HK society.
- I said that perhaps she was not aware that she might have other reasons linked to deciding to learn languages. I said that the interviews had revealed some interesting points such as she would use French with English as a way to reaffirm her HK singularity/identity as well as to forge her own individuality, which showed that there might be other meaning behind her deep engagement with languages.
- As I write these notes, it reminds me of the tension between ideologies and practices/agentive actions and about Bourdieu's comments about human beings' unconscious actions although at the same time, the study seems to reveal a far more complex 'game' than the social/symbolic game he describes in his definition of cultural capital -> people's practices are a lot less predictable, stable and a lot more individual.

NEW POINTS THROUGH MY IRT MEETING WITH IC :

- I asked IC about how she would describe her identity now -> she commented on the term 'multicultural' to describe what made HK people so different to mainland Chinese : 'we' [HK people] are not taking a resisting side of resisting other cultures'. Also, she commented : 'HK is opened to the world (e.g. October Fest)… Mainland China does not portray foreign cultures as 'international'… they behave in an 'arrogant' manner => the image of HK has the open, all-embracing, respectful attitude towards cultural differences is a recurring element in IC's story i.e. the good versus the bad? She also seemed to say that being 'multicultural' was a 'trend in HK right now' (this could be linked to HK people looking to leave HK or students going abroad to study, etc.).

- **IC's activism** (goes with the picture I have of her of someone who likes to engage fully into whatever she does) came again strongly in this re-interview. When I questioned her again at what she meant by 'contribute' to HK, she said: **It's not about doing something great… it's about conserving the language or conserving the culture same thing**…. So imagine if no one is using the language so Cantonese will be replaced or if we all move out so no one will understand the root of the Cantonese culture for example and it will be replaced or… be mistaken somehow' (section 2 9') **'so [contribute] is not about your work or is not about how beneficial HK will be financial wise or in any other aspects… but it's just about how to conserve our identity'**

- During our meeting, she both affirmed the reality of HK existence and provided evidence as to Mainland China's threat to HK's existence. E.g. IC said it was 'cultural brain-washing'… She gave examples:

a) the sequence of language announcements on the MTR is Cantonese, Mandarin then English when English was before Mandarin … -> IC sees this as a sign of an attempt to 'brain-wash' the HK people. Her activism was also to reaffirm the 'reality' of a distinct HK identity: IC: 'One of my trip in the UK, an immigration officer said: 'Oh! HK passport!' = IC said: 'it's a sign of identity', that people outside of HK have the same feeling as her i.e. they recognize the HK passport as being different to a Chinese passport;

b) IC talked about the 'dark side of the story' -> a 'strategy' from 'the Chinese govt?… I don't know!' is their way to **'wash away the colonial culture in HK** so one the one hand they are trying to manipulate the media, they're trying to manipulate the general opinion of the public and it feels like it's threatening your life […] and it makes Chinese immigrants come to HK to rebuke (?) the culture of HK… and it's not something I would like to see' (12').

- Difficulty of adapting to other environments outside home -> although IC said that through her multicultural exposure, she was gaining a different picture of reality: (see Beginning of Section 2 recording): 'when you step up outside you can see the reality differently'

=> But she suggested that there was a conflict: 'you want to be in the outside world…but you may feel that may not be able to adapt to the outside world or the outside world may not accept you because of the confusion (?) to us Chinese'.

=> She said that this made her feel like 'a naughty girl' who went out of HK but would like to go back home **'because home is your final destination or is your safe place'. She said because of 'some dark sides to the world', someone might take a 'more protective approach'. She said that perhaps this explained why she might want to go back to HK -> 'because it is my hometown'** (see printscreen IC-IRT-graph 1)**.** She also suggested that she started seeing that the outside world had the same situation as HK (she said 'the outside world might also have some dark sides like news or political stability so it does not

seem that the outside world is better than your hometown'). Perhaps she was thinking of Brexit.

- Choosing to go back home and work for a local company -> **Interestingly since July 2017, IC has moved to a local company** where she has no more contact with the outside because everyone is 'local' around her and she never needs to speak English anymore. She said also : '1hr 13': Now she's got the reverse experience in her new local company' in Chinese culture, 'if you talk about your personal life it may become gossip… you might be attacked'

- ➔ **new form of resistance** ? => seems to be both a way to contribute and the difficulty to fit in different cultural environments + also it seems to be linked to her perception of what class she belongs to in society (=> interesting Bourdieu's field work)
- ➔ **IC explained what dilemna she found herself in** : 'I think it's a dilemna' -(section 2 6') 'It's a dilemma because why ME moving out because of other people ruling my country or my place… versus… I can't see myself a chance of moving out… an opportunity of moving out … the financial stability of able to move out… the adaptability when you move out to another country' => in other words, she feels trapped in more ways than one. For example although quite a lot of HK people wanted the same as her i.e. 'wanted to move out', she added that from what she could see on FB or her feelings were that people wanted to move out as 'a way to escape' but also as a way to show that they had 'better living than you' because they had 'the money to move out… education… the understanding of moving out') => suggests again social inferiority/ feeling of injustice = not everyone is equal in this (yet IC does not seem to realise that she has successfully made a career for herself !? Why ? Reverting back to her own social class limitations ? Lack of confidence ? feeling of intense insecurity ? => She said that she felt angry that other people were pushing her out of her home (i.e. China) but she also knew she 'can't do anything about that' and this made her feel quite 'hopeless': 'You want to change the current situation but you can't stop the government doing pro-Chinese activities, you can't stop mainland Chinese move to your place every day' and you 'can't stop yourself doing business with the Chinese people'.

- **Is critical of the way schools have equipped her to perform in the world; somehow feels she has been let down.**

She talked about her last trip to England at a conference: IC received a letter by her line manager (section 1 56') criticizing the way she spoke about the challenges in the HK market=> being seen as criticizing but not finding solutions to the problem => suggests that she should find a better way to explain disagreeable truths => makes her reflect about the 'power of influencing' and the role of language training -> 'we didn't learn anything [about this] in school or

university' -> 'it seems I didn't get any skills to do this' => seems to have a connection (though perhaps only a portion) to her decision to leave her former company i.e. does hurt leads to retreat or spite?

- ➔ also she remarked how surprised she was to see that her nephew was still being taught in the same way -> learning methods have not change despite the use of technologies and more interactive ideas about learning. IC said that technologies/resources had improved but the fundamentals of learning a language had not changed => in saying this, it seems that IC is aware of how power and control limits her own development although she did not articulate what or why. She ventured an explanation saying that maybe it was because the grammar way of learning is seen as the 'most useful way', 'the most secure way… maybe it's parents' expectations… maybe it's more traditional school ways of learning because I can foresee the way of teaching grammar in international schools should be different' . She compared to the 'adult way of learning' like in her company where e-learning and more interactive ways of learning are introduced) (section 1, 8'17') => ideologies
- ➔ This conflicted with what she said after that she thought that in the real world, in reality, people are less demanding about accuracy (yet at the same time, reasserting that grammar helped to build her confidence) => In this way, she feels she has changed her perspective (14'30" section 1) => she now thinks that context is more important than accuracy and observed that school does not teach that: 'We're knowing the shell of the language but we are not really learn about the meaning about the language' => she said that was a big gap. Yet does IC realize that a foreign language could never be totally acquired because contexts change all the time. Yet, she seems to have gained the confidence of asking when she doesn't know (she gave the example of asking about Ramadan; she said that she realized that although everyone around her was 'nodding' , people were in the same boat as her, they still did not understand the context i.e. often local people don't understand what is said but don't dare asking what it means because this would show their lack of competence in English. CHECK RECORDING => Here GRAMMAR IS SEEN AS THE POWER TO CONTROL/ SCHOOLS PRIVILEGE GRAMMAR TRAINING (OR FOCUS ON THE TECHNICAL ASPECT OF LANGUAGE LEARNING) ; this constrains the individual (because you have to know the rules, you are always under pressure to perform well and mistakes/errors prevent you from being an equal social actor).

- Talking about French being 'open-minded' and 'proud of their own culture', IC commented (section 1 51'): I asked her if this perception was important for her: '**Yes and I want to have this in my own culture too' -> it takes time… it's**

about 'a collective' effort over time => it's about 'preserving' our own culture.

- ➔ **and in this meeting, it was clarified that her understanding of French culture was mainly a 'perception' (section 1 48'): 'And I think it's very generic' because it's only based on cinema, etc… 'it's just a creation… a perception'** and that creation may not be the same for French people as well… e.g. Agnes b. : '**sometimes I wonder is that very French'**
- ➔ This perception was nevertheless useful to her. On the passage where I wrote 'I took this to mean that through learning French IC was learning another way to survive in the world through cultural knowledge, and with this knowledge she was gaining self-confidence', she commented : 'yes because you're building a connection to that area'
  - ⇨ IC talked about how **confidence was missing at school.** She described her graphs she drew on her notes (see printscreen IC-IRT-graph 2)
  - ⇨ **'It's kind of like a graph of two circles… overlapping together so I've done the spoken training at home and I've done all the written thing at school (i.e. the technicalities of the language) but what I lacked in the past it's the confidence in between… to utilize both at the same time so I think it may… lead me to have a tendency to further my language study…yeah… I… when I am reading this [IRT] when I think about myself in the past and that's why I…I have a fancy of working with foreign exposure… company because I thought I was missing the middle part between spoken and written and the part… middle part overlapping is all about the culture… is all about… the foreign exposure…. yeah it's quite cultural !…like how to utilize what you [have learned in spoken form -> pragmatics => social process!] or actually what you've learned during the written English learning [classes i.e. at school] may not be euh commonly used yeah so there may be some more colloquial or localized use of language so this is something I think I've missed and it takes me to a tendency to further my English study'-> She said she was looking 'to fill that gap between spoken and written'**
  - ⇨ For example, she talked about her last trip to England at a conference. After the conference, IC received a letter from her line manager (56') criticizing the way she spoke about the challenges in the HK market=> it seemed to emphasize how IC had been overly critical without offering solutions to the problem => **so in a way, the letter suggested that she should find a better way to explain disagreeable truths or be more positive => This made IC reflect about the 'power of influencing' and the role of language training -> 'we didn't learn anything [about this] in school or university' -> 'it seems I didn't get any skills to do this'**
  - ⇨ (section 1 34') However, I asked her if she had fulfilled her aim of filling the 'middle part' (i.e. gaining confidence ; gaining pragmatic skills) working for an international company. **She answered that 99% of her colleagues were local Chinese so she did not get to use her English or gained English exposure but she said that she gained a lot of 'practice'. She said 'definitely… not purely from talking with English people but about the**

western world'. She said she still had that 'appetite to know more'.. She said that for example through talking to me she would know more how French people look at the French President, how western people will 'have a stand on the media' (we talked about how his ratings had gone down and what I thought were the reasons for the French press extensively covering this only three months after being elected). She said this was quite 'in contrast to how local people' saw things => change of perspectives from gaining access to the wider world.

POINTS TO LOOK INTO:

- IDEOLOGIES => multilingual practices as resistance : '… the study of multilingualism to understand important social processes, such as the definition and establisment of personal and political power, and social inequality' (Heller & Pavlenko 2010, 72 in 'Society and Language Use')
- Look at how IC talks about Mandarin Chinese as opposed to Cantonese
- See 'light communities' on/offline identities: Blommaert, 2017: https://alternative-democracy-research.org/2017/11/22/online-offline-modes-of-identity-and-community-elliot-rodgers-twisted-world-of-masculine-victimhood/

ANNEXE 18

Résumé (en français) de la thèse

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Index des mots clés

Apprenants multilingues

Apprentissage des langues

Compétence multilingue

Construction identitaire

Identités

Pratiques langagières

Pratiques langagières dites de « translanguaging »

Superdiversité

Chapitre 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Cette thèse de doctorat s'intéresse à l'expérience d'apprentissage du français de quatre sujets hongkongais en liaison avec la construction identitaire. Pour ce faire, l'étude adopte une approche méthodologique de type « étude de récits » avec comme question de départ :

> *Comment l'apprentissage du français contribue-t-il à la construction identitaire de quatre hongkongais ou que signifie apprendre le français pour ces quatre individus ?*

Il s'agit d'une recherche interdisciplinaire qui combine à la fois les champs de la recherche en didactique des langues et de la sociolinguistique.

La thèse a été réalisée en co-tutelle entre deux établissements, l'Université de Lorraine et Education University of Hong Kong (EduHK), à Hong Kong.

1.2 Justification de la thèse

Pour beaucoup de professeurs et d'élèves, les langues sont des outils qu'il faut apprendre et maîtriser le plus rapidement possible. Cette perception est accentuée par l'intense marchandisation des langues étrangères autour de discours dominants sur la nécessité de toujours plus s'auto-améliorer, sur le besoin d'être mobile et d'augmenter ses chances d'employabilité. Influencée par ce discours (et aussi par manque de temps), je passais sept ans à enseigner le français dans le centre de langues d'une université hongkongaise sans m'intéresser de près au rapport de mes étudiants avec le français ou sur la façon dont ils l'utilisaient.

En 2009, je participais à un atelier conduit par Felicity Kjisik et Leena Karlsson de l'Université de Helsinki lors d'un colloque sur l'apprentissage autonome des langues par Independent Learning Association (ILAC) à Hong Kong. J'y découvrais le récit d'apprenants de langues (connu sous le terme de « Language Learner Histories » ou LLHs; voir Mercer 2006, 2013). Au

cours d'activités pratiques pendant lesquelles je partageais ma propre histoire d'apprentissage des langues avec une collègue et réfléchissais à la place que celles-ci avaient dans ma vie, je réalisais à quel point mes langues étrangères étaient intimement liées à ma vie. Des quelques notes que j'avais commencées à écrire dans mon LLH surgissaient de véritables acteurs de ma vie sociale alors que je les utilisais (en particulier l'anglais) comme des masques pour obtenir, influencer, me cacher, contourner ou bloquer des choses. Une réflexion sur mon parcours personnel m'amena par exemple, à considérer mon enthousiasme initial pour l'apprentissage de l'anglais en lien avec les émotions que ma grand-mère avait déclenchées en moi quand elle me racontait ses histoires de l'occupation allemande et de la libération alliée pendant la seconde guerre mondiale. Dans ses souvenirs sonores, l'anglais était enjoué et souple alors que l'allemand était dure et autoritaire. Ainsi en écho aux ressentis de ma grand-mère, j'éprouvais une aversion immédiate pour l'allemand alors que j'étais immédiatement très réceptive à l'anglais. Je réalisais, par ailleurs, que la maîtrise de l'anglais avait été un moyen de surmonter des sentiments d'injustice pendant ma vie scolaire en France ainsi qu'au cours de ma vie professionnelle. En d'autres termes, l'anglais apparaissait dans mes récits étroitement lié à des questions d'estime de soi et de confiance en soi en réponse à des échecs ou des rejets crûment ressentis. Je réalisais aussi en me racontant que la perception que les autres avaient eu de moi était liée à la langue que j'utilisais et que cette langue déterminait aussi ma façon de me comporter avec les autres. Je me souvenais, par exemple, que dans un kibboutz en Israël alors que je peinais à m'exprimer en anglais au début de mon séjour, j'étais considérée comme une personne timide et peu sûre d'elle alors qu'au fond de moi je me pensais bien différente de cette image. Je me souvenais avoir pensé que cette perception qu'avaient mes camarades de kibboutz était en fait un moyen de me donner le temps nécessaire pour apprivoiser mon nouvel entourage.

En résumé, à travers cet atelier, je réalisais qu'apprendre des langues était aussi un « processus de construction identitaire » (Benson, Chik, & Lim 2003, 31).

Au cours des années qui suivirent, j'introduis des activités autour des LLHs dans mes cours afin de donner aux étudiants la possibilité d'explorer eux-mêmes leur rapport aux langues, y compris d'explorer ce qu'ils trouvaient intéressant dans la culture française. En lisant leurs réflexions, me venaient des questions du type : pourquoi untel avait-il choisi de parler de ce chanteur ou de ce réalisateur français plutôt qu'un autre ? Quelle motivation poussait cette apprenante à s'intéresser

à Jacques Lacan ? Pourquoi, cet autre, né à Hong Kong, se présentait-il comme étant marocain-français ? Y avait-il une raison particulière de ne pas parler à ses parents de son intention d'étudier le français pendant un semestre ? Ces questions me firent réaliser que je savais très peu de choses du rapport de mes étudiants avec le français et cela me donna envie de m'intéresser de près au rôle que cette langue jouait dans leur vie. Ainsi, je décidais de quitter mon poste d'enseignante de langues au centre de langues de mon université hongkongaise quatre ans après le colloque ILAC[1] afin de poursuivre des études doctorales qui me permettraient de me pencher sur l'apprentissage du français en liaison avec le récit de trajectoires de vie d'individus hongkongais.

Hong Kong de par ses origines historiques, les caractéristiques contemporaines de cette mégapole et son paysage politique changeant (particulièrement sensible à l'automne 2014 au début de l'étude) est en effet un acteur clé de l'étude car la mutation identitaire de Hong Kong vient se surperposer aux récits de construction identitaire des sujets étudiés.

1.3 Ancrage disciplinaire et méthodologique

Cette étude s'appuie sur des problématiques liées à l'identité qui comprennent la considération des concepts de subjectivité et d'agentivité ainsi que du rôle de l'imagination. Elle s'appuie sur l'étude de Norton Peirce (1995 ; Norton, 2000, 2010, 2012) qui a mis en lumière l'expérience d'apprentissage de langues étrangères en lien avec la construction identitaire.

L'étude s'intéresse également aux nouvelles perspectives sur les pratiques linguistiques à l'ère de la diversité (voir Li W., 2011 ; Li & Zhu, 2013 ; Blommaert, 2010 ; Pennycook, 2010 ; Rampton, 2006 ; Heller, 2007; Jørgensen, 2008; Jørgensen *et al.,* 2011 ; Otsuji, 2008). Liée aux pratiques du français observées dans cette étude, intervient la question de la compétence langagière et sociolangagière (voir Bourdieu 1977 ; Kramsch & Whiteside 2008 ; Kramsch 2006).

L'étude utilise la méthodologie dite de la « narrative inquiry » (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990 ; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000 ; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007 ; Clandinin, 2013) - qui peut se traduire par l'étude de récits de de vie (voir Pineau & Legrand, 1993 ; Bertaux, 2005; Delory-

[1] ILAC: Independent Learning Association

Momberger, 2004, 2005 ; Gaulejac, 2002 ; de Villers & Joassart, 2006 ; Molinié, 2019, 2015 ; Chaxel, Fiorelli & Moity-Maïzi, 2014) de type « enquête approfondie » - pour explorer la construction identitaire en relation avec l'apprentissage du français.

1.4 Objectifs de l'étude

L'objectif principal de cette étude est de mieux comprendre ce que signifie apprendre le français à un moment précis de la vie de quatre individus hongkongais et de l'histoire de Hong Kong. S'intéresser à l'étude du français à Hong Kong est intéressant, d'une part, parce que c'est une langue minoritaire (en contraste avec les trois langues majoritaires du territoire : le cantonais, le mandarin et l'anglais) et aussi parce que cette langue n'est pas une langue obligatoire à Hong Kong (elle est prioritairement choisie comme option).

Par ailleurs, comme le notent Clarke et Hennig (2013, 79), les expériences d'apprentissage du français ou de l'allemand à Hong Kong servent à mieux comprendre la construction identitaire en dehors de situations où les apprenants ont la nécessité de la langue, comme c'est le cas pour les apprenants migrants, par exemple (voir, par exemple, l'étude de Norton, 2000).

Un autre objectif de l'étude est lié au fait que peu de chercheurs à Hong Kong se sont peu intéressés à ce type de langues additionnelles se concentrant surtout sur les langues majoritaires de Hong Kong que sont l'anglais ou le mandarin (voir Flowerdew & Miller, 2008 ; Xu & Gao, 2014 ; Gu, 2010). Hennig (2010a, 2010b) est la seule étude qui se soit penchée sur l'apprentissage de l'allemand mais son étude est centrée sur des apprenants qui ont choisi l'allemand comme matière principale à l'université. Par contraste, la présente étude s'intéresse à des apprenants qui ont choisi le français comme option à l'université et pendant un temps court (seulement un semestre ou deux). De ce fait, notre étude vient pallier le manque de connaissance en matière d'apprentissage de langues minoritaires à Hong Kong.

Cette étude répond également au besoin de collecter des données qualitatives sur l'expérience individuelle d'apprentissage des langues à Hong Kong. Hormis l'étude qualitative récente de Hennig (2010a, 2010b), les autres travaux de recherche ont été de type quantitatif ou d'approche méthodologique mixte (voir Humphreys and Spratt, 2008; Leung, 2007; Humphreys and

Miyazoe-Wong, 2007). Pourtant, les chercheurs s'accordent sur la nécessité d'adopter une approche résolument tournée vers la compréhension de « vrais individus dans leur milieu social » et non pas d'individus conceptualisés (Ushioda 2012, 64; Block, 2003; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). En adoptant une méthodologie de type « étude de récits », cette étude complète celle de Hennig (2010a, 2010b) tout en étendant la période de recherche avec les participants à deux ans au lieu de deux semestres et en se concentrant sur seulement quatre individus. L'objectif est de comprendre au plus près le ressenti et l'expérience d'apprentissage du français dans ce qu'elle a d'unique et d'individuelle.

En apportant un éclairage sur l'apprentissage d'une langue additionnelle telle que le français dans le contexte de Hong Kong, les résultats, contribueront à la description d'un modèle d'apprentissage des langues à l'ère de la « superdiversité » (Vertovec, 2007). L'étude espère apporter un éclairage significatif qui sera utile aux professionnels de l'enseignement des langues.

1.5 Présentation des chapitres

La thèse est organisée en onze chapitres. Après le chapitre 1 qui introduit la problématique de l'étude et ses objectifs, les chapitres 2 et 3 servent d'ancrage théorique à l'étude. Le chapitre 4 présente l'approche méthodologique et détaille chaque étape de la procédure analytique. Le chapitre 5 est consacré à la présentation du contexte hongkongais y compris son histoire récente ainsi que les différentes facettes de la présence du français à Hong Kong. Les chapitres 6, 7, 8, 9 présentent les résultats de l'étude sous la forme de quatre récits narratifs à la fois descriptifs et interprétatifs. Le chapitre 6 est consacré à la signification du français dans le récit de Candice alors que le chapitre 7 est consacré à Yasmina, le chapitre 8 à IC et le chapitre 9 à Nicole. Le chapitre 10 apporte une réflexion sur les thèmes principaux émergeant des quatre récits et suggère des pistes théoriques et didactiques. La conclusion dans le chapitre 11 souligne les limites de l'étude et résume les enseignements qu'elle a livrés.

Comme la thèse a été écrite en anglais et fait très majoritairement référence à des études scientifiques dans cette langue, j'ai conservé certaines références scientifiques en anglais afin de ne pas dénaturer le propos scientifique. Toutes les traductions en français dans ce résumé sont les miennes.

Chapitre 2 Cadre théorique I – Problématique

L'objectif principal du chapitre 2 est le positionnement de l'étude au sein des débats actuels sur les langues et les pratiques langagières à l'ère de la mondialisation, où la diversité linguistique et culturelle et la multiplication des échanges semblent s'être intensifiés. Le chapitre commence donc par le phénomène de mondialisation et ses effets, notamment les débats qu'il suscite autour de ce qu'est une langue et de ce qu' « être compétent dans une langue » veut dire. Le message principal de ce chapitre est la nécessité de reconsidérer l'activité sociale du point de vue de sa complexité. Les notions de fluidité et de fixité (ou de « liquidité/solidité » selon Bauman Z., 2012 & 2000) sont présentées comme des éléments clés de cette étude.

La dernière partie de ce chapitre introduit et définit les notions d'apprenant multilingue et de langues additionnelles (« additional languages »), terme qui est utilisé pour catégoriser le français dans cette étude. Il est également fait mention des études récentes qui ont été conduites à Hong Kong autour des langues additionnelles telle que le français.

2.1 Le phénomène de la mondialisation

Le chapitre commence par introduire le phénomène de mondialisation (voir Appadurai, 2000) en abordant les questionnements qui y ont trait, notamment les questions de l'appartenance nationale, régionale, ethnique, culturelle ou linguistique (voir Blommaert 2010, 7 ; Giddens 1990, 64). L'anthropologue Eriksen (1995) souligne que les sentiments d'appartenance culturelle aujourd'hui sont autant liés à la sphère mondiale (ou globale, terme préféré dans cette étude) qu'à la sphère locale. Eriksen (ibid.) note aussi la rapidité à laquelle les changements sociaux, culturels ou économiques opèrent.

L'idée de « superdiversité » introduite par Vertovec (2007) pour capturer le phénomène de « diversification de la diversité » qu'il observe en Grande-Bretagne, est considéré comme un élément déclencheur en sociolinguistique. Dès lors, les chercheurs renouvellent leur intérêt autour du sujet de ce qu'est une langue et s'interrogent sur les usages des langues dans les situations de fluidité et de complexité sans précédent qu'ils observent.

Plus précisément, les chercheurs interrogent la conception de la langue dans les systèmes d'idéologies monolingues qui dominent dans le monde et dans lesquels la langue est présentée comme système stable et homogène (voir Pietikäinen, 2015; Ag & Jørgensen, 2013 ; Blommaert & Rampton, 2011 ; Pennycook, 2006 ; Silverstein, 1976). En liaison avec ce questionnement, la conception du bilinguisme et du multilinguisme est aussi interrogée. Par exemple, Heller (2007) interpelle la conception classique du bilinguisme le décrivant comme une « cohabitation de deux systèmes linguistiques » côte à côte (p. 1) ou encore une forme de « monolinguisme multiple » (p. 5 ; voir également Arnaut, 2012 ; Blommaert *et al.,* 2016) et met l'accent sur le fait que la conception des langues dans les systèmes monolingues ne reflète pas la réalité des pratiques langagières.

2.2. L'approche et la catégorisation du phénomène social

Cette section est consacrée à la manière d'approcher et de catégoriser le phénomène social dans le débat scientifique et commence par la problématique de la conceptualisation de l'espace. Elle aborde pour commencer les notions de fluidité et de fixité et dans un deuxième temps, la notion de polarité entre agentivité et structure sociale qui est utile comme grille de lecture de l'activité humaine en sciences sociales.

Problématiser l'espace social, c'est définir le théâtre des activités humaines et donc le théâtre des pratiques langagières. Les pratiques des langues au 21ème siècle s'observent à la fois sur le plan local (comme par exemple, l'espace familial ou le quartier) et sur un plan global plus large (comme par exemple, sur Internet) (voir Canagarajah & De Costa, 2016). Jacquemet (2005, 264-265) note que les groupes transnationaux interagissent autant par des circuits de communication locaux que par des circuits de communication distants, soulignant ainsi la complexité de l'activité humaine au sein de l'espace social moderne ainsi que la fluidité des pratiques langagières.

Pennycook (2010, 80) alerte cependant sur le besoin de ne pas seulement considérer l'aspect fluide de l'activité humaine (qui évoque une situation de changements perpétuels comme celle décrite par la pensée postmoderne) mais de considérer aussi son aspect fixe, c'est à dire son

aspect plus traditionnel (Otsuji & Pennycook, 2010, 244 ; Connell & Gibson 2003). En d'autres termes, il faut s'intéresser à la fois aux pratiques langagières qui pourraient être qualifiées de « flottantes » et d' « inattendues » (« floating around in unexpected places » ; Heller 2007, 343) mais aussi à des pratiques plus fixes liées aux frontières culturelles, historiques ou politiques (Otsuji & Pennycook 2010, 244) du groupe culturel auquel on appartient ou on se sent appartenir. Comme piste pour approcher et catégoriser le phénomène social dans sa réalité quotidienne, Pennycook (2010, 1) insiste sur la nécessité d'observer de manière détaillée et minutieuse de la manière dont les gens utilisent réellement les langues au sein de leur environnement social et de considérer les tensions entre fluidité et fixité dans leurs pratiques langagières.

La seconde partie de cette section présente la théorie sociale de la structuration associée à Bourdieu (1977, 1982, 1991) et Giddens (1976, 1990, 1991 ; voir également Inglis & Thorpe, 2013). Cette théorie cherche à rétablir un équilibre entre agentivité et contraintes structurelles dans l'action sociale. L'agentivité, décrite comme « la capacité d'agir en liaison avec l'influence de l'environnement socioculturel » (Ahearn 2001, 112) est considérée comme une piste essentielle pour comprendre l'humain (voir Layder, 1994 ; Giddens, 1991 ; Lantolf and Pavlenko, 2001 ; Norton, 1997).

Le concept de subjectivité est ensuite introduit en tant que vecteur de l'agentivité. Ortner (2005) décrit la subjectivité comme suit :

> [Subjectivity] is a necessary part of understanding how people (try to) act on the world even as they are acted upon. Agency is not some natural or originary will; it takes shape as specific desires and intentions within a matrix of subjectivity – of (culturally constituted) feelings, thoughts, and meanings. (Ortner 2005, 34)

2.3 La langue comme pratique sociale et locale : Nouvelles perspectives sur les pratiques langagières

En lien avec ce qui a été dit à propos de la fluidité et de l'agentivité dans les sections précédentes, cette section commence par l'introduction de la notion de langue comme « pratique sociale » et comme « pratique locale » (Pennycook, 2010).

Cette section introduit ensuite trois des nouvelles pratiques langagières qui ont émergé dans le monde scientifique ces dernières années : la pratique dite du « translanguaging » (Li W., 2011 ; Li & Zhu, 2013) ; la pratique dite du « metrolingualism » (Maher, 2005 ; Otsutjii & Pennycook, 2010) ; et la pratique dite du « polylanguaging » (Jørgensen *et al.*, 2011). Ces pratiques qui n'ont pas d'existence ontologique servent à sensibiliser sur la diversité des usages des langues dans la réalité quotidienne.

Il découle de ce questionnement sur les pratiques de langues la question de la compétence linguistique. Blommaert (2010, 103) souligne l'importance de considérer tout type d'utilisation de langue même s'il s'agit d'une utilisation partielle ou perçue comme étant incorrecte du fait de l'utilisation d'un répertoire qui serait considéré incomplet ou « tronqué » (« truncated repertoire »). Blommaert met ainsi en lumière l'importance de prendre avant tout en considération le sens et l'utilité de la langue pour l'utilisateur ainsi que de considérer l'environnement social dans lequel la langue est utilisée.

2.4 L'apprenant multilingue et la recherche sur les langues additionnelles

Cette section commence par évoquer brièvement la recherche sur les apprenants multilingues et leurs ressentis. On parle notamment du problème à trouver sa « vraie voix » (Kramsch 2009, 485) ou du sentiment d'être « un imposteur » (Kramsch, 2012 ; Pavlenko, 2006).

Le reste de cette section est consacré au sujet des « langues additionnelles ». Le terme « langue additionnelle » est défini comme faisant référence à une langue qui a peu ou pas de fonctions communicatives et une présence limitée dans un contexte particulier. Le choix de ne pas utiliser le terme « troisième » ou « quatrième » langue est aussi expliqué.

La problématique des représentations sociales (Jodelet, 2005) en tant que dynamique d'apprentissage des langues est ensuite abordée (voir Candelier & Hermann-Brenneke, 1993 ;

Castellotti & Moore, 2002). Elle est suivie par l'introduction de l'entité « francité » (ou « Frenchness ») qui capture doublement l'idée de la langue et de la culture française et permet de penser la motivation en termes de répertoire symbolique. L'étude de Coffey (2010) évoque le pouvoir du français sur l'apprenant avec des images telles que « élégance », « beauté » ou « la belle vie » (p. 124) qui seraient intégrées par l'apprenant au sein d'un répertoire pour son usage personnel. Dreyer (2009, 34-35) aussi évoque le pouvoir de l'image romantique du français en Chine et à Taiwan.

Cependant, malgré la part inévitable que peuvent jouer les stéréotypes de la francité glanés ici et là sur l'individu, De Fina (2006) souligne la nécessité de considérer l'identité comme un projet en constante évolution et en tension avec ce qui est vécu. L'objectif de la présente étude consiste à mettre en lumière ce qui lie construction identitaire (par définition changeante) et apprentissage du français en lien avec l'évolution personnelle de quatre individus. C'est ce qui constitue l'originalité de cette étude par rapport aux études de Hennig (2010a, 2010b) et de Coffey (2010) qui ont peu creusé la question de l'individualité et parlent essentiellement d'images stéréotypées de la langue additionnelle comme par exemple, la sophistication française (mentionnée dans l'étude de Coffey) ou la ténacité allemande (mentionnée dans l'étude de Hennig).

2.4.1 La recherche sur les langues additionnelles

Cette section introduit les recherches effectuées sur les langues additionnelles comme base de références pour cette étude. Au niveau mondial, il est fait mention des études de Coffey (2010; Coffey & Street, 2008), Ros i Solé (2007, 2013, 2016), Lamoureux (2012) et Kinginger (2004). A Hong Kong, l'étude de Humphreys et Spratt (2008) qui s'appuie sur les théories de Dörnyei et Clément (2001) pour explorer la motivation d'étudiants hongkongais à apprendre différentes langues (notamment, le mandarin, l'anglais, le français, le japonais et l'allemand) est évoquée. Puis, il est question de l'étude de Hennig (2010a, 2010b) qui s'intéresse à l'expérience d'apprentissage d'une langue sous l'angle de la notion du « souci de soi » (Foucault 1981, 1984a, 1984b, 1988). La chercheuse décrit l'expérience d'apprentissage de l'allemand à Hong Kong comme une recherche de son individualité et une voie vers l'émancipation personnelle (Hennig 2010a, 319). Elle (Hennig 2010a, 308) conclut que les apprenants de langues trouvent à travers l'apprentissage d'une langue un moyen de « développer, construire et vivre leur vie d'une

manière qui correspond à leurs convictions éthiques et ascétiques ». Selon elle, le rôle des langues devrait donc être davantage envisagé comme un acte d'« auto-formation » (« self-formation » ; Hennig, 2010b ; Clarke & Hennig, 2013).
En dépassant l'angle de l'acculturation pris par Humphreys & Spratt (2008) et en s'intéressant à l'apprentissage des langues sous la forme d'un « projet d'identité autobiographique » (Coffey 2010, 125) réalisé en grande partie dans l'imaginaire, l'étude de Hennig constitue donc un point de départ pour la présente étude.

Chapitre 3 Cadre théorique II – Bases conceptuelles de l'étude

L'objectif du chapitre 3 est d'introduire les bases conceptuelles de l'étude qui serviront à orienter l'analyse des récits des participants. Après avoir fait le lien entre identité, langue et culture, le concept d'identité en tant que concept clé de cette étude est présenté en détail. Dans la dernière section du chapitre 3, l'approche théorique connue sous le nom de « scalar approach » (voir Blommaert 2007, 2010 ; Canagarajah & De Costa, 2016 ; Wortham, 2005) - héritée du domaine de la géographie humaine (Wallerstein, 1998) - est présentée comme inspiration et direction à suivre pour appréhender la complexité des phénomènes sociolinguistiques telle que la construction identitaire à l'ère de la mondialisation (voir Bailey *et al.* 2016, 331) dans cette étude.

3.1 Identity, langue et culture

Cette section fait état des critiques des chercheurs d'une conception des langues dominée par l'idéologie monolingue c'est-à-dire considérer qui est liée l'ideology de l'état-nation (Heller 2007, 341; Byram 1992, 11). Dervin (2011, 39) souligne le fait que la recherche sur interculturalité se satisfait de représentations de cultures essentialisées avec des contours stables et exactes quand en réalité ces frontières sont poreuses et instables (voir aussi Ortner 2005, 36).
Dervin (2011) propose une approche de l'interculturalité qui met en avant la rencontre d'individus plutôt que de cultures (p. 38). Parralèlement, Ros i Solé (2016, 3) remet en cause 'the long-held belief that we are born and die with the same cultural identity' et met l'accent sur l'expérience individuelle d'une culture :

> Learners embark on personal journeys where they draw their own cartographies of the world which use the force of perception, affect and creativity to experience and fashion new road-maps of the world and new interpretations. This view of language learning claims that languages and cultures are not forever ; they come in different versions and sizes to fit the bodies of their owners and their circumstances, and they are not only 'acquired' and 'learnt', but also 'lived'. (Ros i Solé 2016, 3)

En conséquence, Blommaert et Rampton (2011) émettent l'idée que les langues et cultures ne soient plus aborder comme étant séparées les unes des autres mais plutôt comme étant utilisées de manières complexes et combinatoires (voir aussi Otsuji & Pennycook 2010, 243; Jørgensen et al., 2011).

3.2 Le concept d'identité selon la perspective post-structuraliste

Le concept d'identité adopté dans cette étude s'appuie sur le modèle de Norton (2000 ; Norton Peirce, 1995) qui part de la pensée post-structuraliste (en particulier, Weedon 1987, 1997) pour peindre le portrait d'un individu multiple, dynamique et contradictoire, étroitement lié (et conditionné) par son environnement socio-culturel mais qui cherche aussi à assouvir ses intérêts (voir Weedon 1997, 109). En résumé, la perspective post-structuraliste de l'identité met en avant la mobilité ontologique de l'identité et du sujet (voir Weedon 1997, 32 ; Laplantine 1999, 81 ; Hall, 1996).

Selon la définition éponyme de Norton, l'identité dans cette étude est vue comme :

> [T]he way a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how that person understands possibilities for the future. (Norton 1997, 410)

L'identité est aussi décrite comme un phénomène relationnel (ou discursif) plutôt que purement individuel (Norton 2012, 2 ; Block 2007, 17 ; van Langenhove & Harré, 1999 ; Davies & Harré,

1999 ; Weedon, 1997 ; Gee, 1996). Un autre aspect est le fait qu'elle se construit en résistance à des mécanismes de pouvoir et d'exclusion. Partant de la conception bourdieusienne de la parole comme d'un droit qui se conquière (Bourdieu 1977, 1982, 1991), Norton évoque « le désir de reconnaissance, le désir d'appartenance, et le désir de sécurité » comme moteurs essentiels de l'apprenant de langue (Norton Peirce 1995, 410) ainsi que son désir « d'étendre les facettes de son identité et d'aspirer à des environnements plus larges » (Pavlenko & Norton 2007, 670). Benson *et al.* (2013, 2) notent que la connaissance d'une langue étrangère « ajoute la possibilité d'être, ou d'être vu comme, quelqu'un de différent dans une variété de contextes » (voir également Norton 2000, 5). Enfin, l'identité est mobilisée dans l'action comme par exemple, à travers sa façon de s'habiller (Block 2007, 32).

3.3 Les liens entre identité et agentivité et entre identité et subjectivité

Après une présentation détaillée du concept d'identité et de l'importance de reconsidérer la notion de compétence linguistique (voir Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008 ; Kramsch, 2006), le lien entre identité et deux concepts centraux à l'étude est clarifié : il s'agit du lien entre l'identité et le concept de subjectivité (voir Block 2009, 219 ; Weedon, 1997 ; Davies & Harré, 1999) et du lien entre l'identité et l'agentivité (Ortner, 2005 ; Layder, 2004).

3.4 Le rôle de l'imagination dans la construction identitaire

L'imagination est ensuite présentée comme jouant un rôle important dans la construction identitaire en permettant d'appréhender et de visualiser sa place dans le monde (Wenger 1998, 176 ; Ryan & Irie, 2014 ; Norton, 2012 ; Kanno et Norton, 2003 ; Pavlenko, 2003 ; Barkuizen & de Klerk, 2006). Early et Norton (2012, 199) soulignent également l'importance de l'imagination dans « des situations de rapports de pouvoir asymétriques » ainsi que dans « des systèmes anciens de discrimination ». En d'autres termes, l'imagination a un lien avec la question d'agentivité.

3.5 La « scalar approach » : Un outil pour appréhender l'activité sociale et la construction identitaire

L'approche dite « scalar approach » (voir Bailey *et al.* 2016) est présentée à la fin du cadrage théorique comme introduction à la direction analytique qui a été choisie pour cette étude.
La « scalar approach » permet la visualisation de l'action sociale par l'observation de différents niveaux ou dimensions de l'expérience qui s'entrecroisent et se déroulent de manière simultanée. Ces dimensions incluent la dimension spatiale (soit, les espaces locaux et plus distants) et la dimension temporelle (soit, le passé, le présent et le futur y compris l'imaginaire). Blommaert (2007) évoque ci-dessous l'idée que grâce à cette visualisation (qui fait penser à une image à trois dimensions), l'action sociale apparaît dans toute sa dynamique inter-connective :

> [E]very social event develops simultaneously in space and in time, often in multiply imagined spaces and time frames. (Blommaert 2007, 5)

L'intérêt de la « scalar approach » n'est pas seulement de mettre en avant l'inter-connectivité des dimensions temps et espaces mais aussi de faire apparaitre l'agentivité humaine. Blommaert (2007, 6) note en effet que grâce à cette approche on peut observer les manières qu'utilisent les individus pour résister ou reprendre l'avantage dans des situations d'inégalité ou d'infériorité, comme par exemple lorsque qu'ils sont confrontés à une hiérarchie institutionnelle. Ces prises de pouvoir sont dits de « rescaling » (voir Brenner, 2011 ; Blommaert, 2007), traduisibles par les notions de « réévaluation » ou encore de « changement d'échelle ».

En offrant une piste pour aborder la complexité de l'action humaine, la « scalar approach » nous a paru particulièrement utile pour la mise en lumière des mécanismes de construction identitaire et a ainsi guidé le choix de la méthodologie dans cette étude.

Chapitre 4 Cadre méthodologique

Le chapitre 4 commence par l'introduction des objectifs d'une recherche de type qualitatif qui cherche à comprendre de vrais individus dans leur milieu social et non pas d'individus « théoriques » ou « idéalisés » (Ushioda, 2012; Block, 2003; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006 ; Danilo 2007 ; Passeron & Revel, 2005).

La description de la méthodologie choisie pour cette étude - connue sous le nom de « narrative inquiry » (ou « étude de récits » sous la forme d'une « enquête approfondie ») - ainsi que des détails sur la procédure de collecte de données et la procédure analytique constituent la plus grande partie de ce chapitre.

4.1 Le choix d'une méthodologie de type « étude de récits »

4.1.1 Présentation

Il est d'abord fait mention de l'origine de la méthodologie de type « étude de récits » (« narrative research ») en sciences sociales (voir Ricœur 1990 ; Bruner 1987, 1990, 1991). Cette méthodologie est particulièrement mobilisée par les chercheurs dans le domaine de la didactique des langues depuis quelques années (par exemple, Barkhuizen 2007, 2009, 2010, 2011 ; Benson & Nunan, 2005 ; Kinginger, 2004 ; Pavlenko 2001, 2002, 2007 ; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000 ; Kramsch, 2006 ; Liu & Xu, 2011).

Le choix d'une méthodologie de ce type tient à deux éléments principaux : premièrement, elle fait émerger une image complète du phénomène social au sein du contexte (Barkhuizen 2011, 451 ; De Fina & Geogakopoulou, 2012) et deuxièmement, elle met l'acteur social enquêté au cœur de l'étude le considérant comme « un véritable observatoire du social, à partir duquel se font et se défont les interactions et actions de tous » (Le Breton 2004, 20). Barkhuizen (2011) trouve cette approche particulièrement adaptée à la capture de la fluidité de la connaissance :

> The concept of narrative knowledging […] recognizes the active, fluid nature of meaning making, and aims to avoid conceptions of narrative knowledge as stable, permanent, and unchallengeable. (Barkhuizen 2011, 396)

4.1.2 Bases ontologique et épistémologique de cette méthodologie

La base philosophique de l'étude de récits met en avant trois éléments principaux : le récit comme besoin humain, l'importance de la subjectivité dans la recherche de la connaissance et

l'interprétation comme manière d'accéder à la connaissance. Ces points sont brièvement développés ci-dessous.

Premièrement, l'étude de récits existe parce qu'elle correspond à un besoin humain. Nous avons besoin de raconter - de *nous* raconter - depuis la nuit des temps. Barkhuizen (2011, 393) souligne que nous raconter permet non seulement de nous comprendre nous-même mais aussi de comprendre l'autre à travers nous-mêmes (voir également Pavlenko 2002, 213 ; Bell, 2002 ; Ochs et Capps, 2001). Connelly et Clandinin (2006 dans Clandinin 2013, 13) parlent du récit de vie comme d'un « portail » par lequel nous faisons l'expérience du monde.

Deuxièmement, la base épistémologique d'une méthodologie axée sur l'étude de récits tient au fait que la fabrique de nos vies - qui sont faites « de vicissitudes et de drames » - nécessite de mettre au cœur de la recherche les intentions et émotions humaines (De Fina & Georgakopoulou 2012, 16), c'est à dire la subjectivité humaine. La subjectivité dans l'étude narrative est vue comme un élément essentiel de la connaissance (voir Stake 1995 in Duff 2010, 56 ; Ortner, 2005). Bruner (1990, 111) parle de « narrative truth » pour mettre l'accent sur le fait qu'aucun critères externes ou internes ne saurait assurer que la « véracité » (« rightness ») d'un récit a bien été saisie (Bruner 2004, 693). Ceci est dû au fait que d'une part, l'expérience vécue est sans cesse renouvelée et changeante puisqu'elle est le fruit d' « une interaction ininterrompue entre la pensée humaine et l'environnement personnel, social et matériel » et d'autre part, qu'elle ne peut se percevoir que « sélectivement » (Clandinin & Rosiek 2007, 6).

Enfin, l'orientation épistémologique de l'approche narrative consiste à privilégier l'interprétation comme moyen de donner un sens à l'expérience humaine :

> [T]he narrative mode does not lie on the ability to describe reality, but rather on the capacity to give meaning to human experience (De Fina & Georgakopoulou 2012, 16).

Ainsi, l'étude de récits contraste avec les modes de recherche positivistes et approches empiriques traditionnelles et est une autre manière d'aborder et de faire avancer la connaissance (Pavlenko 2002, 213 ; De Fina & Georgakopoulou 2012, 20 ; Connelly & Clandinin 1990, 8 ; Bruner, 1987, 2004).

4.1.3 La pensée par cas

Il est fait mention dans cette section de l'idée de « penser par cas » (Passeron & Revel, 2005) en relation avec la méthodologie de type « étude de récits ». Passeron et Revel (2005, 17-18) expliquent que « penser par cas » c'est penser aux circonstances entourant chaque cas ce qui fait apparaitre « la singularité » du cas.

Dans la pensée par cas (tout comme dans l'étude narrative), on cherche à « résoudre une énigme » propre à chaque cas :

> Faire cas, c'est prendre en compte une situation, en reconstruire les circonstances – les contextes – et les réinsérer ainsi dans une histoire, celle qui est appellée à rendre raison de l'agencement particulier qui d'une singularité fait un cas. (Passeron & Revel 2005, 22)

L'objectif de raisonner par cas est de forcer à réfléchir au « sens de l'exception » pour l'ensemble et éventuellement instaurer « un cadre nouveau [de] raisonnement » (Passeron & Revel 2005, 10-11).

4.1.4 Apports d'une méthodologie de type « étude de récits » pour le thème de l'identité

Cette section met en lumière le raisonnement derrière le choix de la méthodologie « étude de récits » pour cette étude qui est a pour objectif de comprendre la construction de l'identité en liaison avec l'apprentissage du français.

Il est tout d'abord souligné que le récit sert de révélateur d'identité. Comme le note le neurologue britannique Oliver Sacks, notre identité et le récit que nous racontons sur nous-même ne font qu'un :

> We have, each of us, a life-story, an inner narrative — whose continuity, whose sense, *is* our lives. It might be said that each of us constructs and lives, a "narrative," and that this narrative *is* us, our identities. (Sacks, 1998, 110)

Bruner (1987, 15) suggère même que nous devenons les récits autobiographiques que nous racontons, ce que Bourdieu (1986 in Chaxel *et al.,* 2014) appelle « se faire l'idéologie de sa propre vie ».

Qui plus est, le récit est un terrain d'observation du caractère multiple et changeant de l'identité selon la conception de l'identité adoptée par cette étude (voir le chapitre 3). Riessman (2008, 105), en notant que les récits « ne tombent pas du ciel » mais sont les produits d'un contexte particulier, souligne que le récit établit un lien direct avec l'identité en tant que pratique sociale changeante et multiple en réaction permanente avec le contexte social.

4.2 La méthodologie dite de la « narrative inquiry » (ou « enquête narrative approfondie ») choisie pour cette étude

L'objectif de cette section est de présenter la méthodologie narrative exacte choisie pour cette étude et de présenter ses particularités. Cette méthodologie est connue sous le nom de « narrative inquiry » (ou « enquête narrative approfondie ») selon l'approche de Clandinin et Connelly, (2000 ; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990 ; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007 ; Clandinin, 2013 ; voir également Polkinghorne, 1995 ; Barkhuizen 2011, 2016). Le terme anglo-saxon est préféré à la traduction française dans la présente étude.

L'approche de la méthodologie dite de la « narrative inquiry » tourne autour de la notion de « puzzle » (Clandinin & Connelly 2000, 124) et d' « énigme » à résoudre (Passeron & Revel 2005, 20 ; de Villers & Joassart 2006, 216) et mène à une démarche analytique à la fois *descriptive* et *explicative* (Polkinghorne 1988, 161). L'explication naît de l'observation de l'expérience humaine dans son environnement socio-culturel qu'on ne se contente pas d'introduire mais auquel on accorde un rôle. La mise en relation de ces deux éléments est faite de manière à faire émerger la continuité (ou « wholeness ») de l'expérience dans le temps (voir Barkhuizen 2011, 410-402 et 451 ; Clandinin & Connelly 2000, 17 ; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012). En ce qui

concerne l'étude présente, on observe le rôle de l'apprentissage du français le long de toute la trajectoire de vie des participants en liaison avec l'environnement socio-politico-culturel hongkongais. En d'autres termes, on ne cherche pas à découper l'expérience en thèmes mais à la comprendre dans son ensemble (Barkhuizen 2011, 401-402).

Une autre particularité de la méthodologie « narrative inquiry » est que le résultat de l'analyse est un récit. Ce récit est une reconstruction de l'expérience individuelle à l'issue d'un effort collaboratif entre le chercheur et le participant. On parle ainsi de « collaboration », de « co-construction » du savoir (Clandinin & Connelly 2000, 20 et 94 ; Etherington 2007, 600) et de « reconstruction » de l'expérience (Polkinghorne 1995, 15-16 ; Clandinin & Connelly 2000, 165). Clandinin (2013, 42-44) souligne qu'une recherche de ce type se fait *avec* le participant plutôt que *sur* le participant.

4.3 Le cadre analytique

Cette section présente en détail le cadre analytique de l'étude qui combine deux approches complémentaires.

Premièrement, l'étude utilise l'approche proposée par Clandinin et Connelly (2000) qui consiste à décrire métaphoriquement l'espace dans lequel l'expérience étudiée est située. Cet espace est connu sous le nom de « three-dimensional analytical space » (ou « espace analytique tri-dimensionnel » ; Clandinin & Connelly 2000, 50; Clandinin 2013, 39-42). L'une de ces trois dimensions est la dimension temporelle de l'expérience qui inclut des références au passé, au présent et au futur (ou à l'imaginaire). La seconde dimension est dite sociale, c'est-à-dire qu'elle invoque les relations du participant avec son environnement social et dévoile donc l'aspect personnel et émotionnel de l'expérience. La troisième dimension est dite spatiale, c'est-à-dire qu'elle s'intéresse à tous les lieux où l'expérience est vécue. Ainsi, grâce à cet espace tri-dimensionnel qui répond aux questions *quand, avec qui (ou avec quoi)* et *où*, le chercheur peut visualiser l'expérience de vie de l'individu et commencer à comprendre le phénomène social dans sa dynamique interconnective avec le contexte (ici, il s'agit de comprendre l'identité en rapport avec la construction identitaire).

L'étude emprunte également à Barkhuizen (2016, 664) sa conception du contexte par l'intermédiaire d'un schéma qui souligne la complexité de l'environnement avec lequel l'individu interagit et qui permet de mieux visualiser les contraintes structurelles ressenties et relatées comme telle par les participants. Dans ce schéma, le contexte est représenté par trois niveaux qui apparaissent comme entrelacés avec le récit (ou « story ») de chaque individu, comme le montre le schéma ci-dessous :

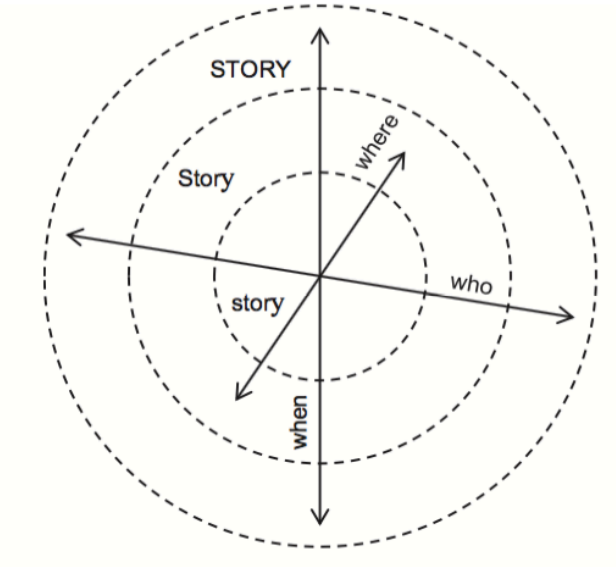

Schéma 1 : Cadre analytique proposé par Barkhuizen (2016, 664)

Ces trois niveaux de contexte réfèrent tout d'abord à l'environnement socio-culturel et socio-politique que Bakhuizen nomme le niveau « STORY » (avec l'utilisation de lettres capitales pour le mot « story ») et qui représente le niveau macro du contexte avec des éléments tels que le discours dominant sur les langues et les politiques linguistiques. Puis, il y a l'environnement institutionnel (le niveau « Story » avec un « S » majuscule) qui inclut, par exemple, l'école ou l'environnement professionnel. Enfin, il y a l'environnement psychologique propre de l'individu ou le niveau « story » (avec l'utilisation de minuscules d'imprimerie) qui fait référence au contexte « intérieur » constitué des idées, pensées et émotions personnelles de la personne. En référence à ces trois niveaux, Barkhuizen (2016, 663) note que la capacité d'action (ou agentivité) de l'individu est plus grande au niveau intra-personnel (donc au niveau « story ») qu'au niveau institutionnel (niveau « Story ») et est encore plus réduite au niveau socio-culturel (niveau « STORY »).

4.4 Les sujets étudiés

Cette section a trois objectifs principaux. La première partie présente la manière dont le chercheur a approché les participants dans cette étude. Ceci consiste en une série d'étapes de négociation avec les participantes conformément à la méthodologie de la « narrative inquiry ». La nécessité d'implication double du chercheur et du participant autour du projet est en effet centrale dans une étude de ce type. C'est-à-dire que les participants doivent eux-aussi trouver tout au long du projet de recherche quelque chose pour eux-même (voir Clandinin & Connelly 2000, 71-79 ; Clandinin 2013, 43-44 ; Ollerenshaw & Creswell 2002, 332 ; Barkhuizen 2011, 393 ; de Villers & Joassart 2006, 216).

La deuxième partie de cette section est consacrée à la description de la dimension éthique de l'étude qui nécessite une prise de responsabilité sérieuse du chercheur (Connelly & Clandinin 1990, 4). Il est d'ailleurs à noter qu'en raison des accords de confidentialité totale passés avec les participantes, le corpus complet de la présente étude (voir chapitres 6, 7, 8 et 9) n'est pas rendu accessible à une personne tierce.

La dernière partie est consacrée à la présentation des quatre participantes connues dans l'étude sous le nom de Candice, Yasmina, IC et Nicole. Yasmina, IC et Nicole sont trois de mes anciennes étudiantes de français entre septembre 2006 et août 2013 tandis que j'ai connu Candice lorsque j'étais assistante du professeur de français dans son cours pendant le premier semestre de l'année 2015-2016. Toutes les quatre ont suivi l'intégralité de leur scolarité (y compris, leurs années de crèche) au sein d'institutions publiques hongkongaises et considèrent le cantonais comme leur langue maternelle. Au début de l'étude, Yasmina avait 24 ans tandis que IC et Nicole avaient 27 ans. Toutes les trois sont dans la vie active depuis quelques années tandis que Candice, qui avait 20 ans au début de l'étude, était dans la dernière année de sa licence en études classiques chinoises.

Parmi un groupe initial de douze participants (qui comprenait deux hommes et dix femmes ainsi que six de mes anciens étudiants de français et six étudiants de licence que je ne connaissais pas avant l'étude), j'ai choisi de ne garder que ces quatres individus. Ce choix fut principalement

guidé par le fait que nous avions établi une relation de confiance étroite, condition essentielle pour mener une étude de ce type (Clandinin 2013, 34 ; Barkhuizen 2011, 398).

La capacité à manipuler la langue anglaise - la langue dans laquelle s'est effectuée la recherche - des quatre participantes a été un autre facteur de sélection. De Villers et Joassart (2006, 216) soulignent que « l'approche narrative ne convient qu'a des personnes capables de verbaliser ».

4.5 La collecte des données

Cette section commence par souligner l'aspect longitudinal de la collecte de données qui a duré deux ans. Puis, elle détaille les méthodes employées. La méthodologie de la « narrative inquiry » utilise le terme « field texts » au lieu du terme « données » pour illustrer l'idée qu'il s'agit d'une enquête (voir section 4.2 ; voir également Clandinin & Connelly 2000, 115). Les « field texts » réfèrent au fait que le chercheur est continuellement occupé à réfléchir à ce qu'il entend, observe ou voit, écrivant des notes réflectives ainsi que refléxives tout au long du processus de recherche (voir Clandinin 2013, 46 ; Connelly & Clandinin 1990, 93 et 375 ; Barkhuizen 2011, 393 ; Ochs & Capps 2001, 35).

Les méthodes pour collecter les données dans cette étude sont ensuite présentées. Elles incluent la collecte de « language learner histories » (LLH ; voir Mercer 2013 ; Ford, 2011 ; Pavlenko, 2007), un rapport d'activités linguistiques en ligne (« technolinguistic report » ; adapté d'une activité de Barton & Lee 2013, 168), la collecte d'emails et de messages sur WhatsApp et Messenger entre les participantes et le chercheur, des mémos réflectifs écrits par le chercheur sur sa propre expérience d'apprentissage des langues et enfin des artéfacts tels que des objets et des photos (y compris des photos téléchargées des comptes Facebook et Instagram des participantes).

L'utilisation de trois entretiens approfondis enregistrés (au début, au milieu et à la fin de la collecte de données) est ensuite détaillée y compris, le type de questions, l'approche et les techniques de l'interviewer avant, pendant et après l'entretien. Le choix d'un protocole de transcription fait l'objet d'une description précise et fait référence à de nombreux auteurs et ouvrages sur l'utilisation d'entretiens dans des études de type de « étude de récits » (voir

Barkhuizen, 2011 ; Barkhuizen *et al.*, 2014 ; McCormack, 2000, 2004 ; Wengraf, 2001 ; Barbour, 2008 ; Richard, 2003 ; Mishler, 1986, 1991 ; Kvale, 2007 ; Riessman, 1993).

Finalement, des détails sont donnés sur l'utilisation d'un compte collectif Facebook intitulé FRENCHINHK et d'un compte Instagram intitulé @frenchinhk créés par le chercheur au début de l'étude à l'automne 2015 et maintenu jusqu'à l'été 2016 avec deux objectifs : le compte Instagram était de constituer une sorte de ressource linguistique avec la volonté de « redonner » (« give back ») aux participantes (voir Clandinin 2013, 51 ; Candlin & Sarangi 2003, 279) en les aidant dans leur étude du français et/ou à satisfaire leur curiosité pour la culture française ; le compte Facebook était de faciliter et de dynamiser l'exploration de la notion de francité (voir chapitre 2, section 2.4) en vue de commencer le procédé de réflexion sur ce qu'apprendre le français signifie pour un apprenant hongkongais.

4.6 L'analyse des données

Cette section détaillée est consacrée à la présentation de chaque étape de l'analyse en des données trois temps. Au cours de la première étape, il s'est agi de définir la dimension tri-dimensionnelle de chaque expérience (voir section 4.3). Ceci a impliqué de revisiter de manière systématique toutes les données collectées (y compris, notes, enregistrements, transcriptions, etc.) et d'organiser l'information sous forme de tableaux et de notes (voir Clandinin 2013, 118 ; Ollerenshaw & Creswell 2002, 340 ; Whiffin *et al.* 2014 ; McCormack, 2000). Ces tableaux et notes furent ensuite utilisés pour capturer le développement chronologique de la trajectoire individuelle, décrite comme « un entrecroisement de multiples lignes biographiques plus ou moins autonomes ou indépendantes les unes des autres » (Hélardot 2006 in Chaxel *et al.,* 2014) ainsi que pour noter les « turning points » (Mishler 2006, 38) ou points de transition (voir Adawu & Martin- Beltrán 2012, 396 ; Coffey & Street 2008, 457). Comme le dit Ricœur (voir Polkinghorne 1988, 68), le récit de vie permet de mettre en lumière une trajectoire singulière et de mieux comprendre l'interconnectivité des décisions avec les évènements vécus.

La deuxième étape de l'analyse s'est articulée autour de l'entretien dit « intermédiaire » ainsi que du « texte intermédiaire » (« interim research text » ou IRT) qui consiste en un premier récit reconstitué sur l'expérience du participant et qui est écrit par le chercheur.

L'étape « intermédiaire » est importante car c'est la première fois que le participant voit son histoire d'apprentissage du français interprétée par le chercheur à partir de tous les éléments qu'il lui a fourni. De ce fait, le participant a besoin de temps pour y réfléchir. Le chercheur lui envoie le texte à l'avance et l'encourage à y apposer ses remarques ainsi qu'à partager son ressenti. L'entretien « intermédiaire » est une discussion du ressenti du participant autour du IRT. Ensemble, avec le chercheur, l'apprenant discute de l'interprétation la plus plausible quant au rôle du français dans son histoire au moment de l'enquête. (La notion de plausibilité est expliquée dans la section suivante).

La dernière étape est la rédaction du texte final (ou FRT) par le chercheur. Cette étape est décrite dans la section 4.7 ci-dessous.

4.7 L'issue de l'analyse

La dernière section de ce chapitre est consacrée à l'issue de l'analyse c'est-à-dire aux « final research texts » (ou FRT). Comme il a déjà été dit, l'issue de l'enquête narrative est un texte qui est obtenu à la suite d'un processus de « co-construction » et de « reconstruction » (voir section 4.2).

Il est fait également mention dans cette section du critère de la « plausibilité » ainsi que des notions de « *restorying* » et de « *burrowing* » qui ont guidé la rédaction des FRT.

4.7.1 Le critère de la plausibilité

En se basant sur Bruner (1990, 2004) au sujet de la question de la vérité dans les études de récits (voir section 4.1.2), Denzin (1989a) pose la question de l'évaluation :

> The lived experiences of interacting individuals are the proper subject matter of sociology. The meanings of these experiences are best given by the persons who experience them; thus, a preoccupation with method, validation, reliability, generalizability, and theoretical relevance of the biographical method must be set aside in

> favour of a concern for meaning and interpretation. (Denzin 1989a, in Creswell 2013, 258).

Denzin (1989b) propose donc comme critères d'évaluation pour les études de récits le « respect de la perspective du chercheur » ainsi que la « densité de la description » (« thick description » ; voir Creswell 2013, 258 ; Maxwell 2013, 258).

Connelly et Clandinin (1990), quant à eux, proposent la notion de la plausibilité pour se guider dans une enquête de type « narrative inquiry ». Polkinghorne (1995) explique le critère de plausibilité en ces termes :

> The explanation needs to satisfy the subjective needs of the reader of the report to understand how the occurrence could have come about. The story has to appeal to the readers' experienced general sense of why humans respond and act [...] It needs to be compatible with the reader's background knowledge or beliefs in characteristic behaviour of people or nature in order for the reader to accept the explanation as possible. (Polkinghorne 1995, 19)

Pour Connelly et Clandinin (1990, 8), la recherche de la plausibilité ne peut-être réalisée qu'avec le participant et dans le cadre de l'espace tri-dimensionnel défini par le chercheur (voir section 4.3). Pour Polkinghorne (1995, 18), l'obtention d'un texte plausible se fait par le biais d'une intrigue :

> [The] final guideline concerns the need for the researcher to provide a story line or plot that serves to configure or compose the disparate data elements into a meaningful explanation of the protagonist's responses and actions. (Polkinghorne 1995, 18)

L'intrigue émerge en établissant des liens plausibles entre les différents évènements autour de la question :

> How is it that this outcome came about; what events and actions contributed to this solution? (Polkinghorne 1995, 18)

Dans notre étude, le chercheur s'est attaché à établir des liens autour de la question suivante :

> *« Pourquoi l'apprentissage du français ; qu'est-ce que les participantes cherchent et trouvent en apprenant le français ?»*

Dans la recherche d'une réponse à sa question, le chercheur se guide également par l'idée que tout individu éprouve le besoin de se rendre « audible » auprès des autres (Cameron 2000, 6) et par le besoin d'établir une « continuité biographique » en liaison avec son expérience (Giddens 1991, 54). Ceci veut dire que l'individu est motivé par le besoin de rassembler divers aspects de son expérience sociale en un récit cohérent (Cameron 2000, 4-5).

4.7.2 Les procédés dits de *restorying* et de *burrowing*

Lors de la construction des FRT dans une étude de type « narrative inquiry », interviennent également les procédés dits de *restorying* et *burrowing* (Ollerenshaw & Creswell 2002, 332 ; Polkinghorne 1995, 18 ; Polkinghorne 1995, 15-16 ; Clandinin & Connelly 2000, 165 ; Connelly & Clandinin 1990, 11 ; McCormack, 2004). Le procédé de *restorying* est décrit dans les termes suivants :

> [Restorying is] the process of gathering stories, analyzing them for key elements of the story (e.g., time, place, plot, and scene), and then rewriting the story to place it within a chronological sequence. (Ollerenshaw & Creswell 2002, 332)

Comme il s'agit d'une enquête, on parle de reconstruction de l'histoire autour d'une intrigue (« the advancement of a plot » ; Polkinghorne 1995, 15-16 ; Clandinin & Connelly 2000, 165) ou de l'écriture d'un scénario (McCormack, 2004). Dans le cas de cette étude, l'intrigue se construit autour de la question de départ au sujet du rôle du français dans la vie des participantes :

> *Comment l'apprentissage du français contribue-t-il à la construction identitaire de chaque individu dans cette étude ?*

Pour définir l'intrigue, on regarde à la fois « backward and forward » ainsi que « inward and outward » tout en situant l'expérience au sein de l'espace narratif tri-dimensionnel, comme il a déjà été dit (voir section 4.3 ; Clandinin & Connelly 2000, 139-140).

Le procédé dit de *burrowing* consiste à penser la logique de l'intrigue « du point de vue de la personne au moment ou l'évènement se déroule » (Connelly & Clandinin 1990, 11). Connelly et Clandinin (1990) expliquent le procédé en ces termes :

> We focus on the event's emotional, moral, and aesthetic qualities. We then ask why the event is associated with these feelings and what their origin might be. (Connelly & Clandinin 1990, 11)

En d'autres termes, les émotions ainsi que les opinions des participants sur la morale ou l'esthétique (qui ont été notés pendant la phase d'analyse ; voir section 4.6) sont aussi prises en compte.

Le chapitre 4 se termine par un résumé de l'approche méthodologique sous la forme d'un tableau récapitulatif.

Chapitre 5 Le contexte à Hong Kong

Le chapitre 5 est divisé en deux parties principales. La première introduit le contexte hongkongais dans lequel les quatre participantes à l'étude présente évoluent depuis leur enfance tandis que la seconde brosse le portrait de la présence du français à Hong Kong.

5.1 Hong Kong

5.1.1 Un contexte multilingue

La présentation du contexte dans cette étude commence par mentionner le recensement de 2007 qui décrit la population de Hong Kong comme étant ethniquement chinoise à environ 94% (Li,

D. 2009, 72) avec pour langue dominante le cantonais, parlé par 90% de la population (Li, D. 2009, 74).

Pourtant, Bolton (2000) souligne le caractère multilingue de Hong Kong et parle du « mythe monolingue » associé à Hong Kong. En effet, Bacon-Shone et Bolton (2008, 44) indiquent que la proportion de la catégorie « cantonais monolingue » est passée de 30% de la population en 1983 à seulement 9% en 2003. La catégorie la plus large en 2003 est celle des « trilingues cantonais-anglais-putonghua » qui représente 63% de la population, suivi par la catégorie « bilingues cantonais-putonghua » avec 17% de la population (Bacon-Shone & Bolton 2008, 44).

Cette diversité linguistique grandissante tient à deux phénomènes qui ont vu le jour ces dernières années : d'une part, un plus grand nombre de Hongkongais considèrent qu'ils parlent bien l'anglais (Bacon-Shone & Bolton 2008, 37) et d'autre part, la place du putonghua/mandarin a aussi augmenté (voir Li, E. 2015, 115). La diversité linguistique est aussi liée au fait que « beaucoup de Hongkongais parlent plus d'un dialecte chinois » Li E. (2015, 115) et une partie des enfants hongkongais est scolarisée dans des pays anglophones. Li, E. (2015) note que de telles expériences internationales contribuent à rendre la fabrique sociale de Hong Kong de plus en plus multilingue et multiculturelle.

Un autre aspect de la diversité linguistique à Hong Kong est la pratique langagière omniprésente du « code-mixing » ou la manière dont les Hongkongais mélangent mots cantonais et anglais dans leur conversation de tous les jours (Ho, J., 2008 ; Li, E. 2015).

5.1.2 Le système éducatif hongkongais

Les caractéristiques du système éducatif hongkongais de l'école primaire à l'université et la place des langues dans ce système sont soulignées dans cette section. Notamment, il y est fait mention du problème du choix de la langue d'instruction qui est une caractéristique majeure du système scolaire hongkongais. Dans le secteur primaire, alors que le cantonais était prioritairement utilisé pour enseigner toutes les matières, on observe de plus en plus que le putonghua est utilisé pour enseigner la langue chinoise (Wang & Kirkpatrick, 2013). Dans le secteur secondaire, le débat est toujours sensible sur la question du choix de la langue

d'instruction à adopter (Li, D. 2009 ; Li, E. 2015) alors que certaines écoles utilisent l'anglais (English Medium of Instruction - EMI schools) pendant que d'autres utilisent le cantonais (Chinese Medium of Instruction - CMI schools). En ce qui concerne les universités locales (qui donc s'adressent en priorité aux jeunes hongkongais), seule l'instruction en anglais est autorisée hormis dans certaines matières telle que les études du chinois.

Sur les campus hongkongais, ce qui est notable est que ceux-ci s'internationalisent de plus en plus du fait de la multiplication des échanges entre universités ainsi que de la volonté de Hong Kong de se positionner comme « pôle éducatif » (« education hub ») en Asie (Yu & Zhang 2016, 1). De surcroit, Yu et Zhang (2016, 2) soulignent « l'augmentation stable » des étudiants de Chine Populaire, ce qui signifie que l'emploi du putonghua est de plus en plus marqué sur les campus. Des statistiques du University Grants Committee (UGC) – l'institution finançant les universités à Hong Kong - indiquent que le nombre d'étudiants venant de Chine Populaire a triplé depuis ces onzes dernières années (Yu & Zhang 2016, 2). A cause de cela, les tensions entre étudiants hongkongais et chinois de Chine augmentent (Yu & Zhang 2016, 8). Yu et Zhang (2016, 8) notent que Hong Kong est devenu une ville « extrêmement politisée » (voir également Li, D. 2009, 76).

5.1.3 La question des changements sociaux à Hong Kong et de l'identité de Hong Kong

Cette section fait le point sur les changements sociaux récemment observés à Hong Kong alors que notre étude venait de commencer. La question de l'identité de Hong Kong, liée à ce contexte de changement, y est abordée.

Le Mouvement des Parapluies (Umbrella Movement) survenu à l'autome 2014 et qui a paralysé les quartiers d'affaires du centre de la ville pendant plus de deux mois (voir *City of Protest* de Dapiran, 2017 ; Bland, 2017) pose des questions importantes sur la société hongkongaise. Dapiran (2017, 95) décrit une société en « déséquilibre » bloquée entre un « fort degré de liberté » (par exemple, la liberté de la presse jusqu'ici respectée) et un « faible niveau de représentation démocratique », ce qui a déclenché les protestations du Mouvement des Parapluies. Dapiran (2017, 95) suggère que le Mouvement des Parapluies est révélateur de la question identitaire qui se pose dans le territoire depuis plusieurs années :

> The Umbrella Movement and all the protest movements that came before it were never just about the immediate issue at hand – whether the universal suffrage or the protection of heritage buildings or support for democracy in Mainland China. These protests have always had at their core anxiety about Hong Kong's identity. (Dapiran 2017, 108)

Même si selon le quotidien de presse en langue anglaise South China Morning Post (SCMP), « la plupart » des Hongkongais s'identifient plutôt comme honkongais que comme chinois (Blundy, 12 Nov. 2016), le Mouvement des Parapluies a en fait mis en évidence des divergences profondes au sujet de l'identité et du futur de Hong Kong au sein de la société, notamment entre supporteurs pro-démocratie d'un côté et supporteurs de la politique de Beijing de l'autre (voir Schlesinger *et al.,* 7 Sep. 2016).

5.2. Présence du français à Hong Kong

La seconde partie de ce chapitre dresse l'inventaire de la présence du français à Hong Kong en mentionnant la communauté française vivant à Hong Kong, les institutions où il est possible d'apprendre le français et la politique culturelle française. Elle donne quelques exemples d'évènements culturels français qui se sont progressivement inscrits dans le calendrier culturel annuel de la ville.

5.2.1 La communauté française à Hong Kong

Cette section résume le profile de la communauté française à Hong Kong. Sur environ sept millions d'individus qui vivent à Hong Kong (Census, 2018) et les 60% de cette population née à Hong Kong (Population By-census, 2016), il y aurait environ 25 000 Français vivant à Hong Kong (en comparaison avec 4 000 allemands et 2 000 italiens) et 800 entreprises françaises enregistrées à la Chambre de Commerce Française de Hong Kong (Panorama of the French Community in Hong Kong, 31 Mar. 2016). Cette population augmenterait régulièrement (voir Keegan, 28 Dec. 2017).

5.2.2 Apprendre le français à Hong Kong

Cette section dresse la liste et décrit quelques endroits où l'on peut apprendre le français à Hong Kong avec en particulier : Le Lycée Français International (LFI), les institutions primaires et secondaires locales ainsi que les institutions tertiaires et les écoles privées locales ou commerciales telle que l'Alliance Française de Hong Kong et Macao.

Il est noté que très peu d'élèves s'inscrivent en langues additionnelles (telles que décrites dans cette étude) à l'examen public du Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE). Le nombre d'élèves qui passent l'examen de français est notamment très peu élevé (voir par exemple, Press Release 2016 Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination[2]).

Cependant, il faut remarquer que la réalité du nombre d'apprenants de ces langues est sans aucun doute plus élevée du fait de la forte compétivité de la société hongkongaise et de l'anxiété perpétuelle des parents de donner à leurs enfants des atoûts qui les démarquent des autres. Le site du Consulat Général de France et de Macao annonce les chiffres de 50 000 personnes qui parleraient le français occasionnellement à Hong Kong et de 2% de la population hongkongaise qui aurait appris cette langue (French Language in Hong Kong[3], 18 Sep. 2014). L'Alliance Française fait état d'environ 6000 élèves qui apprennent le français dans ses locaux chaque année.

5.2.3 Evènements culturels français à Hong Kong

Cette section présente le calendrier des évènements culturel français à Hong Kong notant qu'il est chargé avec notamment, les festivals annuels connus sous les noms de 'Le French May' et 'French Cinépanorama'. Ces évènements sont organisés principalement par le Consulat Général de France et de Macao à travers son Service de Coopération et d'Action Culturelle en tandem avec des partenaires locaux français tels que l'Alliance Française de Hong Kong et Macao, le

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[2] PRESS RELEASE2016 Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination Catégorie C subjects results released: http://cfswahyan.weebly.com/uploads/3/8/5/4/38548659/20160712_hkdse_full_results_eng.pdf
[3] French Language in Hong Kong. (2014 Sep.18). Retrieved from https://hongkong.consulfrance.org/French-Language-in-Hong-Kong (Accessed on 19 Nov. 2018).

Lycée Français International, the French Alumni Association, le Centre d'Études Français sur la Chine contemporaine et l'Association of French Teachers in Hong Kong and Macau (AFLE).

La politique du gouvernement français en matière de promotion de la langue, de la culture française dans le monde (notamment à travers la Francophonie) est également brièvement introduite dans cette section. Il y est mentionné que la Francophonie se présente « comme une composante majeure du plurilinguisme mondial » (Rapport d'information sur la Francophonie 22 janvier 2014, p.7) et que l'Asie est perçue par l'institution de la Francophonie comme la région du monde avec la plus importante croissance du nombre d'apprenants du français dans le monde (Rapport d'information sur la Francophonie 22 janvier 2014, p. 36).

5.2.4 La présence commerciale et visuelle du français à Hong Kong

Cette section complète le portrait de la présence française à Hong Kong en faisant mention des images commerciales et visuelles qui interpellent le passant dans la rue comme par exemple des publicités géantes, des façades de magasins qui ventent les marques de luxe françaises (par exemple, Dior, Chanel) dans les quartiers centraux de la ville et la multitude de produits français (tels que parfums, mode, fromages, vins, etc.) qui se trouvent facilement dans la ville.

En plus de ces images qui circulent, il y a des références plus locales au français et à la culture française comme par exemple des noms de restaurants ou de boutiques tels que « pe:tite », « visionaire » ou « amelie ». Il est probable que ces références seraient jugées comme incorrectes (par exemple le mot « visionaire » ou « amelie » sans accent aigu sur la lettre *e*) ou tout du moins surprenantes (par exemple, « pe:tite ») par un francophone qui passerait par là.

Par ce biais, l'aspect local de la pratique linguistique s'invite dans cette étude. Elle fait référence aux recherches de Sergeant (2009) sur la pratique de l'anglais au Japon ainsi qu'à Blommaert (2010, 29-30) qui s'est également intéressé à l'utilisation de l'anglais dans les rues japonaises. En rapport à ses travaux, Sergeant (2009, 106) observe que « l'intelligibilité mutuelle » (p. 167) n'est pas le seul objectif dans la pratique d'une langue et que vient s'y ajouter les émotions et le rêve (c'est-à-dire l'imaginaire). Il est donc question de dimension symbolique de la langue (ibid., p. 1).

Chapitres 6, 7, 8 et 9 Corpus d'expériences d'apprentissage du français

Les chapitres 6, 7, 8 et 9 de la thèse ont la forme de récits reconstitués de l'expérience d'apprentissage du français des quatre participantes dans notre étude (voir section 4.7). Les quatre textes sont présentés séparément conformément à l'objectif de la thèse de « penser par cas » (voir chapitre 4, section 4.2), c'est-à-dire de mettre l'accent sur les particularités de l'expérience.

Les chapitres sont organisés en fonction de l'âge des participantes en commençant par la plus jeune : Candice (chapitre 6), Yasmina (chapitre 7), IC (chapitre 8) et enfin, Nicole (chapitre 9). Comme il a été expliqué dans le chapitre 4 (sections 4.2, 4.6 et 4.7), les textes présentés dans ces chapitres sont des reconstructions de l'expérience autour d'une « énigme » et autour de la question « Quel rôle joue le français dans la vie des participantes ? » qui sert de trame au récit. Les FRT sont l'issue d'un procédé de co-construction entre les participantes et le chercheur qui s'est déroulé tout au long de la recherche y compris pendant la collecte des données ainsi que lors de l'entretien intermédiaire pendant lequel le chercheur et les participantes se sont mises d'accord sur une interprétation plausible du rôle du français dans leur vie au moment de l'enquête.

Chaque FRT est composé de trois parties distinctes. La première est essentiellement descriptive et organisée selon un axe chronologique qui retrace la trajectoire de la participante depuis la petite enfance. Elle inclut des intitulés tels que : la famille, les langues à l'école (par exemple, l'expérience d'apprentissage des langues à l'école primaire, dans le secondaire, à l'université et pendant un séjour linguistique à l'étranger) et l'expérience professionnelle selon chaque cas. La seconde partie est également principalement descriptive et est consacrée aux perceptions de chaque participante au sujet de la culture et de la langue françaises (ou « francité » ; voir chapitre 2). Enfin, la dernière partie intitulée « Exploration de la signification du français pour (nom de la participante) » est la partie explicative de l'analyse, celle qui offre une interprétation plausible du rôle du français dans la vie de chaque participante au moment de l'enquête, c'est-à-dire à un moment très précis et unique de leur vie.

Comme aucun élément du corpus (par exemple, enregistrement ou transcription des entretiens ; voir section 4.4.) n'est accessible au lecteur, des citations permettent d'entendre la voix des participantes, et des extraits de dialogue entre le chercheur et les participantes permettent au lecteur de mieux comprendre le processus de co-construction ainsi que l'interprétation qui est livrée dans le FRT.

Chapitre 10 Discussion et pistes interprétatives

Le chapitre 10 commence avec la section 10.1 qui résume les perspectives découvertes par l'étude en listant une série de points clés. La section 10.2 met en lumière les perspectives offertes par l'étude en contraste avec la perspective de l'acculturation. Les sections 10.3, 10.4 et 10.5 développent les trois thèmes principaux qui émergent de l'analyse et qui sont : premièrement, l'apprentissage du français est un moyen de résister aux normes et contraintes de son environnement ; deuxièmement, l'apprentissage du français permet de redécouvrir son contexte local et se réconcilier avec lui ; troisièmement, les pratiques individualisées de la langue étrangère servent à se reconnecter avec soi-même et exprimer son individualité. La section 10.6 présente des pistes interprétatives (ou recommendations) au niveau méthodologique, théorique et pédagogique en lien avec les enseignements fournis par l'étude.

Les citations utilisées pour illustrer les thèmes principaux de l'analyse sont codées comme suit : INT1 (citations provenant du premier entretien) ; INT2 (second entretien) ; INT3 (troisième entretien) ; IRT meeting (entretien intermédiaire).

10.1 Les principaux résultats émergeant de l'analyse

En général, la présente étude suggère que les raisons d'apprendre le français à Hong Kong sont hautement personnelles et en étroite liaison avec le contexte, ce qui reflète la conception de l'expérience de Dewey (1981) :

> In an experience, things and events belonging to the world, physical and social, are transformed through the human context they enter, while the live creature is changed and developed through its intercourse with things previously external to it. (Dewey 1981, 251)

Les perspectives qui émergent de l'étude incluent les points clés suivants :

- L'étude souligne la capacité d'agentivité des invididus (Layder 1994, 145) qui utilisent le français pour se construire en fonction de ce qui leur semble « bien ou mal » pour eux (Rampton 2006, 12) et comme moyen de s'accomoder dynamiquement du contexte représenté comme un « complexe de micro-hégémonies » (Blommaert & Varis 2015, 3-5). Le français apparait donc comme l'une des réponses possible aux émotions suscitées par le contexte (y compris au niveau institutionnel et au niveau socio-politique, avec notamment, les tensions politiques récentes à Hong Kong). L'étude met l'accent sur la large palette d'expressions agentives liée à l'apprentissage d'une langue additionnelle minoritaire dans ce contexte.
-
- Cependant, le français n'apparait pas tant comme un acte de résistance contre son contexte mais comme une manière de se réconcilier avec lui et d'acquérir « a sense of societal and cultural belonging » (Hennig 2010a, 313). Ainsi, l'étude suggère qu'apprendre une langue peut être vu comme jouant un rôle dans la revitalisation du contexte au niveau local (voir Gee 2000, 121).
-
- L'étude montre que même si les participantes utilisent des stéréotypes de la francité, elles construisent et s'approprient cette francité de façon très personnelle. Elles construisent en quelque sorte leur propre francité en fonction de leurs besoins personnels et de leur rapport avec leur context tout en illustrant la remarque de Pennycook (2010, 80) : « the global is always manifested locally, and the local is always part of the global ». Cela résulte en d'importantes variations dans la perception locale de la langue et culture française.

- L'étude vient également ajouter des arguments sur le besoin de considérer une langue en liaison avec d'autre langues et d'autres cultures et non pas de manière isolée (par exemple, voir Coffey 2010, 125).
-
- L'étude montre aussi qu' une connaissance même limitée du français a un sens profond pour l'apprenant. Dans l'étude, les pratiques du français apparaissent comme des actes de construction identitaire. Le français est utilisé pour résister à son contexte mais aussi pour se réconcilier avec lui. C'est aussi un espace pour se retrouver (« a space to think » selon Nicole, INT2) et une manière de se reconnecter avec soi-même en prenant soin de soi. En d'autres termes, apprendre une langue est bien plus qu'apprendre correctement des codes linguistiques.
-
- Enfin, le français n'est pas la seule « niche » qui accompagne la construction de son identité mais l'une des multiples « micro-actions » que les individus choisissent pour définir qui ils sont (Blommaert & Varis 2015, 3-5).

10.2 Les perspectives de l'étude en comparaison avec la perspective de l'acculturation

Cette section a pour but de mettre en lumière les résultats de notre étude par rapport aux perspectives qui voit l'acculturation comme dynamique motivationelle dans l'apprentissage des langues étrangères. En sociolinguistique, le concept des « communities of practice » (or CoPs ; Lave & Wenger, 1991 ; Wenger, 1998) met l'accent sur le besoin des apprenants de « négocier un droit d'accès » à une culture ou à une communauté précise (par exemple, la communauté française).

Or, le désir d'acculturation n'est pas une motivation dans cette étude. La motivation des participantes pour le français dépasse l'idée de s'associer à une communauté parlant français et dépasse aussi l'idée de maitriser cette langue. Candice, qui apparait comme une apprenante très motivée, n'émet pas d'envie particulière pour continuer à l'apprendre. Bien que Yasmina évoque son intention de poursuivre des études en France dans le futur, ce projet parait lointain et vague et son niveau de français a peu évolué depuis qu'elle a fini ses études en 2012-2013. Pour

IC, l'université est loin (elle l'a quittée en 2006-2007) et son français semble avoir régressé de son propre aveu :

> You know after these few years of study of French…I'm trying to make use of them [French vocabulary]…I went to Paris, I go to a shop selling macarons and I just "Combien est-ce que c'est?" but I mistook it… 5 euros… I mistook 15 euros as 5 euros (laugh) so I paid 5 euros for actually 15 euros so it's a very interesting experience (IC INT1)

L'explication du rôle du français dans la vie de IC ainsi que dans celle des autres participantes est donc ailleurs et fait l'objet d'une description plus détaillée dans les sections 10.3, 10.4 et 10.5 ci-dessous.

10.3 L'apprentissage du français comme moyen de résister aux normes et contraintes de son environnement

Cette section est divisée en trois sous-sections qui illustrent chacune un aspect du thème « la langue comme résistance au contexte ». Ce theme fait référence à l' « agentivité » et au fait que le français est un moyen d'éviter de se laisser positionner d'une certaine manière par la société (Ollerhead 2012, 67; Rampton 2006, 12 ; Morita, 2004; Norton, 2001). Il illustre également la fluidité de l'expérience (Rampton 2006, 12 ; Bauman Z., 2000).

Par l'intermédiaire de citations empruntées aux chapitres 6, 7, 8 et 9, la section 10.3 brosse un portrait de l'expérience d'apprentissage du français en relation avec trois niveaux de contexte selon le cadre analytique de Barkhuizen (2016, 664 ; voir le chapitre 4, section 4.3). Ce cadre permet en effet de mieux visualiser la complexité et l'inter-connectivité de l'expérience avec le contexte sous des angles différents. Ce découpage artificiel est utilisé simplement pour expliquer les résultats de l'étude tout en sachant que dans la méthodologie de la « narrative inquiry », on s'intéresse avant tout à la continuité (« wholeness ») de l'expérience et à l'indissociabilité des différents éléments de cette expérience (Clandinin & Connelly 2000, 17).

L'expérience d'apprentissage du français des participantes est ainsi premièrement présentée sous l'angle de la résistance au niveau institutionnel du contexte (sous-section 10.3.1), puis en relation avec le contexte socio-politique de Hong Kong (sous-section 10.3.2) et enfin, comme outil au niveau personnel pour se reconnecter avec soi-même et (ré)affirmer son individualité (sous-section 10.3.3).

Une première conclusion est que l'apprentissage du français est un moyen de regagner du pouvoir sur son environnement dans un procédé dit de « rescaling » (voir Brenner, 2009, 2011 ; Blommaert, 2007), c'est-à-dire que l'individu « saute » d'un niveau de contexte à un autre de manière à récupérer un peu de son pouvoir agentif. Par exemple, Yasmina souffre d'un manque de confiance en elle dans son environnement professionnel et a des difficultés à s'exprimer en face de ses supérieurs ou de ses collègues en cantonais (niveau institutionnel du contexte ; voir Barkhuizen 2016, 663). Elle trouve au niveau personnel, à travers sa perception des barmans français qu'elle décrit comme étant hautains et impolis (« bitch face » ; Yasmina INT2), l'inspiration et la confiance d'être plus elle-même et de dire plus souvent ce qu'elle pense :

> you just speak directly and « I don't want to do that thing» and it's kind of truth and it's representing your own self (Yasmina INT2)

Quant à Nicole, pour des raisons économiques et familiales, elle ne peut pas poursuivre son rêve d'être artiste et est frustrée du manque de créativité dans son travail (niveau institutionnel du context). Elle compense ce manque en imaginant un projet futur autour des arts qui la satisferait pleinement. Le rôle du français dans cette entreprise - qui se situe essentiellement dans le domaine des idées et de l'imagination - est de lui fournir un modèle d'existence qu'elle aimerait avoir et qui est en contraste complet avec sa vie professionnelle du moment. Ses perceptions de la francité servent à renforcer l'idée qu'elle pourrait ne pas faire comme tout le monde si elle le désirait, ce qui l'aide à endurer les restrictions auxquelles elle est contrainte :

> Yeah it [French culture] gives me ideas about euh others' life living on the other side of the world, euh it's not necessary for me to live in the same way as other Hong Kong or the major Hong Kong people live. To live is to make yourself feel contented, or happy, or trying to offer help to others, and yeah it's… yeah it… should break away from the ideas or to physically been in Hong Kong (Nicole INT2)

Ainsi, le français apparait essentiellement dans les récits de construction identitaire des participantes à travers l'imagination, où elles se réinventent (Wenger 1998, 185) et cherchent de nouvelles « possibilités pour le futur » (Norton Peirce 1995, 410).

Une deuxième conclusion est le rôle prééminent de la subjectivité (Ortner, 2005) dans la construction identitaire. Durant l'enquête, les réactions des participantes vis-à-vis de leur environnement apparaissaient souvent liées au désir, aux émotions ou à des intentions qu'elles ne peuvent pas assouvir (voir Ortner 2005, 34). Dans le cas de Candice, par exemple, il s'agit de combattre les émotions déclenchées par les opinions des autres concernant la beauté et la féminité qui l'affectent personnellement :

> When I was young and… many… not many but… my family particularly, grandma, my grandma said that I had to remove the [beauty] spots (Candice INT1)

A travers la culture française qu'elle se représente comme acceptatrice de la beauté sous toutes ses formes, Candice trouve un miroir pour se regarder positivement, pour affirmer ses valeurs personnelles sur la féminité en général et pour se reconnecter avec elle-même (voir Clandinin & Connelly 2000, 50; Clandinin & Rosiek 2007, 39 & 41). A travers sa représentation des femmes françaises, elle justificie son refus d'artifices et retrouve confiance en sa physionomie et en la sorte de femme elle désire devenir :

> They [French women] don't need plastic surgery, they just bring themselves up… I mean women in France… and they're really confident and it's really charming not like… maybe… Korea! They [Korean women] do a lot of things on outside of the body or make-up, and they're still really not confident about themselves. (Candice INT1)

Un autre aspect soulevé dans cette section 10.3 est l'impact des changements socio-politiques à Hong Kong (voir Bland 2017, 120) sur les participantes. Le climat de tension qui règne affecte leurs perceptions du future et donc de leur identité dans ce futur. Nicole présente son lien avec la communauté international à travers l'apprentissage des langues comme une façon de se rassurer ('At least to… to make myself feel better', Nicole INT2) et de sécuriser son avenir :

> China can change just within a second. They… there's no logic you can guess. So… better to have a secondhand [plan] (Nicole INT2)

Le récit de IC souligne également des incertitudes liées au contexte politique de Hong Kong qui lui fait prendre la décision de revenir travailler à Hong Kong au sein d'une entreprise locale après avoir commencé une carrière internationale pendant laquelle elle a beaucoup voyagé et travaillé avec des gens de toutes nationalités :

> It is my home somehow I'm still insisting that why I have to leave my place to somebody from outside make my home worse? There's no reason for that, so from this moment I will have the same feeling about last time that I'm happy to be here and I want this place to be better and better, not by moving out but staying here. Maybe influence in a positive way to the next generation (IC INT3)

En se faisant, elle réaffirme son identité hongkongaise. La section 10.3 se termine sur l'idée dominante que l'apprentissage du français est non seulement une manière d'exercer son « agentivité » contre des contraintes hégémoniques mais aussi de se construire soi-même, selon l'idée d'identité comme projet de « *self-realization* » émise par Layder (2004, 143).

10.4 L'apprentissage du français comme moyen de redécouvrir son contexte local et de se réconcilier avec lui

L'étude montre également que l'apprentissage du français n'est pas seulement une manière de s'affirmer face à son contexte. Cette expérience permet aussi de se rapprocher de lui en apprenant à mieux le comprendre et à l'appréhender. Les récits de Yasmina et Nicole montrent qu'elles rejettent l'idée d'opposition avec leur environnement et voient plutôt leur ouverture sur

le monde à travers l'apprentissage de langues étrangères comme un moyen de prendre du recul et de le regarder avec des yeux nouveaux (Wenger 1998, 185), motivées par l'envie (et le besoin) de se réconcilier avec lui.

L'extrait suivant provenant du récit de Nicole illustre ce point. Nicole, qui a été élevée dans l'esprit traditionnel du respect des aînés et des règles sociétales selon Confucius, indique qu'elle préfère l'idée de trouver des alternatives pour exister à Hong Kong sans être en opposition avec la manière dont les gens fonctionnent dans cette société, même si ce fonctionnement ne la satisfait pas :

> …there are always alternatives or other ways to present yourself or […] there're many ways to achieve one goal […] or to break away from the tradition, but not violating any rules or it can be simply something new (Nicole INT2)

Yasmina pense que l'apprentissage du japonais et du français l'aidera à exprimer ce qu'elle veut dire à ces collègues avec lesquels elle a du mal à communiquer mais rejette l'idée d'imposer ses opinions aux autres :

> To speak up my mind [...] and at the same time, I am not standing against... [...] because I just want to speak my voice but I don't want to [...] to have your own opinions but you are not violating others' beliefs [...] both parties are really communicating and try to understand each other (Yasmina INT1)

En d'autres termes, apprendre une langue ne veut pas dire développer imposer de nouvelles perspectives aux autres et se mettre en opposition avec les autres mais plutôt acquérir plus de souplesse et de recul pour pouvoir accepter son contexte et accepter le compromis.

L'aspect de réconciliation avec son contexte dans le récit de IC est différent de celui de Yasmina et Nicole. L'appropriation des langues dans le récit de IC apparait comme une manière de réaffirmer l'identité de Hong Kong à un moment sensible de son histoire. Le français est présenté comme une manière d'assoir sa différence avec les Chinois de Chine qui n'utilisent pas de

langues étrangères dans la conversation de tous les jours alors que les Hongkongais mélangent le cantonais avec l'anglais avec quelques fois quelques mots de français :

> I think French can use along with English... for example...in the current company I'm working with sometimes we'll [her boss and her] speak French "Au revoir" "Bonjour" "How does it feel?... Comme ci-comme ça" yeah, they know each other but it makes your language into more fun, it puts more elements into it and makes it more... diverse...' (IC INT1)

En mélangeant les langues, IC renforce l'idée que Hong Kong est différente du reste de la Chine. Par exemple, dans l'extrait ci-dessous, la culture hongkongaise apparait plus proche de la culture britannique que de la culture chinoise continentale :

> … if it [French-English code-mixing] is the way that they [British people] speak … then it is… just like code mix[ing] between English and …Cantonese in Hong Kong but for example like Mainland immigrant, they won't so you can differentiate between how localized you are in a particular country or language (IC INT1)

Par ce moyen, IC réaffirme son identité hongkongaise qui est à la fois cosmopolite et multiculturelle et attachée au contexte local (exprimée par le terme « Hongkongish » dans l'extrait ci-dessous) :

> I won't have the definite nationality of culture here because we are, I am I'm born in Hong Kong and I'm born to be a multicultural person. So my lifestyle is totally a mixture but I think mostly I think it's Hongkongish because most of my time is in Hong Kong (IC INT2)

Pour résumer, notre étude affine la compréhension de la tension qui existe entre « global » et « local » ainsi qu'entre « fluidité » et « fixité ». Tout d'abord, elle illustre l'interconnection de ce qui est « local » d'avec ce qui est « global » (Pennycook, 2010 ; Appadurai, 2000) en montrant qu'il est difficile de séparer les deux puisque la notion de ce qui est « local » et de ce qui est « global » est interprété différemment par les individus et est changeante en fonction des

évolutions à la fois du contexte et des individus. D'autre part, l'étude renforce le fait que les identités sont construites de manière discursive intégrant la fois des aspects de résistance et de conformité (Weedon 1997, 109), c'est à dire de « fluidité » et de « fixité ». En montrant comment les individus « actively interpret the world » (Weedon 1997, 93) et sont à la fois positionnés par lui et inspirés à agir par ce positionnement (Hall 1996, 5), l'étude souligne que fluidité et fixité n'ont pas d'existence ontologique. Les pratiques de résistance ont à la fois des qualités de « fluidité » et de « fixité » et il en est de même pour la conformité.

10.5 Les pratiques individualisées du français comme moyens de construire son identité

La section 10.5 met en avant les manières dont les participants utilisent le français. L'objectif est d'illustrer le lien entre pratiques langagières et construction identitaire ainsi que d'expliquer de quoi ces pratiques sont faites.

Les pratiques du français dans cette étude reflétent l'idée de Pennycook (2010, 2) qu'une langue est surtout « une activité plutôt [qu'une] structure » :

> [I]t is not language that governs the speakers of the language but rather the speakers that negotiate what possible language forms they want to use for what purpose (Pennycook 2010, 129)

Yasmina illustre ce propos en parlant des langues comme s'il s'agissait d'une idée à peindre (« similar to put paint on a canvas » ; Yasmina IRT meeting). Elle explique qu'elle se sert de plusieurs types de média (des mots dans deux langues qui accompagnent une photo noir et blanc qu'elle a développée elle-même) ainsi que d'une typographie particulière (des minuscules d'imprimerie et des points entre chaque groupe de mots) pour créer un sens qui transcende l'idée d'une langue se résumant à l'utilisation de mots et de syntaxe. Son poste sur FB (ci-dessous) illustre le fait qu'une langue, pour Yasmina, est plus que cela :

Artéfact 1 : Photo FB par Yasmina (23 Mai 2013) partagée dans son Technolinguistic Report

Yasmina explique que son choix des mots est lié au fait que les mots résonnent émotionnellement et parce qu'ils suggèrent des ambiances, des émotions ou du mouvement : « So I think sometimes the word itself is associated with the atmosphere, the feeling and also including some kind of actions » (Yasmina INT2).

L'utilisation des langues chez Yasmina illustre non seulement l'idée d' « activité » de Pennycook mais aussi celle de Blommaert (2010, 103) qu'avec un « répertoire tronqué » (« truncated repertoire ») qui peut sembler incomplet et même incorrect, on peut exprimer des choses profondes qui ont un sens pour soi (voir Blommaert & Backus, 2013).

Une autre pratique qui ressort de l'étude est l'utilisation du français pour dissimuler ce que l'on veut dire sur les réseaux sociaux ainsi que cibler de manière précise un groupe d'interlocuteurs :

> I think it is my way to differentiate people who want to understand you from others or I just want some minority people …. to understand what feeling I am having (IC INT3)

Yasmina parle du français comme d'une « clef mystérieuse » (« mystery key ») et comme d'un « espace privé » (« private corner ») dans lequel elle peut partager des souvenirs qui resteront secrets puisqu'elle ne s'adresse qu'à un public ciblé qui a partagé son expérience d'apprentissage du français et qui donc, seul, pourra comprendre ses intentions (Yasmina INT2). Le thème du

français comme « code » apparait également dans le récit de IC : « it's like a code » (IC INT3) ; I want to post something but I don't want others to "read it directly" » (IC TLR).

Pour Candice, par ailleurs, il est question de pouvoir exprimer à travers le français des émotions librement grâce d'une part, au fait que le français est une langue qu'elle se représente comme synonyme de licence poétique (« I don't think I could do the same effect using Chinese or English », Candice INT2) et d'autre part, parce qu'elle sait que peu de gens comprendront ce qu'elle exprime :

> French is a new language *you could put all yourself into this* and not many people that know me can understand what I wrote (Candice INT2)

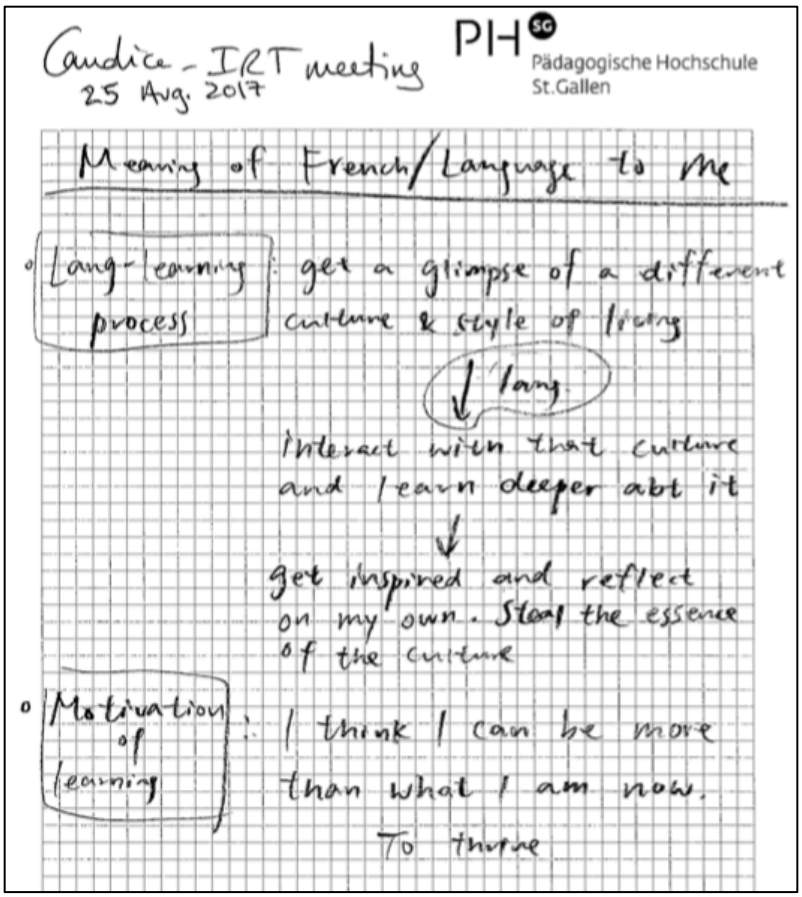
De ce fait, le français apparait comme une libération dans une société que Candice décrit comme permettant peu l'expression individuelle. A travers le français, elle peut faire vivre ses émotions à travers les caractères qu'elle crée (dans le cadre d'activités d'écriture créatives dans ses cours de français à l'université) et révéler au lecteur une part de qui elle est vraiment à l'intérieur d'elle-même:

> I like imagining characters and have empathy with them. In some way they express who I am because I put a bit of my feeling and identity in them. (Candice Reflexive essay Dec. 2015)

Dans ses notes préparatrices pour l'entretien intermédiaire (IRT meeting ; voir chapitre 4), Candice résume en ces mots le sens profound qu'apprendre le français a pour elle :

> [Through learning French] I think I can be more than what I am now (Candice, IRT meeting)

Une copie des notes d'où cette phrase est extraite est présentée ci-dessous :


Candice - IRT meeting
25 Aug. 2017

PH SG Pädagogische Hochschule St.Gallen

Meaning of French/Language to me

- Lang-learning process: get a glimpse of a different culture & style of living
  ↓ lang
  interact with that culture and learn deeper abt it
  ↓
  get inspired and reflect on my own. Steal the essence of the culture
- Motivation of learning: I think I can be more than what I am now.
  To thrive

Artéfact 2 : Notes de Candice en préparation pour l'entretien intermédiaire (25 Août 2017)

En résumé, les pratiques décrites dans cette étude illustrent le rôle personnel et unique des langues, révèle la fluidité des pratiques d'apprenants multilingues qui contribuent à la construction de soi. Les pratiques du français de IC, Candice ou Yasmina ne sont pas limitées à des mots. Leurs pratiques intègrent des perspectives culturelles, incluent des éléments sémiotiques, sont interactionnelles et sont leurs manières propres de réagir à leurs circonstances sociétales (« to act and react to given societal circumstances in their own way » ; Hennig 2010a, 309). Les pratiques du français des participantes évoquent également le fait que les individus cherchent à créer des petits espaces d'originalité pour renforcer son individualité propre : « small spaces of uniqueness, of things that we believe we do not share with others » (Blommaert & Varis 2015, 27).

Les pratiques langagières décrites dans cette étude rejoignent les descriptions des pratiques dites de « translanguaging » (Li W., 2011 ; voir aussi le chapitre 2). Selon Li Wei (2011, 94), ces pratiques sont synonymes d' « aptitude à défoncer les règles et les codes comportementaux »:

> [T]he ability to choose between following and flouting the rules and norms of behavior, including the use of language, and to push and break boundaries between the old and the new, the conventional and the original, and the acceptable and the challenging. (Li W. 2011, 94)

A travers les pratiques langagières diverses et multilingues décrites dans cette étude est interrogée la notion traditionnelle de ce qu'est une langue et la notion de frontière dans la conception de l'identité nationale (Creese et Blackledge 2015, 24 ; Makoni & Pennycook, 2007).

10.6 Les piste interprétatives ouvertes par l'étude

La section 10.6 suggère un nombre de pistes possibles en lien avec les perspectives développées par notre étude.

Pour commencer, il est noté que le français peut être considéré comme « plus qu'une langue » avec les notions d' outil de construction identitaire, de langue indivisible (dans le sens d'entité qui ne peut se résumer à la somme de ses caractéristiques linguistiques ou à des images stéréotypées) et d'entité qui ne peut s'envisager en isolation d'autres langues et cultures.

Ainsi, le secteur éducatif devrait repenser ce qu'on entend par « langues » (avec la notion de frontière de la langue) ainsi que repenser leur rôle notamment pour l'individu (en particulier, les langues additionnelles minoritaires comme le français à Hong Kong) ce qui reviendrait à repenser l'enseignement des langues.

Cette étude propose des pistes méthodologiques (10.6.1) et théoriques (10.6.2) pour la recherche ainsi que des pistes éducatives pour les acteurs de l'enseignement des langues (10.6.3).

10.6.1 Au niveau méthodologique

La méthodologie dite de la « narrative inquiry » a permis aux individus de cette étude de mieux se comprendre eux-mêmes, comme l'exprime Candice dans l'extrait ci-dessous :

> Because when I'm clear about myself, the outside world seems to be clear… it's like a mirror, what you see in the mirror is actually not about the things or the actual things, it's about myself (Candice INT2)

Clandinin et Connelly (2000) soulignent que cette méthodologie aide les individus à s'ouvrir à de nouvelles perspectives pour eux-mêmes :

> The outcome of narrative inquiry is important not so much for the knowledge they contain but for the vicarious testing of life possibilities […] that they permit (Clandinin & Connelly 2000, 42)

De même, cette méthodologie permet aux individus de réaliser que leur expérience est digne d'intérêt particulièrement pour des individus qui se sentent en marge de la société mais aussi tous ceux qui ont besoin de gagner en confiance personnelle. Ceci peut avoir des répercussions à la fois pour la société et pour la salle de classe (voir Clandinin interviewée par O'Donoghue, 2012).

Une première implication de cette étude est donc d'utiliser la méthodologie de la « narrative inquiry » non pas seulement comme méthode scientifique mais également comme moyen de stimuler les individus en leur faisant prendre conscience d'eux-mêmes. Laplantine note également qu'à travers soi-même, on peut mieux comprendre les autres (« Si je peux comprendre les autres c'est parce que je suis autre que moi » ; Laplantine 1999, 81), ce qui est une autre contribution possible de la méthodologie « narrative inquiry » pour s'insérer dans nos sociétés culturellement diverses.

10.6.2 Au niveau théorique

Un autre apport de cette étude est son éclairage au niveau théorique. Dans un article récent, Li Wei (2016, 20) indique que nous vivons dans une ère de « post-multilingualism » qui est caractérisée par la « co-existence or co-use of multiple languages ». Li Wei (2016, 8) souligne non seulement le caractère « transformatif » des pratiques langagières des apprenants multilingues (voir aussi Flores *et al.* 2017, 549 ; Li & Zhu, 2013 ; Li W. 2011) mais aussi le fait que les langues « can be appropriated and exploited without allegiance to its historically native speakers » (Li, W. 2016, 2).

Dans notre étude, les pratiques langagières des participantes multilingues apparaissent comme une expression du phénomène de « de/reterritorialization » de la langue (Jacquemet, 2005). Elles remettent également en question les notions de multilinguisme (Heller, 2007 ; Otsuji & Pennycook 2010, 243 ; Jørgensen *et al*., 2011) ainsi que les notions de compétence linguistique (Flores *et al.* 2017, 545-551) et de fixité/fluidité (voir la conclusion de la section 10.3 ; Otsuji & Pennycook 2010, 244).

Les chercheurs se sont déjà efforcés d'appréhender la compétence linguistique sous des angles nouveaux. On parle de « compétence symbolique » (« symbolic competence » ; Kramsch, 2006 ; Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008), de « compétence interculturelle » (Dervin 2011 ; Dervin, Paatela-Nieminen, Kuoppala & Riitaoja, 2012 ; Dervin & Tournebise, 2012) ou encore de « compétence plurilingue et pluriculturelle », une notion développée par les chercheurs pour le compte du Conseil de l'Europe (voir Coste, Moore & Zarate, 1997 ; Beacco & Byram, 2003, 2007 ; Candelier, 2003, 2008; Moore & Gajo, 2009 ; Castelloti & Moore, 2005). On parle d'une compétence « plurielle, complexe, voire composite et hétérogène » (Coste, Moore & Zarate, 1997) qui serait à la fois constituée de « capacités, d'attitudes et de savoir qui s'acquièrent » (Macaire 2008, 25 ; voir également le Cadre Européen Commun de Référence (CEFR) tel que décrit par Council of Europe, 2001, 2018 ; Candelier 2003, 83-84). On s'intéresse également à la notion de « répertoire plurilingue » (Beacco 2005, 19 ; Busch 2012, 521 ; Blommaert 2009, 424).

Cependant, ces pistes de réflexion ne nous paraissent pas suffisantes pour adresser les perspectives soulevées par notre étude c'est à dire la langue comme outil de construction

identitaire et comme outil conçu en relation avec d'autres langues et cultures et en relation avec des besoins changeants étroitement liés au contexte.

Il semble que la question de l'évaluation de langues additionnelles minoritaires (tel que le français à Hong Kong) n'est également pas suffisament posée ou n'est pas/plus appropriée dans le cas - comme dans cette étude – où les langues additionnelles s'éloignent de façon marquée du désir d'appropriation de codes linguistiques ou de s'insérer dans une « community of practice » pré-établie et fixe (comme il a été souligné dans notre étude).

10.6.3 Au niveau éducatif

Au niveau éducatif, des pistes sont également avancées.

Kramsch met le doigt sur le fait que les mécanismes motivationnels dans l'appentissage de langues sont de dépasser des frontières, que celles-ci soient linguistiques ou nationales :

> [The] symbolic self is less intent on decoding than on interpreting words and their indexicalities, less focused on the standard monolingual use of one language than on the ability to use one language or the other, less keen on explaining and judging one national culture versus another than on understanding their owns and others trajectories and values. (Kramsch 2009, 189)

Ainsi l'enseignant de langues devrait prendre en compte l'acteur social et sa capacité à agir (Moore & Gajo, 2009, 142) en écho à la notion phare dans l'œuvre d'Antony Giddens (1991, 6) sur la capacité humaine à « s'auto-actualiser » et à l'émancipation (« self-actualisation and empowerment »).

Une première suggestion est d'appréhender l'apprenant de langues au sein de son contexte socio-politique (Heller 2007, 345). Comme le note Makoe (2014, 665), les apprenants de langues ne sont pas de « passive participants in institutional socialisation processes » et continuent d'être des acteurs sociaux actifs dans la salle de classe. Pour donner à la salle de classe un visage plus social, Flores *et al.* (2017, 550) suggèrent tout d'abord de prendre conscience des contraintes qui

agissent sur les apprenants alors que et Kubota *et al.* (2003, 21) évoquent les questions sociales, de diversité et d'inéqualité comme étant au centre des préoccupations de tout apprenant de langues. Les auteurs insistent donc sur le fait qu'un cours de langue ne devrait pas laisser de côté les questions de politique sociale :

> Researchers and practitioners must shift their attention beyond apolitical appreciation and celebration of foreign culture, to critically explore issues of diversity and sociopolitical aspects of human communication, and to make foreign language education instrumental in creating greater equality. (Kubota *et al.* 2003, 22)

De même, Ollerhead (2012, 80) parle du besoin de mettre en place une « pédagogie transformative » et de la nécessité de donner des occasions aux apprenants de « s'approprier les objectifs du cours de langue » qui leur offrent « more powerful identity positions for the future » (Ollerhead 2012, 79). Em d'autres termes, le cours de langue ne devrait pas confiner l'apprenant de langues dans un seul rôle (celui d'apprenant) mais au contraire lui donner des occasions de s'exprimer sur divers sujets (y compris dans d'autres langues que la langue cible) et en se faisant, d'exercer son identité sociale.

Kramsch (2009) explique sa manière d'envisager l'enseignement à des apprenants multilingues comme une chose vivante qui s'active autour d'expériences vécues et ressenties dans sa chair :

> Teaching the multilingual subject means teaching language as a living form, experienced and remembered bodily, with a relation to an Other that is mediated by symbolic forms – an experience that an increasing number of students nowadays have already had at home or by living in multilingual neighborhoods' (Kramsch 2009, 191).

Une autre piste éducative serait de positionner le cours de langues comme opportunité d'affirmation et de définition de soi, qui dépasse l'idée traditionnelle du cours de langue. Hennig (2010a, 2010b) propose une pédagogie qui intégrerait l'idée de « formation pour soi-même » (« self-formation ») ou comme le dit Layder (2004), l'idée de « self-realization ». Ceci pourrait inclure, par exemple, de laisser les apprenants décider de ce qu'ils souhaiteraient discuter en

classe et de mettre en avant la notion de plaisir, comme ce qui se passe dans l'apprentissage individuel des langues hors contexte éducatif (Hennig 2010a, 320 ; Kramsch, 2009 ; Francis, 2010).

Des activités qui explorent à la fois les domaines de l'interculturalité, des relations interpersonnelles et des émotions seraient un moyen de faire sortir les apprenants d'eux-mêmes. Bauman R. (2000, 4) propose le theâtre comme méthode de réflexion - à la fois pour les acteurs et pour le public - sur la construction et la négotiation de l'identité. Stratilaki (2012, 197) insiste sur le fait de donner aux apprenants multilingues le choix de combiner plusieurs langues, notamment dans l'écriture (voir également Belz, 2002). Kramsch (2006, 206) rappelle en effet que pour beaucoup d'apprenants de langue apprendre une langue est une forme de libération des contraintes liées à sa langue maternelle.

Cela étant dit, l'étude montre que les participantes sont attachées à apprendre les codes et règles linguistiques du français et que donc, il ne s'agit pas uniquement de privilégier les pratiques dites de « fluidité » au détriment de celles qui seraient considérées comme ayant des attribus de « fixité » car tournées vers l'acquisition des normes et règles linguistiques. Il s'agit d'aborder les deux de manière équilibrée.

Chapitre 11 Conclusion

Le chapitre 11 commence par un résumé du processus qui a conduit à mener cette étude et rappelle les différentes étapes ainsi que perspectives majeures soulevées par l'étude. Une seconde section est consacrée aux limites de l'étude et une troisième propose des pistes de réflexion pour l'avenir.

11. 1 Les limites de l'étude

Une première limite de l'étude serait de dire que l'étude s'adosse principalement sur ce que rapportent les participantes. Cependant, Ochs et Capps (1996, 21) soulignent que tout narrateur ne peut que partager ses représentations et évocations partielles du monde. Clandinin et Rosiek (2007) notent également :

> Experience, for the pragmatist, is always more than we can know and represent in a single statement, paragraph, or book. Every representation, therefore, no matter how faithful to that which it tries to depict, involves selective emphasis of our experience. (Clandinin & Rosiek 2007, 39)

D'autre part, Pavlenko (2007) remarque que les narrateurs 'use the act of narration to impose meaning on experience' (p. 168). Comme il a été mentionné à plusieurs reprises dans la thèse, l'interprétation de l'expérience est temporaire car l'expérience est sans cesse en movement et l'interprétation de cette expérience n'est valable qu'à un moment bien determiné. S'il est possible que les participantes aient été influencées par l'identité du chercheur (c'est à dire par le fait que je sois française, expatriée à Hong Kong et enseignante de langue) et qu'elles aient exagéré le rôle de l'apprentissage du français et de la culture francophone dans leurs récits (en particulier, les côtés positifs), elles ont aussi utilisé leur récit pour se présenter au chercheur d'une certaine manière (Pavlenko 2007, 177) selon la définition même de l'identité qui se construit par le discours et en relation avec d'autres éléments. Par ailleurs, comme le soulignent aussi Davies et Harré : « who one is, that is, what sort of person one is, is always an open question with a shifting answer » (1999, 216).

Dès le départ, l'étude a fait mention qu'il s'agissait de comprendre et d'interpréter la signification de l'apprentissage du français avec le participant dans un processus de co-construction et non pas de chercher à déterminer une quelconque « valeur réelle » (« truth value »; Pavlenko 2007, 176) de l'apprentissage du français (voir aussi Chapitre 4, section 4.2.3). En outre, comme le souligne Hennig (2010a, 311), l'interprétation se fait toujours « aux dépens et en excluant d'autres interprétations et constructions du savoir » et une étude de ce type a surtout pour but d'ouvrir un espace de discussion. Clandinin (2013, 51) note que l'objet de la méthodologie « narrative inquiry » n'est pas donner de « réponse définitive ». Les chercheurs utilisant la méthodologie de la « narrative inquiry » ne peuvent procéder qu'avec « an attitude of knowing that other possibilities, interpretations, and ways of explaining things are possible » (Clandinin et Rosiek (2017, 13 ; voir également Passeron & Revel 2005, 25).

Une autre limite incontournable de l'étude est qu'elle est située dans un contexte politique et social unique qui a forcément des résonnances particulières sur le sentiment d'appartemance

identitaire. Par ailleurs, Hong Kong est un environnement urbain où la fluidité et la diversité sont probablement plus prononcées que dans des contextes non-urbains. Dans un tel contexte, les enjeux de fixité peuvent paraitre moins visibles qu'ailleurs. Des études complémentaires seraient nécessaires pour assurer un équilibre.

Une dernière limite est qu'il n'y a pas de participants masculins. La prédominance des femmes dans cette étude reflète premièrement, le fait que peu d'hommes se sont portés volontaires pour prendre part à notre étude et deuxièmement, qu'il y a majoritairement des femmes dans les cours de français à Hong Kong. Le fait que surtout des femmes aient voulu prendre part à l'étude renvoie aussi à l'idée que la méthodologie de la « narrative inquiry » a des liens étroits avec l'épistémologie féministe (He 1998, 31). Ainsi, notre recherche est une contribution pour mieux comprendre la construction identitaire féminine en liaison avec l'apprentissage d'une langue en attendant une étude similaire avec des participants hommes dans le futur. Il faut noter également que l'objet de notre recherche n'était pas d'être représentative d'une population mais de comprendre l'expérience individuelle, c'est-à-dire de « penser par cas » (Passeron & Revel, 2005).

11.2 Conclusion

En conclusion, d'autres études dans des contextes similaires (en particulier régionaux) seraient utiles pour continuer à explorer le rôle des « langues additionnelles » dans la vie de tous les jours. Ces enquêtes permettraient de continuer à sensibiliser sur la question de la « diversité ou multidimensionalité » des apprenants de langues (Byrd Clark, 2010) ainsi que sur la question de la langue comme resource symbolique pour des individus aux identités multiples (Byrd Clark 2012, 132). Byrd Clark (2012, 132) insiste sur le besoin de repenser la catégorisation des individus et des langues « as socially imagined homogeneous entities », ce qui rejoint l'observation de Jacquemet (2005) qu'à l'ère de la superdiversité, les langues (et aussi les individus ou tout du moins, une partie de la population) deviennent de plus en plus « déterritorialisés » (voir également Blommaert, 2007; Rampton, 2006).

En écho à ces observations, notre étude se conclue par une série de questions soulevées par une autre chercheure:

> Should the focus of education be on promoting the dominant language of the social context [...] while neglecting the complex repertoire of learners made up of other languages? Or should multilingual and intercultural competences be part of the content gamut of teaching practices? (Stratilaki 2012, 198).

A Hong Kong, il semblerait que ces questions ne soient pas encore d'actualité alors que l'on continue de suivre largement une orientation monolingue dans la conception de l'apprentissage et de l'enseignement des langues. La méthodologie de la « narrative inquiry » pourrait jouer un rôle dans cette transition.

Références supplémentaires

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