

2010-1

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on

**Bilinguals in style and the place of English in
the positioning of Hong Kong "locals"**

26 November (Friday)
5:00 pm
Room L205A

All are Welcome

Katherine Chen was trained in both Sociolinguistics and Linguistic Anthropology. Her research interests are closely connected with these two interdisciplinary approaches: social aspect of bilingualism, code-switching and language contact, language ideologies, language and identity, standardization and prescriptivism, language discrimination, ethnography and sociolinguistic documentary films. Katherine's current research is on bilingual identities in Hong Kong. She investigates how distinctive 'styles' (Irvine 2001) of code-switching relate to social categorization, and what roles language ideologies have played in the (re)construction and negotiation of group and individual identities.

Abstract:

The trilingual (Cantonese, Putonghua and English) and multicultural setting of Hong Kong makes it a language contact zone in which different patterns of code-mixing occur. Previous studies of Hong Kong code-mixing mostly focus on the major pattern commonly found among locally educated ethnic Chinese; little has been done on the coexistence of different code-mixing patterns and their social significance. This research employs Irvine's (2001) conception of 'style' to investigate two code-mixing patterns found in Hong Kong and to explore how they are used indexically to construct distinct social and linguistic identities. For the local younger generation, most of whom went through Hong Kong's bilingual education system, use of the local code-mixing style is a way to identify and interact with people of shared commonalities. It also provides a means to distinguish "outsiders" who use or prefer a different style of language mixing (or non-mixing). This paper reveals how overlapping and fuzzy the linguistic and social boundaries between Hong Kong locals and returnees are, yet social participants essentialize the relationship between speech and speakers, using such knowledge to construct, negotiate, and (re)position their identities, make decisions about whether or not to cross perceived social group boundaries; and maneuver in their local social contexts and beyond.
