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**Code-mixing in Chinese advertisement: an analysis
of bilingual advertising in Mainland China and
Hong Kong**

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A mio papà, che mi ha sempre spronato a seguire i miei sogni
e a coltivare le mie passioni. Anche se non ci sei più,
una parte di te vive in me ogni giorno.

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前言

近年来，随着中国经济的快速发展和全球化进程的加速推进，广告作为一种传播媒介，其功能已不再局限于商业促销，更逐渐演变为折射社会文化变迁与价值观念的重要载体。广告在塑造消费者偏好方面发挥着关键作用，通过推广产品并营造对其的积极印象。

作为一门学科，广告学经常关注全球模式，分析营销策略如何适应不同的文化和社会背景。由于广告与消费者行为和商业活动有着密切的联系，广告往往在消费者群体庞大的地区蓬勃发展。在过去几年中，中国成为仅次于美国的世界第二大广告市场，这可以归因于其快速增长的经济和不断增长的消费需求。如今，与中国做生意时，企业必须认识到，中国不再只是以低成本生产出口商品的“世界工厂”。相反，别的国家越来越关注中国国内市场，中国国内市场在财富和消费者期望方面都有了显著增长。这一转变使中国成为快速和不可预测变化的象征，给外国企业带来了持续的挑战。这种快节奏的转型需要不断的战略适应和创新。

现代中国社会是由传统与现代的融合所塑造的，长期的文化价值观与技术进步并存。这种联系在当代中国广告中尤为明显，它将全球营销实践与当地文化和创意技术相结合。此外，广告是语言接触和互动的场所，特别是在中国这样的多语言社会。在关于语言接触的各种类别中，我们将重点关注语码混合（*Code-mixing*），这是指在一个句子或一段口语或书面文本中交替使用两种语言的做法。近年来，普通话英语和粤语英语的语码混合，在国内外引起了相当大的学术兴趣。来自社会语言学、语用学、心理语言学和语言教育等不同学科的学者从不同角度研究了这种现象。在中国广告中，案策划师经常使用语码混合有两个主要目的：说服消费者和构建身份。随着英语在全球的不断传播，它已经深深地融入了中国的日常交流中，出现在日常对话、媒体和广告中。虽然语码混合可以象征着全球联系和社会进步，但它的使用也引发了人们对文化真实性的质疑。事实上，其中一个主要问题是中英文语码混合可能会损害汉语的纯度。如果在媒体和日常交流中过度

使用，可能会导致两种语言中非标准表达的传播，从而引发语言清晰度和完整性的问题。

这项研究源于个人对探索如何普通话和粤语作为提供语法结构的主导语言，在广告中融入英语术语的兴趣。本研究是在基于各种研究构建一致的理论框架后进行的。基于这一理论框架，我们对广告中的普通话英语和粤语英语语码混合进行了定性分析，探讨了它的语言和心理含义。本研究的目的是提供定量分析，而是研究语码混合如何在广告语境中作为一种沟通和说服策略。本论文共分为三章：第一章和第二章提供了中国广告和语码混合现象的必要背景，为研究奠定了理论基础。第三章将理论框架应用于选定的广告，展示了前面讨论的概念是如何在最近的广告活动中体现出来的。

尤其是第一章介绍了中国广告的历史和理论。它追溯了中国广告从古代到数字时代的发展，突出了这一过程中的关键政治和技术里程碑。然后，本章考察了中国广告行业的特点，并介绍了中国市场的细分，以加深对当前消费者概况的理解。最终，它概述了管理中国广告行为的监管框架，阐明了该国在广告道德和语言使用方面的法律方法。中国的广告行为受一系列国家法律和行业标准的约束，这些法律和标准适用于各种媒体平台，如印刷、电视、户外和在线广告。中国的法规旨在通过要求广告内容真实、对社会负责且表述准确，来防止欺骗性或有害信息的传播。

第二章使用矩阵语言框架 (Myers-Scotton, 1997) 和 Muysken 语码混合的分类 (Muysken, 2000) 等关键语言框架，定义并探讨了语码混合的定义和特征。Myers-Scotton(1997)将提供句法框架的主导语言称为“矩阵语言”(matrix language)，而被嵌入的语言称为“嵌入语言”(embedded language)，强调在一个句子内部，不同语言单元之间存在结构性依附关系；而 Muysken (2000)则将语码混合细分为三类：插入型 (insertion)、交替型 (alternation) 和词汇等同型 (congruent lexicalization)，为理解广告中语言融合的复杂性提供了有力工具。然后，通过分析地区方言和政府语言政策如何影响媒体和广告部门的语言使用，它概述了在中国广告中使用代码拼写的优点和缺点。本章还分析了中国大陆与香港在语言政策和方言分布方面的差异如何影响媒体和广告语言的选择，特别指出政府语言规范

和社会语言习惯共同塑造了广告中中英文混合的语用情况。随后，通过例子，本章展示了英语如何在广告中作为表达现代感、国际化及社会地位的符号被策略性地使用，不仅增强了产品吸引力，也协助广告构建一种理想化的消费者身份。本章还分析了语码混合背后的语用和心理动机，反思了它产生的文化和政治争议。最后，它说明了普通话英语语码混合和粤语英语语码混合的特点，展示了文案策划师在广告创作中的创造力。

第三章介绍了研究项目，该项目涉及对普通话英语和粤语英语广告中的语码混合进行定性分析。这项研究的个案研究是快餐连锁店麦当劳(McDonald's)和美妆品牌魅可(MAC cosmetics)。本章借鉴了从微信、哔哩哔哩、YouTube和官方品牌网站等数字平台收集的广告样本。本研究的目的是探索真实广告环境中语码混合的语言和心理含义。如今，麦当劳在中国大陆和香港都有业务，在这两个地区都有强大的影响力，事实上，中国是仅次于美国的第二大市场。1990年，麦当劳在深圳经济特区开设了第一家餐厅，进入了中国市场。从那时起，麦当劳一直通过为中国消费者量身定制的独特营销来加强其在中国的业务战略，其中包括对中国文化的深刻理解、对特定商业环境的适应，以及实施专业营销服务、定制菜单、出境营销和电子邮件营销等有效策略，以成功吸引中国消费者。魅可于1995年首次在香港开业，2005年在中国大陆开始销售。近年来，魅可通过调整其方法以适应当地消费者的偏好，在增加其在中国市场的份额方面取得了重大进展。为了增加在中国大陆和香港的销售额，魅可采取了与关键意见领袖(KOL)合作的营销策略。这些人在特定行业和社交媒体平台上拥有相当大的影响力。他们的影响力源于他们的专业知识、独特的个人魅力，以及他们与追随者培养的强烈情感纽带，使他们成为现代产品营销和品牌推广的重要组成部分。该品牌已成为专业品质化妆品的领导者，尤其吸引了重视创造力、自我表达和可定制产品的消费者。

本论文的主要目的是研究中英文语码混合在当代中国广告中的使用，特别是普通话英语和粤语英语语码混合。出于对语言、文化和媒体交叉的个人好奇心，我们不仅分析了语码混合是如何发生的，还分析了为什么它在中文和粤语广告中如此普遍。本论文探讨了广告中的语言选择如何反映更广泛的社会、文化和全球化动态，并考察了中国消费者在日益互联的媒体环境中如何看待语言融合的使用。

Introduction

The main aim of this thesis is to investigate the use of code-mixing between Chinese and English, specifically Mandarin-English and Cantonese-English combinations, in contemporary Chinese advertising. Driven by a personal curiosity about the intersection of language, culture and media, we analysed not only how code-mixing occurs, but also why it has become such a widespread practice in Chinese and Cantonese advertising. This thesis explores how language choices in advertising reflect broader social, cultural and globalizing dynamics, and examines how Chinese consumers perceive the use of linguistic blending in an increasingly interconnected media environment.

Advertising in China represents a vibrant and ever-changing sector. Chinese advertising has grown at an exponential rate over the last few decades, gaining strategic and symbolic significance in developing societal openness and driving economic development in the country. Advertising is not merely an economic tool, it also acts as a social phenomenon, reflecting cultural norms and values. It plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer preferences by promoting products and creating favourable perceptions of them. As an academic discipline, advertising often focuses on global patterns, analysing how marketing strategies adapt to diverse cultural and social contexts. Due to its strong links with consumer behaviour and commercial activity, advertising tends to flourish in regions with a large consumer base. In the past few years, China's emergence as the world's second-largest advertising market, behind only the United States, can be attributed to its rapidly growing economy and rising consumer demand.

Modern Chinese society is shaped by a blend of tradition and modernity where long-standing cultural values coexist with industrial and technological advancements. This connection is particularly evident in contemporary Chinese advertising, which combines global marketing practices with local cultural references and creative technologies. Moreover, advertising serves as a site for language contact and interaction, particularly in multilingual societies such as China. Among the various categories regarding language contact, we will focus on code-mixing, which refers to the practice of alternating between two languages within a single sentence or a piece of spoken or written text. This phenomenon is frequent in multilingual communities and reflects social attitudes, cultural affiliations and personal identities. In recent years, Mandarin-English and Cantonese-

English code-mixing, have attracted considerable academic interest in China and abroad. Scholars from various disciplines, including sociolinguistics, pragmatics, psycholinguistics and language education, have examined this phenomenon from different angles. In Chinese advertising, code-mixing is often used by copywriters for two main purposes: to persuade consumers and to construct identities. As English continues to spread globally, it has become deeply integrated into everyday communication in China, appearing in everyday conversations, the media and advertisements. While code-mixing can symbolise global connectivity and social advancement, its use also raises questions about cultural authenticity. In fact, one of the main concerns is that Chinese-English code-mixing could compromise the purity of the Chinese language. If used excessively in the media and everyday communication, it could lead to the spread of non-standard expressions, raising issues about linguistic clarity and integrity.

This study stems from a personal interest in exploring how Mandarin and Cantonese, functioning as matrix languages (Myers-Scotton, 1997), so as the dominant languages providing the grammatical structure, incorporate English terms and expression in advertisements. This investigation was carried out after constructing a consistent theoretical framework based on various studies, including Berruto's (2009) definition of code-mixing, the Matrix Language Frame of Myers-Scotton (1997), the code-mixing classification of Muysken (2000), Verschueren's (1999) Adaptation Theory and Yu Guodong's (2000) Adaptation model. Building on this theoretical framework, we conducted a qualitative analysis of Mandarin-English and Cantonese-English code-mixing in advertisements, exploring the linguistic and psychological implications of it. Rather than providing a quantitative analysis, this thesis aims to examine how code-mixing is employed as a communication and persuasive strategy in advertising contexts. This thesis is divided into three chapters. The first and the second chapter provide the necessary background on advertising in China and the phenomenon of code-mixing, laying the theoretical foundation for the research. The third chapter applies the theoretical framework to selected advertisements, demonstrating how the previously discussed concepts manifest in recent advertising campaigns.

The first chapter, in particular, provides an overview of the history and theory of advertising in China. It traces the development of Chinese advertising from ancient times to the digital age, highlighting key political and technological milestones along the way. Then the chapter examines the industry's characteristics and introduces the segmentation

of the Chinese market to improve the understanding of the current consumer profiles. Ultimately, it outlines the regulatory framework that govern advertising practices in China, shedding light on the country's legal approach to advertising ethics and language use.

The second chapter defines and explores the features of code-mixing, using key linguistic frameworks such as the Matrix Language Frame (Myers-Scotton, 1997) and Muysken's categorisation of intra-sentential code-mixing (Muysken, 2000). It then outlines the advantages and disadvantages of employing code-mixing in Chinese advertising and the language situation in Mainland China and Hong Kong, by analysing how regional dialects and government language policies influence language use in the media and advertising sectors. Subsequently, it provides an overview of the role of English in Chinese advertising and, by using examples of various advertisements, it demonstrates how English can be used to enhance product appeal, signal modernity and construct aspirational identities. The chapter also considers the pragmatic and psychological motivations behind code-mixing, reflecting on the cultural and political controversies it generates. Finally, it illustrates the characteristics of Mandarin-English code-mixing and Cantonese-English code-mixing, demonstrating the creativity of copywriters in the creation of advertisements.

The third chapter presents the research project, which involves conducting a qualitative analysis of code-mixing in Mandarin-English and Cantonese-English advertisements. The study focuses on the fast-food chain McDonald's and on the beauty brand MAC Cosmetics in both Mainland China and Hong Kong. It draws on a sample of digital advertisements, collected from digital platforms such as WeChat, Bilibili, YouTube and the official brand websites. The aim is to explore the linguistic and psychological implications of code-mixing in real advertising contexts.

Chapter 1

Advertising in China

Advertising is defined as any form of paid promotion that enables firms to communicate with potential customers about their products, services and ideas, in order to increase awareness and sales volumes. Advertising typically serves three main purposes: inform, persuade and remind; these three objectives collectively facilitate businesses in attracting, retaining and engaging their customer's base. More importantly, advertising connects a good to a specific need or even creates new ones, implying that consuming the good or service will satisfy that need. For advertising to be effective, it often requires extensive repetition across multiple media channels over specific time periods. Its impact is significantly influenced by the choice of words, colours, emotional appeal, and media channels, thereby offering opportunities for the creative expression of its authors (Hamilton, 2021). Moreover, advertising constitutes a distinctive form of communication that fulfils communicative functions, since it facilitates the establishment of interpersonal connections, it manages the communication processes and informs people regarding events and facts of public life. There is an interaction between society and advertising that functions as a bidirectional process. As a matter of fact, advertising exerts an indirect influence on the perception of individual behaviour and public consciousness. Its indirect impact is evident both in interpersonal communication, where advertising concepts are reflected through personal exchanges, and in social norms, traditions, and stereotypes, which represent mass representations of advertising's influence. However, the impact of advertising on contemporary society extends beyond merely shaping consumer behaviour and influencing the dynamics of demand for goods and services. It functions simultaneously as a medium of communication and as a cultural unit expressed through a variety of media (Mounir, 2023).

Since advertising can be also regarded as a reflection of cultural values and traditions, significant variations exist among advertisements created by companies from different countries. Even within the same country, differences may occur due to local dialects and the cultural influences specific to each region.

Chinese advertising is a dynamic industry, which is closely related to the economic development of the country. During the last few decades, Chinese advertising has

undergone a process of exponential growth, acquiring both strategic and symbolic significance in fostering societal openness and driving economic development in the country. Evolving from an initially negligible sector, it has expanded into a colossal industry. According to Professor Li Hongmei, the evolution of advertising in China is linked to four main factors: the nation's economic globalization, political liberalization, cultural transformations, and technological advancements. The interplay of these interdependent forces defines the essential characteristics of advertising in China (Li, 2016). For this reason, it is important to analyse the cultural transformations, innovations and economic changes that influenced Chinese advertising over the years, making it more persuasive and effective in attracting customers.

1.1 The evolution of Chinese advertising

Chinese advertising has a long history, and its origins can be traced back to ancient China. The earliest forms of advertising, in a broad sense, were clan and tribal totems from the legendary dynasties of the Xia and Shang (2070–1046 BC). In imperial China, advertising continued to evolve throughout the following dynasties, but it is during the Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127) that the first instance of print advertising and branding appeared.

It is believed that modern advertising, which is strictly intended as a paid form of commercial promotion, began to appear in the middle of the 19th century and was related to the two Opium Wars (1839–1842; 1856–1860). During this period, the Unequal Treaties facilitated a flow of goods and capital that benefited only Western nations. Foreigners employed advertising as a persuasive promotional tactic when they came to China, with the intention of marketing their goods to the local population and taking advantage of this promising market. These early instances of contemporary advertisements were published in both Chinese and English in foreign-run newspapers. In the 1920s and 1930s, Chinese advertising experienced what is often referred to as its “golden age” (黄金时代 *huángjīn shídài*). This era saw the flourishing of advertising in China by using various type of media, including newspapers, billboards, radio broadcasts, and neon signs. Among the most emblematic forms of advertising during this period were the “calendar posters” (月份牌 *yuèfēnpái*), which represented elegant Chinese women portrayed in Westernized and modern poses (Puppin, 2020). There are many different

categories of *yuefenpai*, one of which promotes hedonistic values by incorporating Western leisure activities, like ballroom and musical performance, as it is showed in Figure 1 that is an example of a *yuefenpai* for the Fengtian Tobacco company.



Figure 1: An example of *Yuefenpai* for Fengtian Tobacco in the 1930s (source: Zhao & Belk, 2008:52).

In the example above, the two women wear a 旗袍 (*Qípáo*), a mandarin dress that combines the *qi* robe of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), a long and loose dress, with the European-style dress. In this advertisement, the fabric of the *qipao* is decorated with geometric designs inspired by the fashionable *art déco* style of the time. In 1930s Shanghai, *art déco* was an aspect of daily life, exerting a significant influence on individuals across various social strata, especially within the foreign concessions of the city (Zhao & Belk, 2008).

The development of Chinese advertising was interrupted by the Anti-Japanese War (1931-1945) and the Civil War (1945-1949) between the Communists and the Nationalists, who

fought for legitimacy to govern the country. Following the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) victory and the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) on 1 October 1949, advertising in China began to diminish, because it was considered incompatible with socialists' principles. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Chinese advertising experienced a significant decline. However, commercial advertisements for industrial items and raw materials remained, indicating that it wasn't officially forbidden or censored. In that period, Chinese media became state-owned and mainly promoted political messages, an instance of this phase of closure in Chinese advertising are the so called "propaganda posters" (宣传画, *xuānchuán huà*), which promoted revolutionary models and more significantly the cult of the chairman Mao Zedong.

In 1978, during the Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee of the CCP, the then President Deng Xiaoping launched the policy of reform and opening up (改革开放, *gǎigé kāifàng*), which resulted in the reemergence of advertising. Within this new political and economic climate, advertising was acknowledged as essential for driving China's economic development, allowing it to flourish again. During that period, foreign advertising agencies were also permitted to re-enter the Chinese market, and commercial announcements on television and radio began to promote foreign products. From 1979 onwards, China's advertising industry has experienced a significant expansion, and this growth is undeniably linked to the country's economic transformation. There are several key factors that have facilitated its rapid development, including the rise in disposable income and purchasing power among the so-called 'new' Chinese consumers, the liberalization of trade, the proliferation of e-commerce platforms and online shopping opportunities, and government investment.

Between 1992 and 2001, Chinese advertising industry underwent a period of rapid growth, closely associated with Deng Xiaoping's Southern Talks. During his tour of China's southern provinces in 1992, Deng Xiaoping emphasized the importance of establishing a 'socialist market economy' (社会主义市场经济, *Shèhuì zhǔyì shìchǎng jīngjì*), which significantly contributed to the growth of the advertising sector by acknowledging its role as a driver of economic development. As a result, media organizations were permitted to operate as 'business units' (经营单位, *Jīngyíng dānwèi*) rather than public entities, leading to their increasing commercialization. The Chinese advertising industry

experienced a steady growth following the hosting of the Beijing Olympics in 2008 and the Shanghai World Expo in 2010. In those years, advertisement improved significantly in terms of artistic quality and innovation, gaining international acclaim, in fact, China received its first Gold Lion at the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity in 2008 for the campaign “Together in 2008, impossible is nothing” (一起 2008, 没有不可能 *Yīqǐ 2008, méiyǒu bù kěnéng*), developed by TBWA Worldwide Shanghai for Adidas, as is shown in Figure 2 below.



Figure 2 One frame of the Adidas advertising that made China win its first Cannes Lion (Source: Sweney, 2008)¹.

Over the years, Chinese government has consistently supported the advertising industry through various initiatives while aligning its efforts with its Five-Year Plans. For instance, in 2012 the State Administration for Industry and Commerce (SAIC), the authority supervising advertisement in China, introduced the “Plan for the Development of the Advertising Industry during the 12th Five-Year Period”, covering the years from 2011 to 2015 (Puppin, 2020), for the first time. This plan emphasized the significant role of advertising in both the economy and society, and it also outlined some key objectives, including enhancing the industry's competitiveness, professionalism, and global presence.

¹Online material available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2008/jun/18/advertising.chinathemedia>

In the last few years, the rise of online and mobile technologies has significantly transformed the advertising landscape, leading to a decline of traditional media. As early as 2005, online advertising overtook magazines in revenue and became the fastest-growing sector in China. Since 2011, it has maintained an average annual growth rate of 40% and, by 2016, its market size surpassed the combined value of the four traditional media (television, newspapers, radio and magazines). The advancement of mobile technology has led to the rapid development of new apps, that can be used either as social media or e-commerce platforms. Among these, currently the most popular are: Duoyin (抖音 *Dǒuyīn*), Little Red Book (小红书 *Xiǎohóngshū*), WeChat (微信 *Wēixìn*) and Tencent QQ (腾讯 QQ *Téngxùn QQ*). Other two important online platforms that have revolutionised e-commerce in China are Taobao ((淘宝 *Táobao*) and Alibaba (阿里巴巴 *Ālǐ bābā*). The development of these apps and online platforms has enabled China to implement different forms of advertising such as: search engine advertising, AI-generated advertising delivered by avatars and sponsored content promoted by Chinese Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs). These various forms of advertising have become an integral part of daily life in China, significantly influencing how people interact and make purchasing decisions (Puppin, 2020).

According to the 54th Statistical Report (CNNIC, 2024) on China's Internet Development conducted by the China Internet Network Information Center (中国互联网络信息中心 *Zhōngguó hùlián wǎngluò xìnxī zhōngxīn*), by June 2024, the number of Internet users in China had reached nearly 1.1 billion, an increase of 7.42 million compared to December 2023, and the number of online shoppers had reached 905 million, accounting for 82.3% of the total internet users. The report further stated that in the first half of 2024, the online shopping market maintained steady growth and played a crucial role in enhancing consumption. As stated in the report, Chinese online platforms mainly adopt two strategies to improve promotion and user experience: the low-price and user-oriented strategy, and the Old for New initiative that has been launched to encourage the replacement of consumer goods. Regarding the first strategy, major platforms emphasized competitive pricing, for example Pinduoduo implemented an automated price tracking system and a price reduction program to increase data traffic, while TikTok prioritised its Price Force initiative, which focuses on offering low prices to gain a competitive advantage in terms of product pricing. Additionally, platforms adopted consumer-friendly policies like “refund only” and requiring merchants to offer freight and price insurance.

Regarding the second strategy, online platforms facilitated the Old for New initiative by increasing subsidies, simplifying procedures, and enhancing logistics. This initiative's objective is twofold: to replace old products with new ones and to enhance the recycling of the products that have been replaced. Data indicates that e-commerce platforms supported the replacement of over 400,000 types of goods and the simultaneous recycling of more than 300 categories (CNNIC, 2024). These data serve as evidence of the public's acceptance of marketing strategies implemented through the Internet and social media, and they demonstrate that social media technology in China is not only used by companies to communicate with their potential customers, but also for the promotion of business operations both locally and internationally.

1.2 The characteristics of Chinese advertising

Advertising can be analysed not only as an economic factor, but also as a social phenomenon that reflects norms and cultural values. In fact, it plays a crucial role in influencing consumer choices by highlighting certain products over others and shaping their perceived positive attributes. Advertising research focuses on global transformation, examining consistent patterns in advertising across different cultural and social contexts. Since advertising is closely linked to market production, consumer behaviour, and commercial activities, it thrives in regions with large consumer bases. During the last few years, China has emerged as the world's second-largest advertising market, following the United States, due to its expanding economy and rising consumer demand. The rising living standards in the country have undoubtedly played an important role in this growth; however, a significant segment of China's rural population still faces economic challenges, while the middle class is rapidly expanding (Koptseva & Reznikova, 2017).

In contemporary China, social and cultural dynamics integrate traditional heritage with industrial and post-industrial influences, incorporating both global and local trends alongside advanced creative technologies. The interaction between industrial development and traditional culture creates innovative cultural practices that not only position China within the global high-tech landscape but also highlight its deep-rooted traditions. This fusion of traditional Chinese culture and modern technologies is particularly evident in Chinese advertising. Scholars studying the connection between

global and traditional elements in Chinese advertisements have yet to reach a consensus on which aspect holds greater significance; however, most researchers believe that Chinese commercials use a combination of both factors (Koptseva & Reznikova, 2017).

Regarding this topic, a study conducted by Professor Zhou Nan and Professor Belk Russell W. (2004) is relevant to understand cross-cultural advertising strategies, especially in rapidly evolving consumer landscapes like China. This study explores how Chinese consumers interpret and respond to global and local advertising. The two authors investigate whether advertisements with global themes (e.g. Western values, international branding) are more effective than those emphasizing local cultural elements (e.g. traditional Chinese values, nationalism). The study identifies two opposing elements influencing Chinese consumers' behaviour. On one hand, their purchasing decisions are driven by a desire for global recognition and personal prestige or prestige face (面子 *Miàanzi*²). On the other hand, they are also influenced by a strong nationalistic sentiment, which encourages them to preserve traditional Chinese values in their consumption choices.

The two researchers employed a reader-response approach and, by combining in-depth consumer interviews and content analysis of local and global television and printed advertisements, they analysed Chinese consumers' reactions to the ads. This qualitative approach allowed them to capture the subjective meanings that consumers assign to different advertising messages. The participants were 40 in total with post-high-school education and their ages ranged from 20 to 65 years old. By analysing their responses across different demographic groups, the study provides insights into the diverse ways Chinese consumers engage with advertisements. Specifically, younger, cosmopolitan consumers may resonate more with global appeals, whereas older or more traditional individuals prefer locally grounded messages.

Moreover, the research highlights the role of symbolism in advertising, where certain imagery and themes affect consumer interpretations. Advertisements using Western

² The concept of “face” is rooted in traditional Chinese culture, this concept in Chinese is expressed by using two forms 面子 (*Miàanzi*) and 脸 (*Liǎn*), each of which has its own characteristics. *Miàanzi* tends to represent more positive aspects of face, being other-oriented as a social self, while *Liǎn* tends to represent more negative aspects of face, being self-oriented as a personal self. According to Chinese culture, *Miàanzi* and *Liǎn* interact with each other to determine face loss and face gain, such outcomes are shaped by self- or other-judgments and evaluations of individuals' behaviours, which are assessed in accordance with the values embedded in social interactions (Zhou & Zhang, 2017).

imagery, such as foreign models, English slogans, and international settings, often symbolize modernity, luxury, success and a connection to the global economy. Local advertisements, on the other hand, emphasize familial values, collectivism, and cultural pride. These themes resonate deeply with many Chinese consumers, reinforcing a sense of belonging, tradition and national pride. This the reason why some brands successfully blend global and local elements, using Western branding but incorporating Chinese cultural symbols to create a hybrid appeal. It can be said that Zhou and Belk's study provides valuable insights into the evolving nature of Chinese consumer culture and advertising effectiveness. As China continues to integrate into the global economy, understanding these cultural dynamics remains crucial for brands seeking to establish a strong presence in the market. The study emphasizes the importance of strategic cultural adaptation in advertising, where successful campaigns blend global prestige with local authenticity to create more effective and culturally resonant marketing strategies in China's evolving marketplace (Zhou & Belk, 2004).

As outlined in the introduction to this chapter, according to Professor Li Hongmei (2016), advertising in China is linked to four main factors: policy, market, technology and culture. The interaction of these interdependent forces is reflected in three fundamental relationships: state-media, local-global and advertiser-consumer relations. These factors are all connected, as it is illustrated in the map below, and they define and shape the main characteristics of advertising in China.

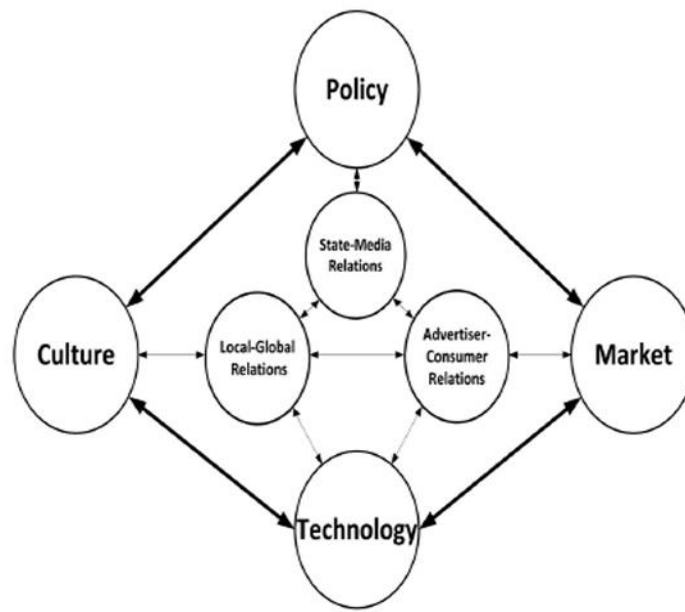


Figure 3 Map that shows the characteristics of Chinese Advertising (Source: Li, 2016: 45).

The term “policy” encompasses several elements that affect advertising practices and the relationship between the state and the media, including ownership, censorship, regulation, and government support for the media. New regulations are regularly put into place to either regulate or liberalize the market as advertising in China changes alongside the nation's political and economic reforms. Consequently, advertisers and industry professionals constantly navigate the complex and often contradictory nature of Chinese media, which serves both as a tool for the state and as a platform for generating commercial profit.

The term “market” includes diverse economic elements, such as competition, consumer demands and business structures. Before China’s economic reforms in 1978, due to the centralized planning system managed by the government, there was no market. After the implementation of these reforms, a variety of measures, both domestic and foreign, were introduced to facilitate economic efficiency. Market forces, profit motives and politics deeply influence Chinese advertising and media strategies. In fact, marketers, supported by the government, employ a broad spectrum of marketing techniques to manipulate consumer preferences, thus influencing the power dynamics among the state and business, advertisers and consumers. Moreover, the process of marketization in China is deeply entangled with the influence of global neoliberal ideologies. Neoliberalism, which is based on key principles such as deregulation, privatization, and the expansion of market

mechanisms, has played a significant role in shaping China's political decisions, economic strategies, and ideological developments over the past decades.

The term “technology” refers to the fact that in China technological advancements, particularly in digital technologies and social networks, have created more accessible and cost-effective ways to produce and distribute content. These tools have enhanced the flow of information and ideas, while also disrupting traditional advertising practices. The rise of new marketing platforms has transformed the relationship between advertisers and consumers in ways never seen before. In addition, the combination of mass marketing and innovative approaches that emphasize consumer’s preferences and participation made the advertising landscape more complex than before.

The term “culture” incorporates the values, and social norms that determine both advertising professionals and consumers’ behaviours. In the Chinese context, advertising often reflects a mix of sometimes conflicting cultural influences—ranging from traditional Chinese values and Confucian ideals to socialist principles and capitalist ideologies—all of which are embedded in advertising messages and strategies. However, in the context of today’s society, Chinese and Western values should not be seen as opposites: they represent various advertising and business strategies that are adopted by different actors depending on the context and time. Rather than existing in conflict, the local and the global are interconnected and mutually shaping each others (Li, 2016).

After the “reform and opening-up policy” implemented by the government in 1978, another characteristic has emerged within Chinese advertising, namely, the use of Chinese-English bilingual advertising, because in that period English has surpassed other foreign languages to dominate the linguistic market. This dominance is largely due to the practical benefits English offers, such as better job prospects and increased social mobility. Given the widespread use of this language in media and the public’s generally positive perception, English is said to be the most studied foreign language by Chinese people. Thus, advertisers use Chinese-English bilingual advertising as a strategy of persuasion to make the product more appealing for customers and to increase sales, because the use of English influence positively consumers and it is a sign of modernity, internationalization and sophistication. Moreover, the implementation of English in advertising often helps construct specific social identities that align with the message being conveyed. However, rather than creating a single identity, advertisements typically construct multiple social

identities for both the advertisers and the audience. This reflects the complexity of social identity, as individuals can embody various roles even within the same context and according to their personal interpretation (Gao, 2005).

1.3 The segmentation of the Chinese market

When dealing with advertising, it becomes essential to develop messages that effectively resonate with consumers' preferences, thereby enhancing a brand's competitiveness in the market. To achieve this, advertisers adopt different marketing strategies, among them one of the most significant is market segmentation strategy by Smith. Market segmentation is the process of dividing a broader market into smaller groups of consumers or organizations that share common characteristics and needs. A consumer market can be segmented according to different factors such as demographics, geography, product usage, or perceived benefits. The goal is to tailor marketing strategies and product offerings to better meet the specific demands of each group. Moreover, this approach focuses on the demand side of the market and often involves targeted advertising and promotional efforts.

Various strategies can be employed in market segmentation depending on the nature of the product and target audience. One such strategy is the aggregation strategy, where the entire market is approached as a single, unified segment: for example, the gasoline market. Another approach is the single segment or concentration strategy, where firms focus on one specific market segment. Lastly, the multiple segment strategy involves targeting several distinct customer groups simultaneously, allowing organizations to reach a broader range of consumers. Within the framework of market segmentation, it is essential for an organization to strategically position itself in relation to its competitors. This positioning may be determined by a range of factors, including product design, pricing structures, distinctive value propositions, distribution strategies etc (Kabeyi, 2018).

Nowadays, Chinese consumer preferences and behaviours are changing due to a confluence of social and demographic shifts as well as the unstoppable adoption of digital technologies. According to the McKinsey Global Institute, there are seven consumers' segments shaping Chinese market, as it is showed in the graph below.

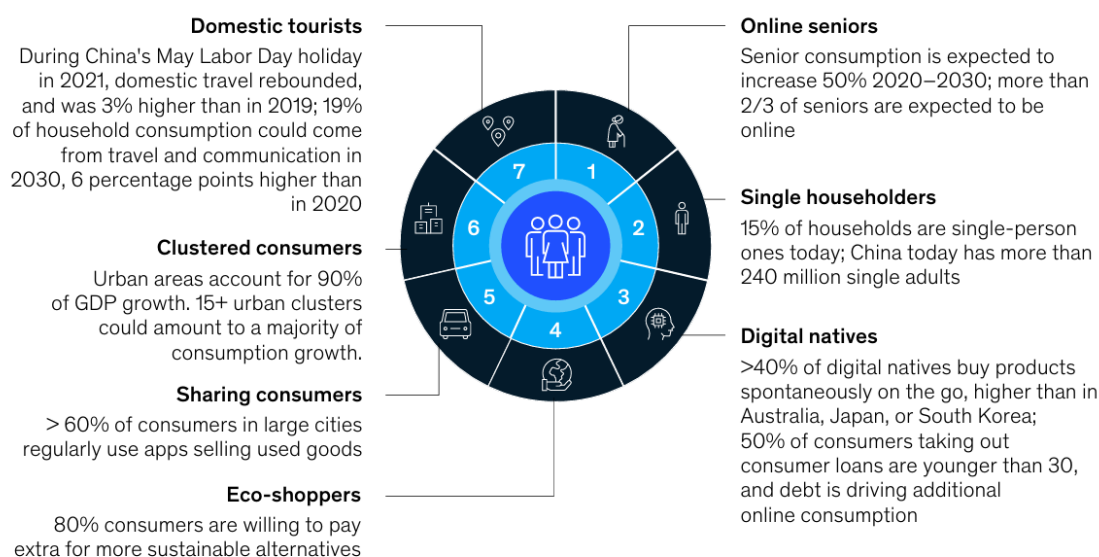


Figure 4 Graph of Chinese market segmentation (Source: Zipser, Seong and Woetzel, 2021)³.

The first segment to be considered is the group commonly referred to as digital natives, which includes millennials and Generation Z individuals born between 1980 and 2012. They contribute significantly to consumption in Asia, making up over one-third of the total. Chinese digital natives tend to make spontaneous purchasing decisions, with over 40% of them shopping on the go, a figure notably higher than in other countries like Japan, and South Korea. According to a McKinsey survey conducted before the Covid-19 pandemic in 2019, 87% of Chinese Gen Z respondents were confident in their ability to achieve their desired financial future, and the willingness to borrow money to finance consumption seems to be a reflection of that confidence (Zipser, Seong and Woetzel, 2021). In fact, China's younger population, which accounts for half of all consumer loan borrowers, are fuelling growth in online shopping, especially in sectors like fashion and everyday consumer goods.

The second market segment under examination is the single householders. In recent years, shifts in Chinese demographic patterns are playing a critical role in reshaping consumption behaviours. One notable trend is the continuous decline in the total fertility rate, which dropped from 1.6 in 2000 to just 1.3 by 2020. This decline is mirrored in the sharp reduction in annual births, and as a matter of fact the average household size has decreased by nearly 30%, shrinking from 3.6 individuals in 1999 to 2.6 according to the most recent census. Alongside these demographic changes, significant social

³ Online material available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/cn/our-insights/our-insights/seven-segments-shaping-chinas-consumption-landscape>

transformations have also emerged. Over the past three decades, the average age at which individuals marry has risen by approximately three years, and as a result, single-person households are becoming increasingly common. The single adult population today has surpassed 240 million in China, giving rise to what is often referred to as the “singles economy”. This growing segment is influencing consumer behaviour in noticeable ways, for instance, pet ownership has more than doubled within a five-year span (Zipser, Seong and Woetzel, 2021). Moreover, the Chinese market is responding to this trend by introducing services and products tailored for individuals, such as single-user gym pods and mini karaoke booths. Companies are also tapping into the emotional needs of this group, with offerings like AI companion chatbots gaining widespread popularity, attracting hundreds of millions of users, many of whom are single.

The third segment that has been analysed in this study is the online seniors. By 2030, individuals aged over-60 are projected to make up roughly one-quarter of China’s population. This shift is accompanied by a significant increase in their consumption, which is forecasted to grow by approximately 150%, a rate that’s nearly double the country’s overall consumption growth. While the economic potential of China’s aging population is already well recognized by businesses and investors, what makes this segment particularly noteworthy is its rapid digital transformation. A major driver of this change was the COVID-19 pandemic, which pushed many elderly people to become more digitally active while staying indoors. By 2030, it's estimated that at least two-thirds of Chinese seniors will be online (Zipser, Seong and Woetzel, 2021). After recognizing this change, major Chinese tech companies are increasingly adapting their products and services for older users. For example, Chinese e-commerce platforms have launched senior-friendly versions of their apps, offering better accessibility and support. However, the companies that want to sell their products and services to elderly people need to be aware of the inequalities within this group. While around 25 million seniors are expected to have relatively high incomes (over \$50 a day) by 2030, there remains a significant portion, over 48 million seniors, who may be living on less than \$11 a day, struggling to afford basic needs (Zipser, Seong and Woetzel, 2021).

The fourth consumer segment that has been examined is the domestic tourist. With rising income levels, there has been a noticeable increase in household spending on non-essential categories such as travel and communication, which grew from 13% to 16% in 2010, and is projected to reach 19% by 2030. Notably, domestic tourism saw a modest

recovery in 2021, with May Labor Day trips rising 3% compared to 2019 (Zipser, Seong and Woetzel, 2021). This recovery can be attributed not only to the easing impact of COVID-19 on daily life in China but also to the proactive measures taken by travel and tourism companies to stimulate demand. For instance, 7 Days Inn, an hotel chain, introduced a “Safe Stay” campaign, combining strict hygiene protocols with promotional discounts during the 2021 Chinese New Year. Similarly, Air China provided flexible refund and rescheduling options to reassure travellers.

The fifth segment analysed in this research is the one of the sharing consumers. Driven by economic challenges, evolving consumer mindsets, and advancements in technology, many Asian consumers are shifting away from traditional ownership models. Instead, they are turning to alternative consumption methods such as rentals, subscriptions, and second-hand purchases to meet their needs. This trend is particularly evident in sectors like mobility, where ridesharing services are rapidly expanding, and housing, especially in high-cost urban areas across China. In the last few years, second-hand consumption has gained significant popularity, in fact, according to the data, second-hand e-commerce platforms had over 30 million active sellers and saw their gross merchandise value double in 2020 (Zipser, Seong and Woetzel, 2021). Another notable trend is the growing preference for digital over physical ownership, with consumers increasingly investing in digital goods and services.

The sixth consumer segment explored in this research is the eco-shopper one. This group is increasingly gaining relevance, especially in Asia, a region highly vulnerable to environmental changes and responsible for a significant portion of the global economic risk associated with climate disruption. However, in the last few years, environmental awareness is intensifying across the region, especially among Chinese citizens. This growing environmental consciousness is not only influencing consumer attitudes but also shifting spending behaviours toward sustainability. A recent study conducted by McKinsey found that over 80% of Chinese consumers expressed a readiness to pay more for eco-friendly packaging. These changing attitudes are also translating into tangible market trends. For example, a major e-commerce company reported a 70% increase in eco-friendly purchases on its platform in 2017, with domestic Chinese brands accounting for most of these transactions (Zipser, Seong and Woetzel, 2021). Despite the higher costs typically associated with sustainable products, two primary drivers are facilitating the rise of green consumption in China. First, the increase in disposable income is narrowing the

gap between consumer willingness to pay and the actual price of sustainable goods. Second, innovation and new technologies are making environmentally friendly options more accessible.

The seventh segment that has been analysed in this research is the clustered consumer one, which reflects the growing importance of urban-based consumption in China. As urbanization in China continues at a rapid pace, it is projected that approximately 90% of China's consumption growth will stem from urban areas. While megacities like Shanghai are expected to see a significant rise in high-income households (about 3 million), urban consumption is not limited to just these major hubs. Mid-sized cities are also emerging as key drivers of consumption, growing at a rate two percentage points higher than Asia's 50 largest cities (Zipser, Seong and Woetzel, 2021). This suggests that companies can no longer focus solely on the biggest metropolises, but they should also consider a broader urban landscape and how different cities are interconnected. China's cities can be categorized into clusters based on factors such as geographic location, consumer preferences, and infrastructures. The Chinese government's investment in linking these urban clusters through improved transportation networks is expected to further stimulate consumption among different clusters. When developing advertising strategies, it is essential for advertisers to have a clear understanding of their target audience, including their preferences and tastes, because one of the main purposes of advertising is to persuade consumers to purchase the promoted products or services. In this context, analysing the current Chinese market segmentation provides valuable insights into the social and economic transformations currently influencing consumer behaviour in China, and this enable advertisers to develop more tailored and captivating advertizing for each consumer segment. Given the vastness and diversity of the Chinese market, such an analysis is crucial for understanding how companies and advertisers should approach this dynamic environment, and it also helps identify the most effective strategies to adopt.

1.4 Laws and regulations on advertising

In Chinese context, advertising laws are crucial to encourage fair competition in the market and maintain costumers trust, thus it is important to understand the legal framework that govern advertising in the country. Chinese regulations aim to prevent

deceptive or harmful content by requiring advertisements to be truthful, socially responsible and precise. Chinese advertising practices are governed by a range of national laws and industry standards that apply across various media platforms, such as print, television, outdoor, and online advertising. Since these regulations are subject to continuous updates, businesses should remain cautious and adapt accordingly to maintain compliance.

China's earliest advertising regulations emerged in the early 1980s, during a period of legal and administrative restructuring following the revolutionary era. The initial framework, known as the "Provisional Regulations on the Administration of Advertising", marked the beginning of formal advertising. These rules were later revised and officially enacted in 1988 as the "Detailed Implementing Regulations on the Administration of Advertising". Although these early regulations were fundamental, they remained broad and lacked specific guidance, limiting their practical effectiveness (Puppini, 2020).

In the Chinese regulatory framework, the State Administration for Market Regulation (SAMR, 国家市场监督管理总局 *Guójiā shìchǎng jiāndū guǎnlǐ zǒngjú*), a ministerial-level organization that refers directly to the State Council of the People's Republic of China, is the main regulatory body overseeing the enforcement of advertising laws. It holds the authority to supervise advertising activities, investigate potential violations, and impose penalties on businesses that fail to comply with legal standards. In fact, SAMR's role is central for maintaining lawful advertising practices and protecting consumer rights. Companies are required to follow these regulations by ensuring that their advertisements are accurate and not harmful to the public, non-compliance can lead to administrative sanctions, civil liability, and potential reputational damage.

In 1994, the National People's Congress (NPC) enacted the "Advertising Law of the People's Republic of China" (《中华人民共和国广告法》 *Zhōnghuà rénmin gònghéguó guǎnggào fǎ*) that represents a milestone in the context of Chinese advertising laws. The "Advertising Law of the People's Republic of China" outlines some fundamental principles such as the requirement for advertisements to be accurate, truthful, and non-harmful to the public. A key point of this law is the prohibition of false or misleading content, in fact advertisers are obligated to present verifiable information, avoiding exaggerations or unsupported claims regarding a product's quality or effectiveness. The law also includes some restrictions regarding the promotion of harmful products, such as

tobacco and gambling. Violations of these provisions can result in serious consequences, ranging from fines and business suspensions to, in extreme cases, criminal charges. This law plays an important role in safeguarding consumer interests and maintaining integrity within the advertising industry. For businesses, understanding and adhering to these legal standards is not only necessary for compliance but also essential for building consumer trust.

Another fundamental regulation regarding Chinese advertisement is the “Consumer Protection Law of the People’s Republic of China” (中华人民共和国消费者权益保护法 *Zhōnghuá rénmin gònghéguó xiāofèi zhě quán yì bǎohù fǎ*). This law, adopted in 1993, outlines the responsibilities of businesses to ensure that their advertising practices do not harm consumers, it also provides mechanisms for both administrative penalties and civil compensation in the event of violations of consumer rights. A core aspect of this law is the requirement for advertisements to be non-deceptive and non-harmful. Businesses must refrain from making false claims about their products and services, and they are expected to present information clearly to help consumers make informed choices. In cases of violations, affected consumers have the right to seek compensation for damages, including financial loss, medical expenses, and emotional distress. Regulatory authorities are also empowered to impose administrative sanctions, such as fines or suspension of the business. Businesses must adhere to these legal standards to maintain compliance and foster a trustworthy consumer environment.

In addition to these regulations, Chinese laws also regulate what kind of words can be used in advertizing, in particular there are some limitations regarding the ones that contain comparative claims such as “better than” or “the best.” When advertisers use such words, the message they want to convey must be substantiated with credible evidence and must not mislead the consumer. Furthermore, the use of subliminal messages in Chinese advertisements is forbidden, this refers to any hidden content designed to subconsciously influence consumer behaviour without their explicit awareness. Finally, advertisers bear the responsibility of ensuring their content doesn’t influence the public in a negative way, this includes avoiding material that is obscene, violent, or that encourages dangerous behaviour (Media scope group, 2023).

Chapter 2

Code-mixing in Chinese advertisement

Advertising serves as a dynamic site for language contact and interaction. Generally speaking, Code-mixing refers to the practice of alternating between two languages within a single sentence or a piece of spoken or written text. This linguistic phenomenon is particularly frequent in multilingual communities, and it reflects how language choices express personal values, social attitude, communicative intentions and cultural roles in specific contexts.

The phenomenon of Chinese-English code mixing has deep historical roots, beginning with the development of an English-based pidgin⁴ at Canton and Chinese treaty ports. During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Chinese Pidgin English also appeared in Canton, while a localized variety, referred to as “Yangjingbang English⁵” (洋泾浜 *Yáng jīng bāng*) , subsequently gained prominence in Shanghai. Since the implementation of China’s reform and open-door policy in 1978, Chinese-English code-mixing became a frequent phenomenon in the mass media, which has drawn much attention from linguists. In recent years, Chinese-English code-mixing has become increasingly relevant in various contexts, including the one of higher education. For instance, at Peking University, English-language textbooks are frequently used in courses that are officially taught in Chinese, particularly in fields like biology, chemistry, business, economics, and finance. During their lectures, professors often incorporate English terminology or directly cite theoretical concepts in English, gaining a certain degree of acceptance among Chinese professors and researchers nowadays (Zhang, Bolton and Botha, 2020).

⁴Pidgin languages are typically defined as speech forms without native speakers, used to facilitate communication between groups of people who do not share a common language. The extent to which a pidgin evolves and becomes more sophisticated depends largely on the frequency and nature of interaction among its speakers (Muysken & Smith, 1994).

⁵The term “*Yangjingbang*” is derived from the name of a river creek that once marked the boundary of the foreign concessions in the treaty-port of Shanghai. In the 1920s and 1930s, Chinese-English mixing was increasingly common in Shanghai’s urban life, as evidenced in local newspapers, and the daily interactions of the social elite, where it was utilized as a symbol of modernity.

Moreover, Chinese-English code-mixing is becoming increasingly common in the daily interactions of university students. A study conducted by Jiang and Tian (2011) at Xiangtan University in Hunan Province found that many students view code-mixing positively. They suggest that this linguistic practice facilitate communication, fosters a sense of closeness, and reflects a more natural conversational style that caters to the communicative needs of both students and teachers. Their research includes specific examples to illustrate these points, like the one showed below:

(1)A: 今晚一食堂三楼有个 party, 你去吗?

Jīnwǎn yī shítáng sān lóu yǒu gè party, nǐ qù ma?

“There is a party on the third floor of the cafeteria. Are you going?”

B: 我不去了, 明天正好有个 exam, 临时得抱抱佛脚。

Wǒ bù qù le, míngtiān zhènghǎo yǒu gè exam, línshí dé bào bào fójiǎo.

“I can’t. There is an exam tomorrow. Got to cram for the exam.”

A: 不想 relax 一下啊?

Bù xiǎng relax yīxià a?

“Don’t you want to relax a bit?”

B: 那我就 pass 不了了。

Nà wǒ jiù pass bù liǎo le.

“Then I won’t be able to pass.” (Jiang & Tian, 2011: 20)

Another context in which Chinese-English code-mixing has become popular nowadays is the advertising one. In Chinese advertising, code-mixing is a powerful strategy through which more persuasive messages can be created, while simultaneously contributing to the construction of cultural and social identities (Basciano, 2015). Recent research shows that entire translation or partial translation are the most common ways in which English is incorporated in Chinese advertisements. For instance, in a study conducted in 2012 analysing 152 advertisements across Shanghai, Nanjing and Lanzhou, Chen X. found that the most common forms of English mixing in advertisements are bilingual parallel texts (48.7%), English monolingual ads (41%), and intra-sentential mixing (10%), among the ones appeared in his study. It is also interesting to notice that about 15% of the ads analysed used pinyin or letters from other languages as brand names, and the author refers

to this phenomenon as "pseudo-English" mixing, which is often used by advertisers to evoke a sense of international and stylish appeal (Chen, 2012).

Several studies have examined Chinese-English code-mixing in newspapers and magazines, and they demonstrated that it could be a powerful instrument of persuasion for attracting customers and achieve conciseness. Therefore, the choice of code by an individual serves as an indicator of their social identity, because different codes carry particular social meanings, and individuals may use these codes to align themselves with those meanings. When English words, phrases, or entire discourses are incorporated into Chinese newspaper advertisements, they become elements that trigger a set of associations linked to the English language, that is usually associated with a modern, fashion and confident style. According to a study conducted by Chen L. (2015) on a corpus of 603 advertisements from three newspapers of Guangdong province, word and phrase insertion is the most frequent method used in Chinese-English advertising, as it can be observed in the DELL newspaper advertisement below:

(2) DELL 你身边的 IT 专家

DELL nǐ shēnbiān de IT zhuānjiā

“DELL The IT Specialist Beside you”

听音乐，做 CD，我的 DellTM DimensionTM2400 满足我！

Tīng yīnyuè, zuò CD, wǒ de DellTM DimensionTM2400 mǎnzú wǒ!

“Listen to music, burn CD, my DellTM DimensionTM2400 satisfy me!”

有做 DJ 的机会就尽情的 show，你的音乐才能会因为有了 DellTM DimensionTM2400 而大放异彩，……，把 MP3 发送到您的环绕立体声系统中，享受喜爱的音乐，烧录自己的 CD，尽情的 high 吧！

Yǒu zuò DJ de jīhuì jiù jìnqíng de show, nǐ de yīnyuè cáinéng huì yīnwèi yǒule DellTM DimensionTM2400 ér dàfàng yìcǎi, …… , bǎ MP3 fāsòng dào nín de huánràò lìtǐshēng xìtǒng zhōng, xiǎngshòu xǐ'ài de yīnyuè, shāolù zìjǐ de CD, jìnqíng de high ba!

“Just show as you like if you have an opportunity to be a DJ, in which way your music will sprout out because you have DellTM DimensionTM2400, …send MP3 to your multichannel sound system, enjoy your music, burn your CD, get high!” (Chen, 2015: 51)

When dealing with advertising in an ever-changing cultural and social context like China, it is crucial to analyse Chinese-English code-mixing to understand how customers can be influenced in their purchasing decisions, as well as how this linguistic phenomenon

affects the brand and the product in different countries. One of the most efficient methods for a firm to create a strong brand name and presence in a foreign market is to adapt to the local culture while still capturing the attention of customers by offering something new. By blending global and local elements, brands can effectively resonate with Chinese consumers, which is why foreign brands utilize Chinese-English advertising for promotion.

2.1 Code-mixing: definition and features

Before defining code-mixing, it is important to begin with an introduction to the concept of language contact, as it provides the foundation for understanding how and why code-mixing occurs. The classic definition of “language contact” proposed by Weinreich in 1974, stating that “two or more languages are said to be in contact when they are used alternatively by the same individuals” (1974: 3, cit. in Berruto 2009: 4) is regarded as outdated considering the current studies about this topic.

In fact, this definition has been criticised by Berruto (2009) for being restrictive, particularly in its emphasis on languages being used alternatively, which imposes some limitations on the definition of language contact itself. More recent approaches, as the one proposed by Thomason, have expanded this definition by defining the place of language contact as an external physical one and as an intersection of certain spatial and temporal coordinates, regardless of whether individual speakers use languages interchangeably. In fact, Thomason defines language contact as “the use of more than one language in the same place at the same time” (2001: 1, cit. in Berruto 2009: 4). This shift moves the focus from the speaker, as Weinreich theorized, to the broader sociolinguistic environment, redefining the notion of contact within the field of language studies. In essence, considering the work of several scholars regarding this topic, Berruto defines the concept of language contact, recovering both the focus on speakers and on the language system, as follows (2009:6):

From the perspective of the speaker, two (or more) languages are in contact when they are to some extent both mastered by one or more speakers; consequently, from the perspective of the system, two (or more) linguistic systems are in contact when they are co-present and interact to some extent [...] in this definition the dimension of the place of contact is left

free, whether individual, social or geographical: systems can be co-present in the individual, in the community, or in the territory. Moreover, no degree of competence (nor of use) is specified to refer to it as contact: this concept “to some extent”, which may seem little more than exorbitant, is important precisely to focus on the continuum characteristic of this phenomenon. Finally, I would like to emphasise that a necessary condition for the occurrence of language contact is that there is a specific sociolinguistic context: “contact” necessarily implies a real sociolinguistic situation as a constitutive ingredient (my translation).

Moreover, in his study Berruto proposed a general overview of all the phenomenology that manifests itself in language contact, which is crucial to understand how code-mixing is inserted in this context, as shown in the scheme below:

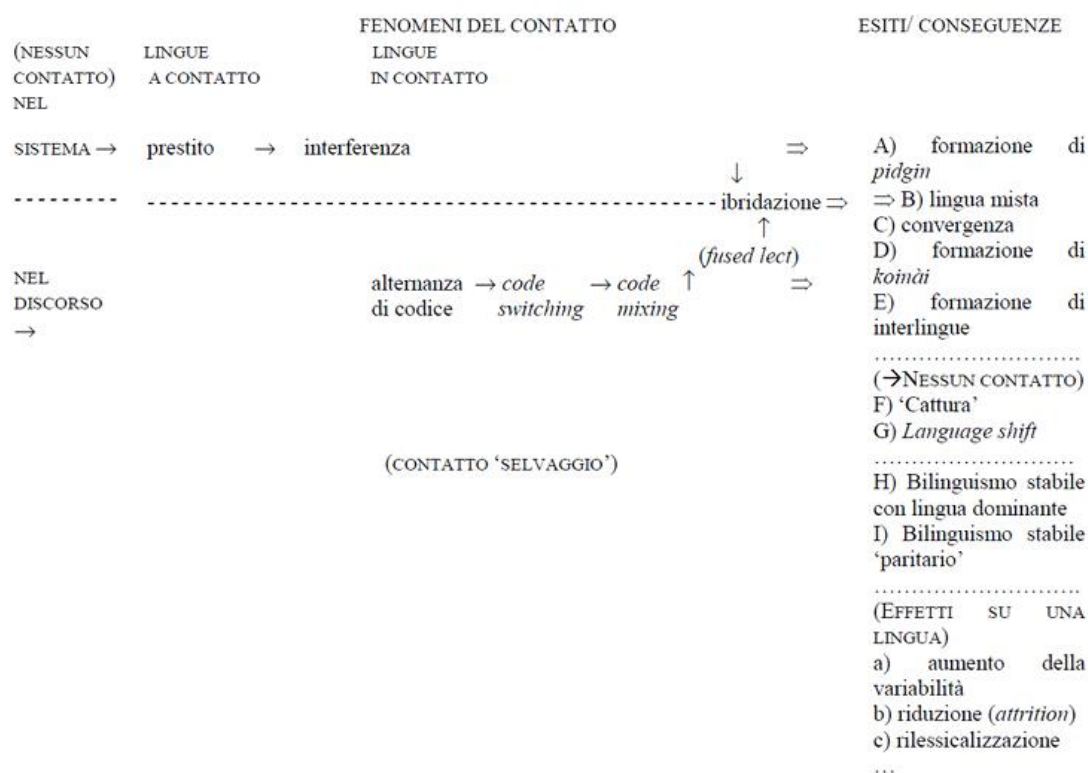


Figure 5 Scheme of the phenomenology of language contact (Source: Berruto, 2009:5).

Moving from left to right, the scheme describes a progression from a lack of contact to a full manifestation of linguistic phenomena due to contact, including weak and strong contact scenarios. This contact leads to effects and consequences, potentially resulting in a return to the initial absence of it.

According to Berruto's model, when analysing language contact, it is important to differentiate between two main types of phenomena. On one hand, there are phenomena

involving contact within the linguistic system, such as borrowing (*prestito*) and interference (*interferenza*). The term “borrowing” involves transferring surface elements, material between one language system to another, and it typically includes lexical and semantic aspects. While, the term “interference” involves the transportation of features, properties, categories, rules at various levels of analysis. On the other hand, there are phenomena that occur in actual language use, within discourse and everyday communication. These include practices such as code alternation (*alternanza di codice*), code-switching, code-mixing, fused lect and hybridization (*ibridazione*). The first three concepts will be explained more specifically in the next paragraph, as they are important for the analysis conducted in this thesis.

Reading from left to right is also fundamental because there is a relationship of implication, which means that the phenomena on the left imply the presence of the phenomena on the right. For instance, in a situation of linguistic contact, code-mixing presupposes code-switching, which in turn presupposes code alternation (*alternanza di codice*). This pattern of implication is reflected in the degree of mixture and interaction between linguistic systems and their grammars.

In addition, in his research Berruto proposes the distinction between “languages in contact” (*lingue in contatto*) and “contact languages” (*lingue a contatto*), highlighting the significance of this differentiation which has not received much attention in the research literature. The former implies that language contact is based on the bilingualism of individuals, groups, or communities, while the latter involves the interaction between speakers of different languages without them being bilingual. This distinction sheds light on the complexity of language interactions and the various ways in which languages encounter one another (Berruto, 2009).

2.1.1 Code alternation, code-switching and code-mixing

For the purposes of this thesis, among the various categories proposed by Berruto regarding language contact in actual discourse, we will focus on code alternation, code switching and code-mixing. The scholar defined code alternation as “a behaviour of the bilingual speaker, which occurs when the same speaker addresses different interlocutors

in different languages” (Berruto, 2009:4). This phenomenon is a choice made by the speaker, because of social and interactional reasons.

The distinction between code-switching and code-mixing is a subject of debate in the research literature, with some scholars questioning the validity and usefulness of maintaining such a separation. For instance, Hatch argues that there is no clear-cut boundary between inter-sentential code-switching and intra-sentential code-mixing. Similarly, some researchers reject this distinction, grouping both phenomena under the broader concept of “situational shifting” (Gumperz, 1982, Pakir, 1989; Tay, 1989 cit. in Ritchie and Bathia, 2004).

An influential classification that aligns with this perspective is offered by Gumperz, who distinguishes between situational and metaphorical code-switching. Situational code-switching occurs when external, situational factors, such as a change in setting, participants, or the level of formality of the conversation, make speakers switch from one language to another. This type of switching is thus closely related to changes in the social environment. In contrast, metaphorical code-switching is not driven by shifts in the situation itself, but rather by changes in topic or subject matter. In such cases, speakers switch codes to align with the cultural or emotional connotations associated with specific languages (Gumperz, 1982).

Another theoretical framework that aligns with the perspective of blurred boundaries between code-mixing and code-switching is Myers-Scotton’s matrix language frame (MFL). According to this linguist, code-switching can be divided into two main structural types: inter-sentential and intra-sentential. While inter-sentential code switching, where switches occur between sentences, has been widely examined from a sociolinguistic perspective and it has received less attention in terms of grammatical analysis. In contrast, intra-sentential code-switching, which involves switching within a single sentence, is more directly influenced by grammatical constraints across the involved languages.

To account for this, Myers-Scotton developed the Matrix Language Frame model. A key component of the MLF model is the distinction between the Matrix Language (ML) and the Embedded Language (EL). In intra-sentential code-switching, the ML is the dominant language that provides the grammatical structure, while the EL contributes with the inserted elements, that can be of any size, from a single morpheme to sentences. The ML is often the speaker’s first language, or the language more frequently used in discourse,

and it forms the syntactic frame into which EL elements are integrated. According to Myers-Scotton, there are three types of constituent patterns in code-switching: ML+EL constituents, containing elements from both ML and EL; ML islands, composed entirely of ML morphemes and governed by ML grammar and EL islands, which follow EL grammar but are still embedded within and constrained by the ML structure (Myers-Scotton, 1997). So, if we apply this MFL model to instances of Chinese-English code-mixing in Chinese advertising, the matrix language is Chinese, while the embedded language is English.

However, other researchers consider the distinction between code-switching and code-mixing both meaningful and valuable, especially when the aim is to formulate a grammatical framework for language mixing. Given the controversial nature of the topic, it is difficult to give a definition of code-switching and code-mixing, but Ritchie and Bathia proposed the following definitions (2004: 337):

We use the term code switching (CS) to refer to the use of various linguistic units (words, phrases, clauses, and sentences) primarily from two participating grammatical systems across sentence boundaries within a speech event. [...] We use the term code mixing (CM) to refer to the mixing of various linguistic units (morphemes, words, modifiers, phrases, clauses and sentences) primarily from two participating grammatical systems within a sentence.

In other words, these definitions underline the fact that code switching is inter-sentential and may be subject to discourse principles, while code mixing is intra-sentential and is constrained by grammatical principles. Moreover, both linguistic phenomena are influenced by social and psychological factors.

Another influential linguist who analysed code-mixing and code-switching, emphasizing that there was a distinction between the two, is Pieter Muysken (2000). His theoretical contributions will be discussed in greater detail in the following section.

2.1.2 Muysken's code-mixing classification

In his book "Bilingual Speech: a typology of code-mixing", that can be considered a pivotal work for the analysis of language mixing, Professor Muysken proposes the

following definitions of code-mixing and code-switching: “I am using the term code-mixing to refer to all cases where lexical items and grammatical features from two languages appear in one sentence. The more commonly used term code-switching will be reserved for the rapid succession of several languages in a single speech event” (Muysken, 2000:1).

Subsequently, Muysken identifies three types of intra-sentential code-mixing, each one of them associated with different structural and sociolinguistic conditions. The first type is “insertion”, which involves inserting lexical items or entire constituents from one language into the syntactic structure of another, as the following example shows:

(3) Yo anduve in a state of shock por dos dias (Muysken, 2000:5)

“I walked in a state of shock for two days.” (Spanish/English)

In the case of insertion, as illustrated by the example provided above, the English prepositional phrase is embedded within the grammatical framework of Spanish. This process closely resembles lexical borrowing, typically involving individual lexical items. However, what gets inserted can vary significantly across different languages, ranging from adverbial phrases to single nouns. This type of code-mixing aligns with Myers-Scotton’s Matrix Language Frame model explained in the previous section, where the matrix language provides the grammatical frame.

The second type of code-mixing is “alternation” that entails a switch between two distinct grammatical structures from different languages within a sentence. Sentences are made up of segments in one language alternating with segments in another language. This type of code-mixing is more symmetrical and is based on the idea that switches occur at points where the two languages have compatible structures. Such a case is illustrated in the next example:

(4) Andale pues and do come again. (Muysken, 2000:5)

“That’s all right then and do come again.” (Spanish/English)

Alternation involves a complete shift from one language to another, influencing both grammar and vocabulary. So, in this case (4), the Spanish segment is not embedded in the English one or vice versa, instead, each segment maintains the structure of its respective language. As such, alternation can be viewed as a specific type of code-switching, typically occurring between utterances.

The third type of code-mixing is “congruent lexicalization”, where the grammars of the two languages work together as one, and lexical items from either language can be inserted freely. This third type often occurs in bilingual settings with closely related languages, as evidenced in the following example:

(5) Weet jij [whaar] Jenny is? (Muysken, 2000:5)

“Do you know where Jenny is?” (English/Dutch)

In this example, it can be observed that *where* is similar to the Dutch *waar*, especially when it is pronounced by bilingual speakers, *is* is homophonous and *Jenny* is a name that exists in both languages.

Moreover, in his study, Muysken gave a structural interpretation of these three concepts that is illustrated in the tree diagram below, in which capital letters (A, B) are used to represent whole constituents associated with a particular language, while lowercase letters (a, b) indicate individual lexical items or words from a particular language.

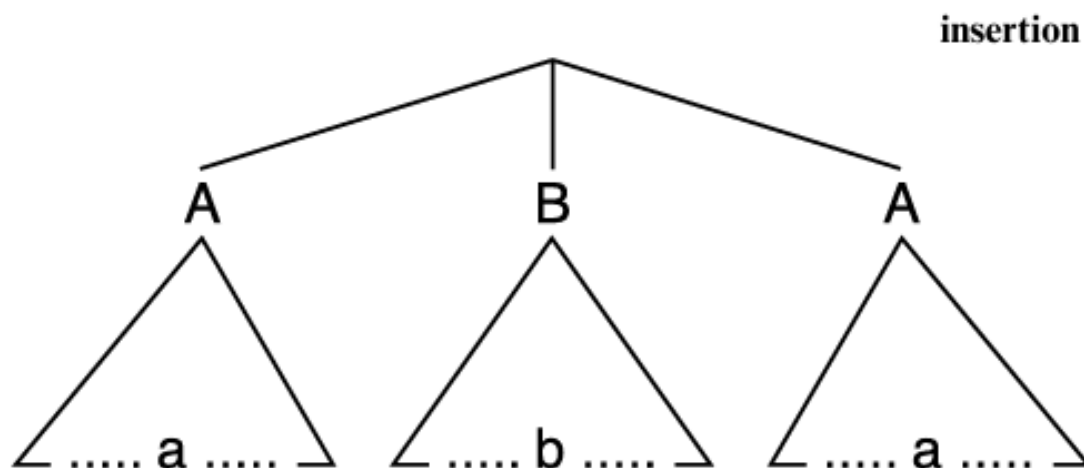


Figure 6 Insertion tree pattern (Source: Muysken, 2000:7).

In figure 6, it is illustrated how a single constituent labelled B and containing words from the same language (b), is inserted into a syntactic structure defined by language A, which contains words from that language(a).

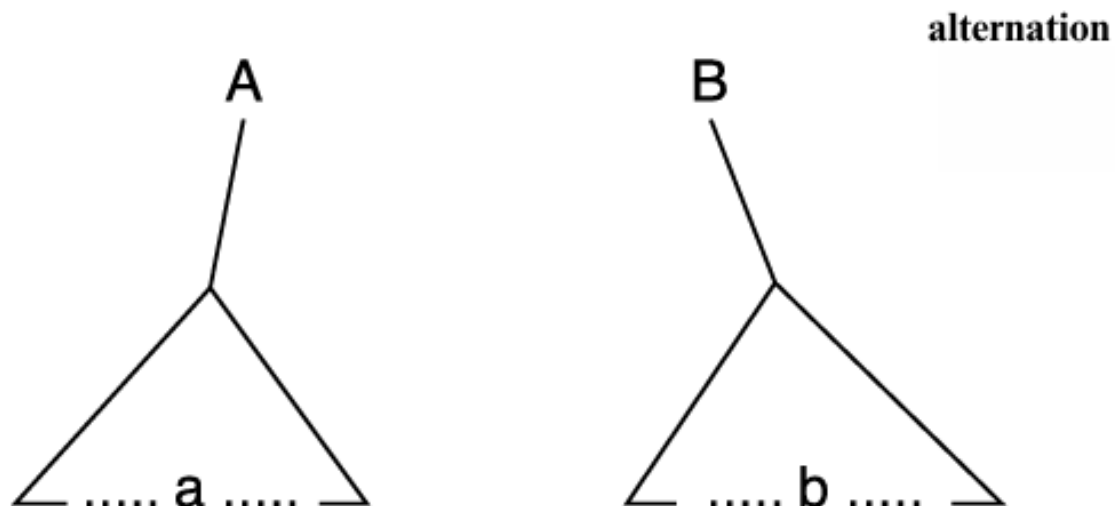


Figure 7 Alternation tree pattern (Source: Muysken, 2000:7).

As shown in Figure 7, a constituent from language A, composed of words from that language(a), is followed by a constituent from language B, also made up of words from its own language(b). However, the language of the constituent dominating A and B is not specified.

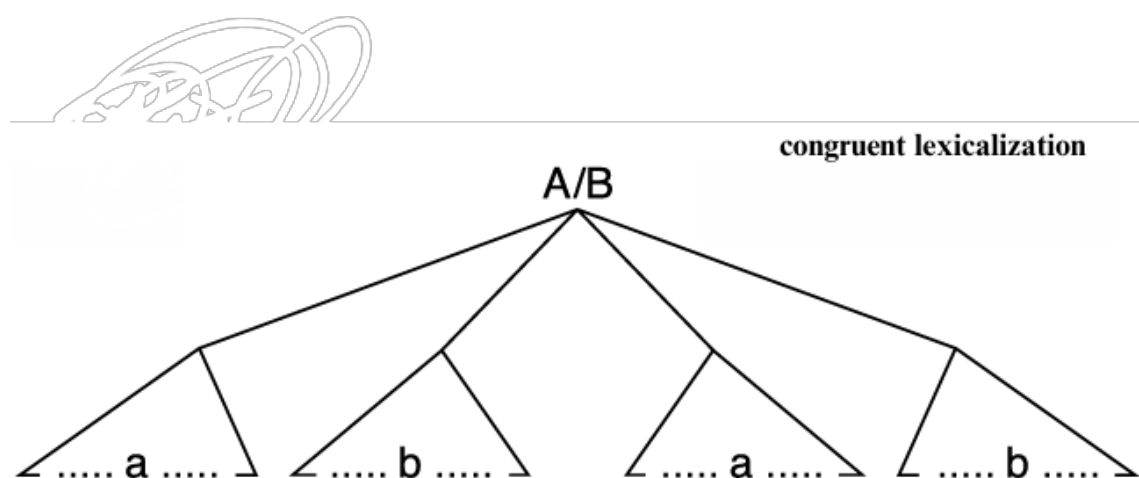


Figure 8 Congruent lexicalization tree pattern (Source: Muysken, 2000:8).

Lastly, figure 8 pictures a scenario in which languages A and B share a common grammatical structure, allowing lexical items from both languages (a and b) to be inserted in a relatively free manner (Muysken, 2000).

After having analysed the complex theoretical framework surrounding code-mixing and code-switching, in the following sections we will delve more into Chinese-English code-mixing in advertising.

2.2 Advantages and disadvantages of using code-mixing in Chinese advertising

The phenomenon of code-mixing has attracted considerable academic interest, both globally and within China. Chinese scholars have approached this linguistic phenomenon from various angles, such as sociolinguistics, language teaching, psycholinguistics, and pragmatics. These interdisciplinary perspectives complement one another, offering a comprehensive basis for a deeper understanding of Chinese-English code-mixing (Yu & Wang, 2025).

In this section we will primarily focus on two theoretical frameworks: Verschueren's Adaptation Theory and Yu Guodong's Adaptation model, which are fundamental to examine the advantages and disadvantages of Chinese-English code-mixing in advertisement.

In his famous book "Understanding Pragmatics", Verschueren (1999) proposed the Adaptation Theory, offering a comprehensive perspective on the cognitive, social, and cultural functions of language use. From a pragmatic standpoint, this theory explains how language operates on multiple levels to convey meaning, demonstrating both explanatory power and theoretical inclusiveness. He suggested that to meet communicative needs, individuals undergo a process of adaptation by choosing from a variety of possible linguistic options. In fact, according to his theory, language use involves constant choice-making and adaptation, because it has three key features: variability, negotiability, and adaptability. As proposed by Verschueren (1999:69):

Variability is the property of language which defines the range of possibilities from which choices can be made. Negotiability is the property of language responsible for the fact that choices are not made mechanically or according to strict form-functions relationships, but rather on the basis of highly flexible principles and strategies. Adaptability is the property of language which enables human beings to make negotiable linguistic choices from a variable range of options in such a way as to approach points of satisfaction for communicative needs.

These three factors are closely interrelated and, without variability and negotiability, the concept of adaptability would lose its essential meaning.

Subsequently, the scholar Yu Guodong (2000), building upon Verschueren's Linguistic Adaptation Theory, introduced the Adaptation Model to interpret the phenomenon of

Chinese-English code-mixing. He believes that “code-mixing is the result of language users’ adaptation to language means according to the actual context and at different levels of consciousness, which is specifically manifested in the adaptation to the linguistic reality, social conventions, and psychological motivations” (Yu, 2000 cit. in Yu & Wang, 2025:88). Adapting to the linguistic reality and social norms is a passive response made by the speakers to achieve her/his communication goals, while conforming to psychological motivations is a communication strategy actively adopted by the speakers to achieve their communication goals.

2.2.1 The advantages of Chinese-English code-mixing in advertising

To explore the advantages of using Chinese-English code-mixing in Chinese advertising, we will refer to a study conducted by Liu (2022), which analyses a corpus of 242 e-commerce advertisements using Yu Guodong’s adaptation model as its theoretical framework.

Nowadays, in Chinese advertising, code-mixing is frequently employed as a communicative strategy to adapt to the linguistic reality, which includes situations where language users switch codes due to purely linguistic factors, such as lexical gaps or culturally specific connotations. Using this type of adaptation strategy in advertising offers two key advantages: it helps fill in semantic gaps between the two languages and it facilitates expression by aligning with consumers’ pragmatic habits. Regarding the first advantage, the scholar proposes the following example:

(6) “实付金额 top1 即享免单, top2~5 加赠额外商品。” (Liu, 2022:3097)

Shífù jīn'é top1 jí xiǎng miǎndān, top2~5 jiā zèng éwài shāngpǐn

“The top 1 of the actual payment amount will enjoy free orders, and from the top 2 to 5 will receive additional products as gifts.” (my translation)

As we can observe in this instance, certain English terms lack precise equivalents in Chinese. The English word "top" can be translated in Chinese as "顶端" (*Dǐngduān*) or "顶部" (*Dǐngbù*), but these terms do not fully convey its intended meaning in certain contexts, particularly when referring to rankings. Since the word "top" has become

popular in China, advertisements often retain the original English term through code-mixing, this kind of strategy make advertisers ensure clarity.

As for the second advantage that comes from adapting to linguistic reality in Chinese advertising, the scholar argued that, due to the improvement of the national cultural level, the popularity of English has significantly increased in China, making English abbreviations a common feature in daily life communication. This strategy in advertising functions as a strategic adaptation to linguistic realities, ensuring clarity and alignment with consumer language habits. For this reason, advertisers have also adapted to this linguistic shift by incorporating such abbreviations, as shown in the example below:

(7) “DIY 数字添色治愈油画。” (Liu, 2022:3097)

DIY shùzì tiān sè zhìyù yóuhuà

“DIY digital colouring therapeutic oil painting.” (my translation)

In this case, advertisers used the abbreviation “DIY” (Do It Yourself) without translation, as the term is already widely accepted by Chinese consumers in everyday language, and it enhances communicative efficiency and commercial appeal.

Chinese-English code-mixing in accordance with social conventions refers to language users' strategic employment of linguistic alternation to comply with sociocultural norms, such as avoiding racial discrimination terms. In Chinese advertising, this adaptation strategy has primarily two advantages: it helps advertisers to avoid taboo topics, and it makes Chinese consumers elevate their social status.

As far as the first advantage is concerned, code-mixing helps advertisers circumvent socially sensitive or awkward topics, thereby enhancing consumer receptivity. For instance, the condom advertisement reported below creatively adapts Shakespeare's famous quote as follows:

(8) “TO 爹 OR NOT TO 爹, that is Not a Question.” (Liu, 2022:3097)

TO diē OR NOT TO diē, that is Not a Question

“To be a father or not be a father, that is not a question.” (my translation)

This playful twist on “To be or not to be, that is the question” by Shakespeare creates a humorous effect, while tactfully addressing sexuality, that is traditionally considered a taboo topic in Chinese society. In this case, by using Chinese-English code-mixing

advertisers mitigate potential discomfort, when dealing these kinds of subject matters, aligning with societal expectations and fostering consumer acceptance.

In relation to the second advantage, it can be said that social conventions reflect collective norms governing people behaviour and perception. Individuals' social standing, which is often tied to prestige or wealth, influences respect in Chinese society. In general, those with high social standing are more likely to get the respect and support of others. Hence, advertisers employ code-mixing to associate their products with a higher social status. For instance, the German car brand BMW, though widely known as 宝马 (*Bǎomǎ*) in Chinese, retains its English abbreviation in ads. In fact, BMW has become a status symbol in China, with consumers reinterpreting its initials as Business, Money and Woman, that are connotations in line with the aspirations of the general male population. Thus, preserving the English abbreviation aligns with consumers' desire for social elevation, reinforcing the brand's luxury appeal.

Moreover, Chinese-English code-mixing that adapts to social conventions also refers to the intentional use of language alternation by speakers to fulfil psychological motivations and achieve specific communicative goals. In advertisements, psychological motivation refers to the underlying promotional intent behind language choices. According to Yu Guodong's adaptation model of code-mixing, this type of adaptation is an active one, serving as a strategic communicative tool for businesses to promote products, meet consumers' psychological needs, and guide their purchasing behaviour. The use of code-mixing in ads, which actively adapts to psychological motivations, has two main advantages: it satisfies consumers' preferences, and highlights product strengths, thereby increasing consumer engagement.

As far as the first advantage is concerned, it can be said that, with global economic development and the rise in consumer demand, buyers increasingly favour internationally recognized and trendy products. Thus, many brands incorporate English or use English names in Chinese advertisements to express global recognition and modernity. This trend is particularly evident in women's fashion ads, as shown in the instance below:

(9) “2022 秋冬新款条纹设计感麻花复古高领针织双开拉链 chic 毛衣打底衫。” (Liu, 2022:3098)

2022 Qiūdōng xīnkǔǎn tiáowén shèjì gǎn máhuā fùgǔ gāo lǐng zhēnzhī shuāngkāi lāliàn chic máoyī dǎ dǐ shān

“2022 Autumn/Winter new striped smooth retro high-neck chic knitted interfaced sweater with double zipper.” (my translation)

In this example, advertisers used the English word “chic”, instead of the Chinese translation of the word, which results more efficient in attracting customers and satisfying their preferences.

Concerning the second advantage in using code-mixing for psychological motivations, when consumers are faced with numerous options, businesses frequently use code-mixing to emphasize products unique features. In such cases, Chinese-English code-mixing underlines advantages in design, functionality, or affordability. As evidenced by the Nike slogan reported below:

(10) “Nike 耐克官方 air Max 2X 女子运动鞋透气缓震 SWOOSH 小白鞋 CK2947。” (Liu, 2022:3099)

Nike nàikè guānfāng air Max 2X nǚzǐ yùndòng xié tòuqì huǎn zhèn SWOOSH xiǎo bái xié CK2947.

“Nike official air Max 2X women's sports shoes - breathable, cushioned SWOOSH CK2947 white shoes.” (my translation)

In this instance, "swoosh", which is the official name of Nike's logo, and is usually associated with a rapid movement, is retained in English and wrote in capital letters to highlight the shoe's sporty, high-performance qualities. This strategy aligns with consumers' desire for superior quality products, which will ultimately boost the sales (Liu, 2022).

2.2.2 The disadvantages of Chinese-English code-mixing in advertising

As for the disadvantages of Chinese-English code-mixing, one of the main drawbacks raised by researchers regarding this topic is the potential contamination of the Chinese language. As a matter of fact, the excessive use of code-mixing in Chinese media may contaminate the purity of the Chinese language and result in the rise of non-standard expressions. These negative consequences have sparked public criticism and even prompted government intervention through regulatory measures aimed at preserving linguistic integrity (Bi, 2011).

In 2004, Liu Bin, a member of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC), and of the NPC's Education, Science, Culture and Public Health Committee, underlined the "alarming" and "excessive" use of English abbreviations in Chinese-language newspapers and magazines, arguing that this practice goes against the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Standard Spoken and Written Chinese Language (中华人民共和国国家通用语言文字法, *Zhōnghuá Rénmín Gònghéguó Guójīa Tōngyòng Yǔyán Wénzì Fǎ*) adopted in 2000. According to Liu Bin this excessive use of English violates article 11 of the aforementioned law that states: "Publications in Chinese shall be in conformity with the norms of the standard spoken and written Chinese Language. Where foreign languages need to be used in publications in Chinese, necessary explanatory notes in standard Chinese shall be applied" (Ministry of education of the People's Republic of China, 2009). So, the proper way to use an English abbreviation is to first provide its Chinese translation, followed by the abbreviation in brackets to ensure clarity and accuracy. However, he points out that this guideline is often overlooked, and the improper use of foreign words has become increasingly widespread.

Another disadvantage of Chinese-English code-mixing that has been highlighted by Professor Hu of Fudan University in Shanghai is that an excessive foreign language influence could weaken Chinese cultural identity, because the embedding of English words into Chinese language has altered its internal harmony. Professor Hu further affirms that approximately 2.500 of the world's 7.000 languages are at risk of disappearing, because of the growing influence of dominant languages. While the Chinese language is not currently threatened with extinction due to its vast number of speakers, he emphasizes that it is Chinese people's responsibility to promote Chinese as a leading global language (Xing, 2004).

2.3 The language situation in Mainland China and Hong Kong

China is a linguistically diverse nation, with 92% of the population belonging to the same ethnic group, the Han ethnic group (汉族 *Hànzú*). While Han ethnic group speak different Chinese dialects, the country also recognizes 55 minority ethnic groups (少数民族 *Shǎoshù mínzú*), most of whom speak Mandarin Chinese (普通话 *Pǔtōnghuà*), and

also maintain their own native languages with regional variations. Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, language policy has prioritized standardization, particularly in promoting *Putonghua* as a unifying lingua franca. This effort has facilitated communication between Chinese people and strengthened national cohesion, while allowing space for minority languages and cultures to persist.

Due to its colonial history, the language situation of Hong Kong is considered a unique case. Under the British rule, the territory exhibited a diglossic language environment, with Cantonese being used for daily life and intra-ethnic communication and English serving administrative functions. Bilingualism was historically limited to the educated elite, though its prevalence has grown in recent decades. Since its handover in 1997 from the United Kingdom to the People's Republic of China, the linguistic dynamics of Hong Kong have continued to evolve, reflecting the shifts in political and cultural realities. This complex sociolinguistic framework exemplifies China's simultaneous emphasis on national unification through Mandarin and the careful consideration of regional diversity.

2.3.1 Mainland China situation

The Chinese language is known for its significant regional variation, which is characterised by the identification of seven distinct dialect groups: Mandarin, Wu, Xiang, Gan, Kejia (Hakka), Yue, and Min. Each one of them possesses distinct phonological systems, particularly in their tonal structures, yet all are historically derived from a common linguistic root. Among these languages, Mandarin is the most widely spoken, encompassing approximately 70% of China's Han population. Mandarin itself is divided into four subgroups: Northern, Northwestern, Southwestern, and Eastern Mandarin. Conversely, Wu, Xiang and Gan are referred to as “Central dialects” and Kejia (Hakka), Yue, and Min are referred to as “Southern dialects”.

Cantonese, a Chinese dialect spoken in Guangdong and in the two special administrative regions of Hong Kong, and Macau, is distinguished by its prestige and it is attracting an increasing number of mainland learners nowadays. Despite their common origins, these dialects diverge considerably in vocabulary, phonology, and even syntax. The degree of mutual unintelligibility among them is substantial enough to permit a comparison of their relationship to that of Romance languages, which are different yet historically and

linguistically connected. This linguistic diversity observed in China is indicative of the complexity of the country's dialectal landscape. Regional dialects function as almost separate languages while retaining traces of a unified heritage, thereby illustrating the intricate nature of the Chinese linguistic landscape.

Despite the considerable dialectal differences that often impede mutual intelligibility, Chinese people have maintained a strong sense of shared ethnolinguistic and cultural identity throughout history. The perception of unity is largely sustained by China's logographic writing system. In this system, each symbol or character typically represents a word or a morpheme, defined as a meaningful unit of language. Consequently, it effectively transcends phonological variations between dialects. As Kwan-Terry and Luke (1997: pp. 276–7, 284) underline:

The Chinese “languages” are called “dialects” because for centuries they have had a special relationship through the writing system, which is by and large accessible from the different vantage-points of the individual dialects. [...] From the point of view of helping to unite a vast country, there is a certain logic in the use of a logographic script. A non-phonetic script is in fact better suited than a phonetic one in facilitating inter-provincial communication.

In contemporary China, the official national language is called Putonghua and has its roots in the Beijing dialect. For over fifty years, the government of the People's Republic of China has engaged in systematic endeavours to promote it as a linguistic standard through educational institutions and media. However, this implementation has faced greater resistance in southern regions, where non-Mandarin dialects are spoken by approximately one-third of the Han population (Li and Lee, 2004). This disparity stems from the fact that standard written Chinese aligns with Northern Mandarin structures, creating a significant gap between speech and writing for speakers of southern dialects. Consequently, the southern regions demonstrate lower Putonghua proficiency rates compared to the northern areas, where the native dialects more closely resemble the standard form. This situation highlights the complex relationship between China's unifying writing system and the practical challenges of implementing a spoken standard language across diverse linguistic communities.

China's ethnic minorities are primarily concentrated in the border regions of the north, northeast, northwest, and southwest, though some live in small communities among the Han Chinese majority. While the Chinese government officially acknowledges 55 minority groups, the country is linguistically diverse, with an estimated 80 to 100 distinct

language varieties in use. The demographic composition of these minority groups is characterised by significant variation, with the Zhuang population numbering over 15.5 million and the Hezhen population amounting to a mere few thousands (Li and Lee, 2004). During the years, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has implemented a policy of non-assimilation that is aimed at the protection of minority ethnic groups. In fact, people belonging to minority nationalities have several advantages, including the permission to have more than one child, when the one-child policy⁶ (一孩政策, *yī hái zhèngcè*) was in place, more relaxed university admission standards, and more flexible employment and promotion conditions.

In the early 20th century, China sought to translate Western knowledge in Chinese, with the language absorbing significant structural and lexical features from European languages such as English, French and Russian. Prominent writers such as Lu Xun adapted their Wu or Mandarin-based vernacular styles by incorporating European grammatical structures, leading to a noticeable “Europeanization” of Chinese syntax and morphology. Xie (1990) has categorised these influences as either beneficial or adverse Europeanization. The phenomenon of beneficial Europeanization has been observed to enhance Chinese expressiveness while maintaining its characteristic conciseness. This is evidenced by the adoption of pronouns such as 前者 (*Qiánzhě*, which means “the former”) and 后者 (*Hòuzhě*, which means “the latter”). Conversely, adverse influences disrupt linguistic economy, such as the excessive use of the adverbial marker -di (modelled after European suffixes like the English -ly). Due to ongoing global interaction, particularly with English, this process of linguistic Europeanization persists in contemporary Chinese.

Since its implementation in the 1950s, the Putonghua Promotion Campaign (普通话推广活动, *Pǔtōnghuà Tuīguǎng Huódòng*), which is a Chinese government initiative aimed at promoting the use of Mandarin Chinese as the standard spoken language across the

⁶ China's one-child policy, introduced in 1980 by Deng Xiaoping, was a strict population control measure aimed at diminishing rapid population growth. This policy limited most couples to only have one child, non-compliance often led to financial penalties or, in severe cases, forced abortions. While urban families were largely restricted, certain exemptions existed, for example rural families could have a second child if their first was a girl, and ethnic minorities were often permitted to have more than one child. In 2016, the policy officially ended, and China began allowing all married couples to have two children in response to the growing concerns about an aging population and a declining labour force. Following a noticeable drop in birth rates, with only 12 million births reported in 2020 compared to 14.65 million in 2019, the government further relaxed restrictions in 2021, permitting Chinese families to have up to three children (Mullen, 2021).

country, has led to a substantial increase in the number of Mandarin speakers nationwide, particularly through formal education. However, this widespread adoption has led to the gradual decline of local dialects and minority languages, as many indigenous vocabulary items are being replaced by their Standard Chinese equivalents. In minority communities, where languages increasingly adopt Chinese pronunciations and loanwords, this practice may inadvertently accelerate language shift or loss. In contrast, language death is a reality for few ethnic languages, of which Manchu is likely the most frequently mentioned example (Li and Lee, 2004).

According to the latest report on the “Language situation in China” released by the Ministry of Education (2021), in 2020, 80.72% of China's population spoke Mandarin Chinese, a 27.66 percentage point increase from 2000. To encourage the usage of Mandarin Chinese, officials have constructed 60 language promotion bases, including one at Peking University. Moreover, the national common language instruction and assessment system has been upgraded, in fact according to the data, almost 5.28 million people on the Chinese mainland have passed the Mandarin Chinese proficiency test.

To enhance the global presence of the Chinese language, China’s Ministry of Education also established the Centre for Language Education and Cooperation, focusing on promoting Mandarin learning internationally. By the end of 2020, Mandarin was being taught in more than 180 countries and regions, with over 70 of them incorporating it into their national education systems. The rise of digital platforms has further accelerated interest in learning Mandarin, for instance, the “Chinese Plus” online learning platform offers over 190 courses on both Chinese language and culture, attracting more than two million international learners. This growing global engagement with Mandarin reflects its increasing significance in the world. Notably, in 2021, Chinese was also officially recognized as a language of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (Ministry of education, 2021).

2.3.2 The situation in Hong Kong

Hong Kong is a major international city located at the mouth of the Pearl River Delta in South China. The territory is comprised of several key regions, namely Hong Kong Island, Kowloon Peninsula, the New Territories, and numerous outlying islands. With a

population of over 7.5 million, it ranks among the most densely populated areas in the world. Today, more than 95% of Hong Kong's population is ethnically Chinese, primarily descended from migrants from mainland China.

The linguistic situation of Hong Kong is notably complex due to its historical background. In contemporary Hong Kong, the three predominant spoken languages are Cantonese, English and Putonghua, each of which functions differently depending on the social context and background of the speaker, while two written languages are used by Hongkongers, namely English and Putonghua. The dominance of Cantonese can be traced back to the post-World War II immigration from southern China, particularly from the Guangdong region and the Pearl River Delta. In addition to Cantonese speakers, Hong Kong is home to several other linguistic communities, including speakers of other Chinese dialects (such as Hakka, Hokkien, Chiu Chau and Sze Yap), native and expatriate English speakers, and Filipino and Indonesian domestic workers who speak Tagalog and Indonesian respectively. The prominence of English in Hong Kong is largely due to its colonial past and the introduction of compulsory education in the 1970s, which significantly expanded the use of English over time. While Cantonese remains the primary spoken language for most residents and acts as a *lingua franca* between speakers of other Chinese dialects, English has long been used in key sectors such as government, law, business and education. In recent years, the global influence of English has also increased its presence in digital communication, including social media, text messaging, and email. However, despite a sizeable portion of Hong Kong population growing up in bilingual environments, which may speak English with their family and friends, most Hong Kong residents only use English in multilingual academic and business contexts. Instead, Putonghua serves as a broader *lingua franca* between the Cantonese-speaking community and other ethnic Chinese-speaking dialects communities, such as immigrants and domestic tourists (Chan, 2024).

Moreover, several studies on language attitudes in Hong Kong have consistently found that Cantonese is considered as the language of solidarity, while English is perceived as having the highest status. In a study conducted by Hansen Edwards (2021: 325, cit. in Chan, 2024), she identified a range of complex social meanings associated with Hong Kong's three spoken languages, as shown by the following definitions: Cantonese is considered as "the authentic language symbolic of an assumed Hong Kong identity and localist political attitudes"; English is "the authentic language of Hong Kong as a means

of achieving optimal distinctiveness from and within the PRC and as symbolic of the UK and democracy”; Putonghua is defined as “the language of the PRC, viewed either as an imposed anonymous language, symbolising economic assimilation with the PRC or as a negotiated (contested) anonymous language, symbolising linguistic assimilation into the PRC”.

To better understand Hong Kong linguistic complexity, it is essential to briefly examine the region’s historical development. Previously a British colony for a period exceeding 150 years, Hong Kong was returned to Mainland China on 1 July 1997 and was designated a Special Administrative Region under the "one country, two systems" policy (一国两制, *Yiguóliǎngzhì*). Deng Xiaoping proposed this concept in the 1980s to solve historical issues, which transformed into a vivid reality when Hong Kong returned to the People’s Republic of China. This policy plays a central role in shaping the region’s political and legal framework, and it allows Hong Kong to maintain its capitalist system and way of life, distinct from the communist system practiced on Mainland China. Under this policy, Hong Kong retains a high degree of autonomy in managing its economic, cultural, and political affairs, including its own legal system, currency, and even social customs. Mainland Chinese laws do not apply in Hong Kong, and the central government in Beijing is not allowed to interfere in local governance, except in matters related to foreign affairs. The principle of “Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong” ensures that the region’s government is run by locally elected leaders, without direct involvement from Beijing officials. To formalize this arrangement, the Chinese government amended its constitution by adding Article 31, thus providing a legal foundation for the establishment of Special Administrative Regions like Hong Kong, Taiwan and Macao, with the promise that the system would remain unchanged for 50 years following the 1997 handover (So, 2011). In the aftermath of the handover, English maintained its status as a co-official language in conjunction with Chinese (standard written Chinese and spoken Cantonese). English remained the dominant language in areas such as government, business, law and education, while the use of traditional Chinese characters in writing, combined with the presence of Cantonese dialect features, in everyday situations and in informal sections of the Hong Kong press, reflects the development of a distinct Hong Kong identity. Notwithstanding a century of British sovereignty, native English speakers have consistently constituted a little proportion of the population, amounting to less than five percent. Historically, the social interactions between Western and local Chinese

communities has been limited, largely due to the existence of separate institutions and media that allowed each group to live and operate within their own linguistic and cultural spaces (Li and Lee, 2004).

Over the last decades, there has been a growing political tension between Mainland China and Hong Kong. More specifically, Hong Kong's political leaders and pro-democracy advocates have frequently engaged in negotiations with Beijing to emphasize the "Two Systems" aspect of the policy "One country, two systems", while Beijing government has consistently worked to reinforce the "One Country" principle. At the beginning of the 21st century, Hong Kong experienced a major crisis with the outbreak of the SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) epidemic in 2003. The situation became so severe that the United Nations issued a travel warning, effectively isolating the city and causing its tourism industry to collapse. At the same time, the local government struggled to revive the economy, which had already been weakened by the lingering effects of the Asian financial crisis. During this economic and public health turmoil, the government attempted to pass Article 23 (the anti-subversion law) under pressure from Beijing. This move was widely seen as a response to Beijing's growing frustration with Hong Kong's tolerance of anti-communist groups, including Falun Gong and the annual gathering to commemorate the victims of Tiananmen Incident. The proposal triggered widespread public backlash, culminating in a massive protest on July 1, 2003, approximately half a million people took to the streets to voice their concerns over potential threats to civil liberties such as freedom of speech, press, and religion. This demonstration represents a turning point in the evolving relationship between Hong Kong and mainland China (So, 2011).

In 2020, the People's Republic of China took a controversial step by directly enacting the "National security law" in Hong Kong, thereby bypassing the local legislature. The law essentially makes any dissent illegal and gives incredibly broad definitions to offenses like secession, terrorism, subversion, and collusion with foreign powers. Moreover, it endowed Beijing with the authority to establish its own security agency in Hong Kong and to exert its influence over the appointment of judges in national security cases. This move has led to a significant concern among pro-democracy activists, while the Chinese authorities and pro-Beijing politicians have defended the law as a necessary measure to restore order following months of large-scale protests (Maizland and Fong, 2024). These

recent historical events made public opinion realize that the tensions between Hong Kong and Mainland China are still present.

Finally, it is also interesting to notice that nowadays code-mixing between Cantonese and English is a widespread phenomenon among educated Chinese speakers in Hong Kong. Rather than switching entire clauses, speakers often insert English words or phrases into Cantonese or written Chinese sentences, a phenomenon known as intra-sentential code-mixing or code-switching. This linguistic phenomenon is indicative of the long-standing contact between the two languages, dating back over 150 years due to Hong Kong's colonial history. Considering English's status as a dominant language in Hong Kong educational sector and its pervasive cultural influence, the integration of English elements into both spoken Cantonese and written Chinese is quite common (Li and Lee, 2004). This thesis will analyse the linguistic phenomenon of Cantonese-English code-mixing in greater detail in the following sections.

2.4 The functions of English in Chinese advertising

In Chinese advertising, English is primarily used for two main purposes: as a persuasive strategy and as a means of constructing social and cultural identities. Persuasion in advertising often targets consumer attitudes, as these can influence and predict behaviours. Many sociolinguists argue that language is not only a tool for communication but also plays a key role in shaping social reality. From this perspective, language use is seen as a form of social practice, and it actively contributes to the construction of identity. The following two sections of this thesis (2.4.1 and 2.4.2) will provide a more detailed explanation of these two concepts, as they are fundamental to understand the rationale behind the use of English in Chinese advertisement.

2.4.1 English as a strategy of persuasion

As advertising has become an increasingly influential part of modern society, there has been a growing academic interest in its persuasive nature. In fact, one of advertising's key

functions is persuasion, achieved through the linguistic strategies employed by copywriters.

The way language is used in advertisements plays a crucial role in the product promotion and consumer behaviour. In many non-English-speaking regions, English is frequently used in bilingual advertisements due to its strong symbolic value, which enhances their persuasive appeal. Moreover, in his research about the use of English in Asian advertisement Bhatia (2001) notes that English is commonly used in Asian advertising to create a positive psychological impact on the target audience.

In order to understand the persuasive impact of advertising, it's important to consider what exactly is being influenced: attitudes, beliefs, or behaviours. According to Murchison (1935), attitudes refer to emotional responses, beliefs relate to the knowledge we have about something, and behaviours are the actions influenced by both. Persuasion primarily targets attitudes, since these can predict future behaviours. Therefore, to be effective, advertisements must be able to shape or alter the attitudes of potential buyers toward the product being promoted. One effective way to achieve this is through the strategic use of English in bilingual advertisements, because the messages associated with English frequently contain sophisticated or globally appealing content, thereby enhancing the attractiveness of the product. It is evident that English functions not only as a linguistic instrument but also plays a pivotal role in the persuasive shaping of attitudes, since it facilitates the positioning of both the advertiser and the audience within a desirable, cosmopolitan framework, reinforcing the appeal of the advertised product (Gao, 2005).

2.4.2 The role of English in identity construction

In advertising, the formation of identity is closely linked to broader social dynamics. Ads do more than simply reflect existing cultural meanings; they actively construct a sense of community among target audiences. Drawing on Anderson's (1983) concept of the "imagined community", advertisements create a collective identity in which individuals, despite being strangers, feel a sense of shared belonging to a collective identity. This imagined sense of unity is often formed in opposition to cultural or national "others". Language plays a crucial role in this process, serving as a tool to forge these shared identities and create discursive spaces in which consumers can identify with both the

product and the wider community it represents. Through ideological processes, advertisements link the symbolic meaning of products to the identities of the customers.

To analyse the Chinese customer's identity construction, through Chinese-English advertising, is important to introduce the positioning theory. The positioning theory proposed by Davies and Harré (1990) is rooted in social psychology, and it has been defined as:

the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines. There can be interactive positioning in what one person says positions another. And there can be reflexive positioning in which one positions oneself (Davies and Harré, 1990: 48).

This theory emphasizes that identity is not fixed but negotiated through available subject positions offered by dominant discourses. In the advertising context, these subject positions are shaped by cultural values attached to English, such as modernity, global sophistication, and technological advancement. Through the strategic use of English, advertisers in China can position consumers in ways that align them with these desirable qualities. While consumers might appear to be self-positioning, this process is largely one-sided and controlled by the advertisers. This asymmetry is crucial for understanding how English operates as a tool for shaping identities. Moreover, positioning is closely tied to cultural norms and local values. Thus, the use of English in Chinese advertisements is effective because it taps into a shared understanding among consumers, regardless of their English proficiency, since it relates to a cosmopolitan and elite status. Positioning theory, therefore, is a valuable analytical lens for exploring how language, identity, and power interact in the everyday lives of Chinese consumers.

According to a study conducted by Li (2015) based on a corpus of 357 printed commercial collected from Chinese magazines and newspapers that feature Chinese-English code-mixing, it can be observed how positioning theory operates in the context of Chinese advertising. By examining the English words and discursive strategies used in headlines, slogans, and brand names, particularly in ads related to technology, real estate, and beauty, he identifies five key positioning cues frequently used to shape the identity of Chinese consumers. These include references to Western place names, emotional language, success discourses, and gendered ideals tied to Western masculinity and femininity. Moreover, Li's (2015) analysis reveals three interconnected ways in which English is used

to position Chinese individuals: locating, refashioning, and assessing; then he proposes the following definitions for these three concepts:

It is locating in that English is used for specific effect to discursively set the geographical places in the West as the living place of Chinese people. It is refashioning in the sense not only is English used to enrich but also reinterpret or redefine traditional collective identities of Chinese people. It is assessing in the sense that some features or standards conforming to traditional Chinese ideals are explicitly or implicitly re-evaluated through the process of a comparison (Li, 2015:82).

2.4.2.1 Locating

Concerning the concept of locating Chinese people, it can be said that one prominent strategy observed in the analysed real estate advertisements in Li (2015) research is the discursive positioning of Chinese consumers within a Western spatial and cultural context. Through the strategic use of English and Western place names, properties located entirely in China are marketed as if they were situated in globally recognized Western cities such as New York, London, or Paris. This linguistic positioning gives the local housing developments a sense of international prestige and spatial specificity, aligning them with the modern and cosmopolitan identities associated with the West, as the following two example show: “Bourton-on-the-water, 英伦水岸 (*Bourton-on-the-water, yīnglún shuǐ àn*)” (Li, 2015:83), which can be translated as “Bourton-on-the-water, on the shores of England”(my translation); “Notting Shire, 诺丁郡 (*Notting Shire, nuòdīng jùn*)” (Li, 2015:83) which can be translated as “Notting Shire, Notting County”(my translation). Bourton-on-the-water is a popular tourist destination in England, while the name Notting Shire may be a spelling variant of Nottinghamshire, an English county located in the East Midlands. In fact, by assigning Western-sounding names to residential projects, advertisers invoke the symbolic meaning of these places. These names are not just decorative; they are intertextual cues that evoke an imagined geography, reshaping the consumer’s perception of the properties as being more than local, they are perceived as transnational, desirable, and culturally superior.

Moreover, this phenomenon reflects a deeper ideological function, because these marketing tactics don't just aim at selling properties, they offer a version of identity rooted

in Western modernity. The Western names and styles serve as cultural metaphors, positioning the Chinese consumer not just geographically, but socially and morally, within a Western framework of progress and prestige. Ultimately, by embedding Western place names and cultural references into the Chinese local urban landscape, advertisers are constructing a shared transnational identity, one that merges local aspirations with global imaginaries. This process defines how Chinese consumers understand space, home, and belonging, reflecting broader narratives of globalization and cultural aspiration.

2.4.2.2 Refashioning

In addition to the spatial positioning through Western place names, the study conducted by Li (2015) also reveals another simultaneous and significant strategy for refashioning Chinese collective identity in advertising that is: the use of Anglophone emotional discourse. This approach relies on emotional appeals, which have long been recognized as powerful tools in influencing consumer attitudes and behaviours, because emotions not only help make the unfamiliar concepts seem natural, but they also play a central role in forming new identities. However, emotions are not universal. They are deeply shaped by cultural norms and language. While all people experience emotions, how those emotions are labelled, expressed, and interpreted can vary widely across cultures. For example, English emotion terms are culture-specific, reflecting the values and worldview of Anglophone societies. However, in the context of Chinese advertising, there has been an increasing utilisation of English emotion words as positioning cues. The employment of words such as "amusement," "delight," "love," "romantic, and "surprise" in product slogans by marketers serves to encourage consumers to adopt Western emotional frameworks. It is evident that these words serve a dual purpose: they not only articulate feelings but also instruct Chinese consumers in the interpretation and articulation of emotions in a manner consistent with Anglophone norms. This results in a repositioning of emotional identity, whereby Chinese people are subtly guided to relate to universal emotions as if they were native speakers of English. An illustrative example of this can be found in the following Canon camera advertisement: "Delighting you always, 感动常在佳能。 (*Delighting you always, gǎndòng cháng zài jiānéng*)" (Li, 2015:85), which can be translated as: "Always being moved and delighted at Canon" (my translation).

Within the context of refashioning Chinese people through advertising, beauty and femininity play a crucial role, particularly in the context of the introduction and normalisation of Western beauty standards in China. The beauty-related advertisements analysed by Li (2015) reveals the strategic deployment of specific English phrases to convey ideals associated with Eurocentric beauty norms. Headlines such as “Age miracle” and “Slim and shape” reflect common themes such as youthfulness, slim bodies, and large breasts, all of which align with Western standards of female attractiveness, as this example of Guerlain advertisement shows: “Age miracle, life miracle 七天, 惊现肌肤的青春奇迹。 (*Age miracle, life miracle qītiān, jīng xiàn jīfū de qīngchūn qíjì*)” (Li, 2015:86), which can be translated as: “Age miracle, seven days life miracle, a miraculous and surprising display of youthful skin” (my translation).

In Chinese advertising, these ideals are not only verbalized through language but are also visually represented by using white, often blonde, Western models who embody a tall, thin, and fair-skinned look. This contrasts with traditional Chinese beauty ideals, which emphasize a more holistic view of femininity, one that links physical appearance to inner virtue, talent, and moral character. However, the increasing presence of Western beauty norms in Chinese media reflects a deeper influence of global capitalism and modernity. As a result, the idea of transnational femininity, focused largely on appearance, becomes embedded within Chinese advertising. This may pressure Chinese women to adjust their perceptions of beauty in ways that align with Eurocentric standards. Still, within these campaigns, there are subtle references to traditional Chinese values, suggesting an ongoing negotiation between global and local ideals of femininity. In essence, these advertisements do more than selling beauty products, they reshape the cultural understanding of female identity by blending globalized, Western ideals with culturally specific expectations, thereby encouraging Chinese women to adhere to multiple and sometimes conflicting beauty standards.

2.4.2.3 Assessing

The refashioning of Chinese identity in advertising frequently entails implicit assessment concerning gender, emotion, and accomplishment. Masculinity and femininity, for

instance, are not merely portrayed; they are evaluated and reshaped according to new standards. In a similar manner, the way Chinese emotional expression is subtly reassessed through the utilisation of English emotion vocabulary serves to encourage an alignment with Western emotional norms. This process of identity formation is frequently characterised by comparisons between Chinese and Western ideals. However, it should be noted that such assessments in advertisements are not always hidden. In many cases, they are explicitly communicated through the choice of English words associated with success, such as “victory” and “succeed.” These terms are frequently employed in the creation of slogans, presenting success as something achievable and personal, like in the following example: “Victory In Pajero, 成功源于帕杰罗 (*Victory In Pajero, chénggōng yuán yú pàjiéluó*)” (Li, 2015: 87), that can be translated as: “Victory in Pajero, success comes from Pajero” (my translation). In this way, advertising does more than increasing the sales, it promotes a vision of individual success that aligns closely with Western values of individualism. This concept often contrasts with the traditional Chinese emphasis on collectivism, suggesting a cultural shift where personal ambition and self-achievement are increasingly celebrated. Thus, English words in advertising functions not only as a linguistic tool but also as a cultural mechanism, reinforcing and reshaping Chinese perceptions of identity, success, and value.

Another common strategy employed in Chinese advertising to assess and position consumers is the recontextualization of elite and aristocratic discourses. The assignment of royal or noble attributes to products, particularly in the context of real estate, serves as a symbolic strategy employed by advertisers to position Chinese consumers as modern-day inheritors of an aristocratic status, as illustrated by the following slogans from Star river and Gubei, respectively: “Caste of surpassing quality, 巅峰身份 (*Caste of surpassing quality, diānfēng shēnfēn*)” (Li, 2015:87), that can be translated as: “Caste of surpassing quality, highest status”(my translation); “My Royal Life, My Gold Way”(Li, 2015:88). It is important to note that these references do not conflict with traditional Chinese notions of success, which, since the ancient times, have been linked to status, privilege, and hierarchy. In essence, the use of English royal terminology in these marketing narratives serves a dual purpose: it invokes the glamour of Western aristocracy, while simultaneously reinforcing a traditionally Chinese understanding of prestige, offering consumers a symbolic claim to both (Li, 2015).

2.5 Creativity in Chinese advertising

It is widely believed that regardless of the advertising format, employing an effective creative strategy remains essential. Creative strategies in advertising play a pivotal role in establishing a connection between brands and consumers, ensuring that the brand message is aligned with the audience expectations. As Frazer (1983) emphasized, creative strategies constitute a crucial marketing decision, determining the core message and guiding the selection of media channels to effectively reach the intended audience. Furthermore, with the advent of digital platforms, advertising strategies evolved. In the contemporary era, consumers are increasingly turning to online sources for their information needs, thereby compelling advertisers to shift towards digital formats. The advent of Internet and social media has not only transformed the advertising landscape, but has also introduced new dynamics to both strategy and creativity. It is believed that creativity in advertising is shaped by the environment in which it is produced. Therefore, to effectively navigate the Chinese advertising landscape, marketers must understand the cultural and contextual dynamics unique to China (Chen, Wang and Liang, 2019).

It is widely known that international corporations in China frequently employ advertising strategies that incorporate a combination of both standardized and localized elements. Zhou and Belk's (2004) research revealed an ambivalent response among Chinese consumers to global versus local appeals. They found that global appeals were associated with modernity, while local appeals resonated with national pride. Despite these findings, relying solely on the standardization-localization framework may oversimplify the nuances of advertising strategy in China.

When doing business with China today, companies must recognise that the country is no longer just the “world's factory”, producing goods for export at low costs. Instead, there is a growing focus on China's domestic market, which has grown significantly in terms of wealth and consumer expectations. This shift makes China a symbol of rapid and unpredictable change, posing ongoing challenges for foreign businesses. This fast-paced transformation requires constant strategic adaptation and innovation. Despite these challenges, China remains a crucial market that companies cannot afford to overlook in their internationalisation strategies. In this sense, China's evolving landscape continues to

drive global innovation and international business development (Vescovi, 2022). This dynamic environment also influences the way in which companies market their products and services, as well as the linguistic techniques employed in advertising. Advertisers must be innovative and flexible, continuously adapting their choice of language to align with changing consumer preferences and the rapidly evolving business landscape.

As proposed by Kachru (1986a), bilingual linguistic creativity typically involves two key aspects: the use of multiple languages within a discourse, such as code-switching or code-mixing, and the employment of verbal strategies shaped by sociological, psychological, and attitudinal factors. This definition highlights the role of code-mixing in Chinese advertising as a manifestation of linguistic creativity, strategically employed by copywriters to influence consumers' purchasing decisions. In the following sections, we will assess Mandarin-English and Cantonese-English code-mixing in Chinese advertising in greater depth, with a focus on the strategies used by copywriters within a bilingual advertising context.

2.5.1 Mandarin-English code-mixing

The global spread of English as an international language has brought about profound social, cultural and linguistic changes. As it becomes more integrated into the everyday communication of diverse societies, English often plays multiple roles, ranging from enabling social mobility and empowerment to, at times, contributing to cultural marginalisation. In many multilingual contexts, English acts as a guest language, blending into conversations or texts primarily in the host language, which is the primary language spoken by individuals or communities. A common manifestation of this is the phenomenon of code-mixing, which is the incorporation of English words or phrases into the grammatical structure of another language, as we mentioned before (Leung and Chan, 2016).

Nowadays, code-mixing has become deeply embedded in Chinese communication across a wide range of discourses, including everyday conversations, pop songs, media, news, and advertising. During the last few years, among foreign languages, English has played the most significant role in connecting Chinese speakers with the global community.

Consequently, Mandarin-English code-mixing has become particularly widespread and relevant in both spoken and written forms of communication. As was explained in paragraph 2.1, according to several researchers, there are various definitions of code-mixing. In a study conducted by Xin and Liu (2014) on Mandarin-English code-mixing in Chinese advertisements, which is primarily based on Muysken's classification and Myers-Scotton's MFL model, the two scholars identified three types of code-mixing: inserted code-mixing, alternative code-mixing and diglossia code-mixing, which will be explained in the following sections.

2.5.1.1 Insertion

As previously discussed in paragraph 2.1, Muysken (1995) defines insertion as the integration of a linguistic element, such as a word or phrase, from one language into the grammatical structure of another. According to Myers-Scotton's (1997) MLF (Matrix Language Frame) model, in the context of Mandarin-English code-mixing, Mandarin typically functions as the matrix language, while English serves as the embedded language. From a linguistic point of view, insertion is further categorized into phonological insertion, clausal insertion, lexical and phrasal insertion, and discourse-level insertions. In this section of the thesis, we will mainly focus on clausal insertion, lexical and phrasal insertion, and phonological insertion.

Clausal insertion refers to a form of code-mixing where an entire clause or sentence from the embedded language (EL) is inserted into the matrix language. In Mandarin-English code-mixing, this typically involves the integration of English sentences into Chinese texts. This phenomenon closely aligns with inter-sentential code-switching as defined in Myers-Scotton's model, where the inserted English segments form "EL islands", grammatical units composed entirely of English elements that follow English syntactic rules that are inserted into the matrix language (ML), as the following advertisement for the cosmetic "Clean clear" demonstrates:

(11) 无油新生魅力蜕变 R U ready? (Xin and Liu, 2014:1432)

Wú yóu xīnshēng mèilì tuìbiàn R U ready?

"Are you ready for a new oil-free glamour transformation?" (my translation)

In this advertisement is visible how the EL island “R U ready?”, which is the short form of “Are you ready?” and obeys to the rules of EL grammar, is inserted into the Chinese ML. The overall message of the advertisement suggests that the 'Clean Clear' cleansing foam reduces facial oiliness, resulting in a fresher and more attractive appearance. Moreover, the phrase 'R U ready?' serves as a call to action, inviting consumers to try the product.

Lexical and phrasal insertion refers to the incorporation of English words or phrases (EL elements) into Mandarin Chinese, which is the ML, as the following example of an adv for VISA shows:

(12) go. 到全世界，收集每一个国家。

go. 是一个动词，简单，却蕴含着无比强大的能量 (Xin and Liu, 2014: 1431).

go. Dào quán shìjiè, shōují měi yīgè guójiā

go. Shì yīgè dòngcí, jiǎndān, què yùnhánzhe wúbǐ qiángdà de néngliàng

“Go to the world and collect every country.

Go is a verb that it is simple yet contains incredibly powerful energy.” (my translation)

In this advertisement, the English word “go” is strategically embedded within the Mandarin Chinese text to convey a sense of movement and energy, reinforcing the global reach and accessibility of the Visa service. The use of “go” emphasizes that Visa can be used anywhere in the world, aligning with the brand’s international image.

The previous example illustrates the insertion of English lexical items into Chinese discourse. This practice has become increasingly common in contemporary Chinese advertising (Xin and Liu, 2014), where English names and set phrases are often used to add prestige or global appeal. This strategy is evident in the following car advertisement for the “Jeep Grand Cherokee”:

(13) Grand Cherokee 在国内俗称大切诺基或大切，算起来他应该是起源于 1083 年 American Motors 设计的 Jeep Cherokee XJ（曾被国内玩家们亲切地称为小切）。1987 年 American Motors 被克莱斯勒收购以后，经过 5 年的努力，终于在 1992 年推出了第一代 Grand Cherokee，并于一年后投产。据 Motor Trend 统计，持续 5 年的生产使第一代 Grand Cherokee 取得了将近 170 万的销量 (Xin and Liu, 2014:1431).

Grand Cherokee zài guónèi sùchēng dàqiènuòjī huò dà qiè, suàn qǐlái tā yīnggāi shì qǐyuán yú 1983 nián American Motors shèjì de Jeep Cherokee XJ (céng bèi guónèi wánjiāmen qīnqiè de chēng wèi xiǎo qiè). 1987 Nián American Motors bèi kèláisīlēi shōugòu yǐhòu, jīngguò 5 nián de nǚlì, zhōngyú zài 1992 nián tuīchūle dì yī dài Grand Cherokee, bìng yú yī nián hòu tóuchǎn. Jù Motor Trend tǒngjì, chíxù 5 nián de shēngchǎn shǐ dì yī dài Grand Cherokee qǔdéle jiāngjìn 170 wàn de xiāoliàng.

“The Grand Cherokee is commonly known as “Daqie nuoji” or “Daqie” in China. It traces its origins to the Jeep Cherokee XJ, designed by American Motors in 1983 (affectionately called “Xiaoqie” by local enthusiasts). After Chrysler acquired American Motors in 1987, five years of hard work finally led to the launch of the first-generation Grand Cherokee in 1992, with the production starting a year later. According to Motor Trend statistics, the first-generation model sold nearly 1.7 million units over five years of production”. (my translation).

In this promotional text, English terms such as “Grand Cherokee”, “American Motors”, “Jeep Cherokee XJ”, and “Motor Trend” are directly embedded into the Mandarin Chinese discourse. These English phrases, being widely recognised by the target audience, are left untranslated to maintain clarity and to save the trouble of translation. This phenomenon can be regarded as a common strategy in Chinese advertising, whereby English expressions are incorporated into Chinese sentence structures, resulting in frequent instances of mixed ML+EL constituents.

Phonological insertion refers to the phenomenon where English sounds, letters or words are embedded within Mandarin Chinese sentences or phrases. A typical example can be seen in the advertisement for the 16th Guangzhou Fashion Expo:

(14) 聚焦时尚新装 明媚春季风尚

第16届“广州（锦汉）服装、家纺及面料展览会”——品牌发布 SHOW 场
(Xin and Liu, 2014:1430).

Jùjiāo shíshàng xīnzhuāng míngmèi chūnjì fēngshàng

Dì 16 jiè “guǎngzhōu (jīn hàn) fúzhuāng, jiāfǎng jí miànlìào zhǎnlǎn huì” —— pǐnpái fābù SHOW chǎng.

“Focus on fashionable new clothes and bright spring fashion.

The 16th Guangzhou (Jinhan) Clothing, Home Textiles and Fabrics Exhibition - Brand Release Showcase” (my translation).

In this case, the English word "show" is phonetically similar to the Chinese character “秀”(xiù), commonly used in the term “秀场”(xiùchǎng), which refers to a fashion show venue. The borrowed English form “show 场” creates a bilingual blend (ML+EL constituent), retaining the original Chinese meaning while adding a playful, ironic twist. This irony is further enhanced by the cultural connotation of “作秀”(zuòxiù, to show off), which makes the use of “show” both stylistically creative and humorous within the context of a fashion event.

2.5.1.2 Alternation

Alternative code-mixing refers to the use of relatively complete utterances from two or more languages that appear alternately within the same advertisement, as this example of a candy commercial illustrates:

(15) Girl: 我的宝贝——旺仔 QQ 糖!

Boy: Come on, baby! Come on, baby!

Girl: 你也要吃一粒吗?

Boy: Yes!

Girl & Boy: 旺仔 QQ 糖——旺旺! (Xin and Liu, 2014: 1433).

Girl: Wǒ de bǎobèi ——wàngzǎi QQ táng!

Boy: Come on, baby! Come on, baby!

Girl: Nǐ yě yào chī yī lì ma?

Boy: Yes!

Girl & Boy: Wàngzǎi QQ táng ——wàngwàng!

“Girl: My baby - Wangzai QQ Candy!

Boy: Come on, baby! Come on, baby!

Girl: Do you also want to eat one?

Boy: Yes!

Girl&Boy: Wangzai QQ Candy - Wangwang!” (my translation).

In this ad, the alternation occurs between Mandarin Chinese (ML) and English (EL). The English phrases, inserted as complete responses, interact naturally with the Chinese dialogue, creating a bilingual exchange that is playful, and engaging. This switching serves not only to attract attention but also to enhance the appeal of the product being advertised.

2.5.1.3 Diglossia

In some cases, alternation occurs not between distinct Mandarin Chinese and English utterances, but between the Mandarin Chinese text and its corresponding English translation. This pattern can be described as diglossia code-mixing, where parallel stretches of mandarin Chinese and its English translation appear alternatively within the same advertisement.

(16) 第九届中国（深圳）国际批拍服装服饰交易会

The 9th China (Shenzhen) International Brand Clothing & Accessories Fair

2009 深圳国际孕·婴·童产业博览会

2009 Shenzhen International Maternity & Clothing Expo

2009 深圳国际纺织面料及辅料博览会

2009 Shenzhen International Trade Fair for Apparel Fabrics and Accessories

2009 年 7 月 9 日-11 日/July 9-11,2009

深圳会展中心

Shenzhen Convention & Exhibition Center (Xin and Liu, 2014:1433).

Dì jiǔ jiè zhōngguó (shēnzhèn) guójì pī pāi fú Zhuāng fú shì jiāoyì huì

The 9th China (Shenzhen) International Brand Clothing& Accessories Fair

2009 shēnzhèn guójì yùn·yīng·tóng chǎnyè bólǎnhuì

2009 Shenzhen International Maternity& Clothing Expo

2009 shēnzhèn guójì fǎngzhī miànlào jí fùliào bólǎnhuì

2009 Shenzhen International Trade Fair for Apparel Fabrics and Accessories

2009 nián 7 yuè 9 rì-11 rì/July 9-11,2009

In this example, Mandarin Chinese descriptions are directly followed by their English equivalents. While the English text doesn't introduce new content, its inclusion broadens the advertisement's accessibility and international appeal (Xin and Liu, 2014).

2.5.2 Cantonese-English code-mixing

In Hong Kong, Cantonese-English code-mixing has become a deeply embedded linguistic practice, influencing both personal interactions and broader societal communication. From casual greetings to professional settings, code-mixing is a regular part of daily life, for instance, it is common for individuals to address one another using English names, a cultural norm that is unique within the broader Asian context. As we mentioned before, this linguistic behaviour is closely related to Hong Kong's colonial history, as it remained under British rule for over 150 years, consequently, English became a prominent and influential language in the region. Even after the handover, English has maintained its official status alongside Putonghua (i.e. the official Chinese language), and the bilingual nature of public communication, especially from the local government, reflects this ongoing dual-language environment. Despite Putonghua being included in the multilingual policy, English continues to have a strong social and communicative presence. As a matter of fact, many residents, though not being fluent in English, regularly incorporate English expressions into Cantonese.

This prevalence of code-mixing also extends into marketing and advertising. Print advertisements in Hong Kong often feature a blend of English and Cantonese to target mass audiences who are accustomed to this bilingual mode of communication. Effective communication in this context, therefore, depends on the audience's ability to understand and relate to the blended messages (Leung and Chan, 2016).

Print advertisements in Hong Kong typically feature a multilingual environment, with at least three language varieties commonly appearing: Standard Written Chinese (SWC), Cantonese, and English. The language mixing patterns that can be observed in advertisements take several forms, including: SWC mixed with English, SWC mixed with

Cantonese, English mixed with Cantonese, and SWC mixed with both English and Cantonese. These combinations reflect the complex and dynamic linguistic landscape of Hong Kong's advertising discourse. According to Wu and Chan (2007), code-mixing in Hong Kong advertising tends to follow two main patterns: the mix between Standard Written Chinese and English, or a more complex blend of Standard written Chinese, English and Cantonese. These embedded components of SWC, Cantonese and English, whether being single words, phrases or full clauses, serve two functions within advertisements: the informational function and the involvement function. The term "informational function" relates to how language conveys information, while the term "involvement function" relates to language's emotive role, which goes beyond giving information.

In Hong Kong advertisements, English is often used for informational purposes, particularly to convey product details or features. As an advertisement for B21 Soleil Vitamins presented below shows:

(17) 配合嶄新專利成份 Bioprotectyl

pui3hap6 zaam3san1 zyun1lei6 sing4fan6

"Including the new franchised ingredient, Bioprotectyl" (Wu and Chan, 2007:312)

It can be observed that in this advertisement there is an emphasis on the product's scientific or specialised nature, leveraging the credibility and modernity of English to enhance the information presented.

Cantonese-English mixing in Hong Kong advertisements often serves an involvement function, helping to establish a casual and relatable tone that resonates with local costumers. A clear example of this can be seen in the Max Factor make-up brand advertisement presented below:

(18) 去 party 玩足成晚，個妝唔止無化到，仲 keep 到好潤。

heoi3 party waan2 zuk1 seng4maan5, go3 zong1 m4zi2 mou4faa3 dou3, zung6 keep dou3 hou2jeon6

"Went to the party and played for the whole night, but the make-up did not get dissolved; and what's more, the skin has been kept very moist". (Wu and Chan, 2007:310)

It is also important to recognise that the blending of English and Cantonese seen in advertisements reflects a common speech pattern among the people of Hong Kong. This linguistic style is mirrored not only in advertising, but also in the evolving language practices and identity of Hong Kong consumers, actively shaping them (Wu and Chan, 2007).

Moreover, Li (2000) conducted a significant study on code-mixing in Hong Kong, his research identified four key motivations behind the frequent use of English in Cantonese discourse, namely euphemism, the principle of economy, bilingual punning and specificity.

2.5.2.1 Euphemism

Euphemism refers to the fact that certain topics or terms may be culturally sensitive or awkward to express in Chinese, so, using the English equivalent allows the speaker to address these subjects more comfortably and with less social discomfort. An illustration of this phenomenon can be observed in the domain of intimate clothing items advertisements, wherein English is employed to denote them in a less explicit manner, as the following example of a bra advertisement shows:

(19) Woo! 透 Bra 格格

Woo! tau3 BRA gaak3 gaak3

“Wow! (a) princess (whose) bra is visible!” (Li, 2000:312)

Although Cantonese and Standard Written Chinese (SWC) have their own terms for “bra”, such as 胸罩 (*hung1 zaau3*, “chest cover”, in SWC) and 乳罩 (*jyu5 zaau3*, “breast cover” in Cantonese) the English word was chosen instead. This preference can be attributed to the explicit nature of the Chinese and Cantonese equivalents, which directly mention body parts such as “chest”(胸) and “breast” (乳). The utilisation of the English term enables the speakers and writers to refer to the same object without overtly naming those body parts, thereby maintaining a certain level of modesty and social comfort.

2.5.2.2 The principle of economy

The principle of economy regards the fact that English is seen as more concise in terms of both structure and memory load. Consequently, English expressions are preferred because they are more efficient than their Cantonese equivalents. This motivation is especially relevant in fast-paced communication, where speakers aim to save time and effort. For instance, the English adjective “in”, commonly used with the meaning of “trendy” or “fashionable”, is frequently seen in informal contexts such as casual speech and informal news articles, because its Cantonese alternative 流行 (*lau4 hang4*) is longer and more intricate than the English alternative.

Another clear example is the phrase “check in”, which is widely used in travel and hospitality contexts. A typical mixed-code sentence might be:

(20) 你 check in 左未呀?

nei5 CHECK IN zo2 mei6 aa3

“Have you checked in already?” (Li, 2000:317).

In this instance, the English phrase replaces the much longer Cantonese equivalent “入住手續” (*jap6zyu6 sau2zuk6*, “check-in procedure”), making the utterance quicker and easier to produce. The present example demonstrates that when the main goal is clear, efficient communication English is naturally favoured by bilingual speakers in Hong Kong, who opt for English expressions to reduce their linguistic effort without sacrificing meaning.

2.5.2.3 Bilingual punning

Bilingual punning refers to the fact that code-mixing is also used creatively to generate puns or layered meanings that play on both languages, adding a humorous or rhetorical effect to communication. In Hong Kong's media discourse, the utilisation of bilingual punning, where English words are purposefully integrated into Cantonese, results in the creation of dual meanings. This technique depends heavily on the phonetic similarities

between English and Cantonese terms. A notable example of this phenomenon is following slogan:

(21) “High tech 搵嘢, low tech 撈嘢”

HIGH TECH haai1 je5 LOW TECH lou1 je5

“High Tech brings trouble, while Low Tech is profitable” (Li, 2000:314)

In this instance, the English words “high” and “low” phonetically resemble the Cantonese words 搵 (*haai1*, “to get into trouble”) and 撈 (*lou1*, “to gain profit”), respectively. This pun cleverly communicates a socioeconomic commentary during a period of economic downturn in Hong Kong, suggesting that high-tech industries bring trouble, whereas low-tech ones are more stable and profitable.

However, this form of wordplay is not confined to print media, it is also employed in Hong Kong advertisements, where English words are used for their homophonic equivalence with Cantonese words. For instance, in a Suzuki car advertisement, the word “fun” aligns with the Cantonese 分 (*fan1*, which means “minute”), creating layered meanings, as the following example illustrate:

(22) FUN FUN 鐘發放回歸的喜悅

fan1 fan1 zung1 faat3 fong3 wui4 gwai1 dik1 hei2 jyut6

“Discharging every minute, with fun, the joy of the handover” (Li, 2000:315)

Since the English word “fun” is phonetically identical to the Cantonese word 分 (*fan1*), the expression FUN FUN can be interpreted not only as a reference to enjoyment, but also as FUN FUN 鐘 (*fan1 fan1 zung1*, which means “every minute”). This creates a clever bilingual pun that conveys the dual meaning of “every minute with fun.”

Similar advertising slogans make use of this type of Cantonese-English code-mixing to enhance emotional and cultural resonance with the audience, as the following advertisement created by Esso, Feoso, and Tiger-Mart to promote their summer gas station by offering coupons and special gifts shows:

(23) 老虎標 FUN 夏日巡禮

lou5 fu2 ban1 fan1 haa6 jat1 ceon4 lai5

“The Tiger-Mart many-and-varied/fun summertime carnival” (Li, 2000:316)

In this advertisement, to highlight the variety and appeal of their promotional items, the advertisers creatively referenced to the Cantonese word 繽紛 (*ban1 fan1*, which means “many and varied”). Moreover, the second syllable 紛 (*fan1*) of the Cantonese word was replaced with the homophonous English word “fun”, producing a bilingual pun that simultaneously conveys the ideas of diversity and enjoyment.

2.5.2.4 Specificity

Finally, specificity indicates that English terms are often considered more precise or general than their Cantonese counterparts, making them preferable in situations requiring more or less clarity.

For example, the English word “fans” is frequently used in both spoken and written Cantonese, often preferred over the Cantonese equivalent due to its broader and more flexible meaning. Unlike the Cantonese term 迷 (*mai4*), which usually needs a premodifier to specify the type of fan (e.g. 歌迷 *go1 mai4*, for music fans or 球迷 *kau4 mai4*, for football fans), the English word “fans” can be used more generally to refer to admirers of a celebrity, regardless of their talents. This generality is useful in modern contexts where many entertainers have multiple talents, as the following example shows:

(24) 黎明有好多 FANS

lai4 ming4 jau5 hou2 do1 FANS

“Leon Lai (the singer/film star) has many fans” (Li, 2000:313)

While the English word “fan” is often used in Cantonese for its broad meaning, other English terms are sometimes preferred for their specificity. A common example is the verb “book”, which frequently appears in code-mixed speech when making reservations, such as booking a restaurant table, sports court or a flight ticket, as the following example illustrate:

(25) 唔該，我想 BOOK 三點，一號場

m4 goi1 ngo5 soeng2 BOOK saam1 dim2 jat1 hou6 coeng4

“Please, I want to book court no. 1 at 3 o'clock.” (Li, 2000:313)

In this example, the speaker uses the English word “book”, because the Cantonese equivalent 𐄂𐄂 (*deng6*, which means “deposit”), typically refers to placing a deposit, implying a financial commitment. In contrast, “book” clearly conveys the act of reserving something without necessarily involving a payment. This semantic precision explains why “book” has become a common choice in Cantonese-English code-mixing, offering a clearer and more practical alternative to existing Cantonese expressions (Li, 2000).

Chapter 3

Case studies

In contemporary Chinese advertising, Chinese-English code-mixing is commonly used to reflect the linguistic reality of modern consumers. This strategy often arises from linguistic necessities, such as overcoming vocabulary limitations or conveying culturally specific meanings that cannot be fully translated into another language. By using code-mixing, advertisers can fill in semantic gaps and communicate in a way that resonates more naturally with consumers' everyday language use. In this context, English is used not only as a persuasive tool to influence consumers' behaviours and purchasing decisions, but also to shape social and cultural identities, as discussed in chapter 2.

According to Yang (2007), there is a relationship between advertising language and social culture, and Chinese-English code-mixing in advertisement can be analysed from two perspectives: the pragmatic meaning and the social meaning. Advertising language is a special means of expression and using code-mixing in advertising makes content more visually and cognitively engaging, effectively drawing attention and generating interest in customers. However, language is not isolated; it evolves alongside changes in society, politics, economics, religion and technology. As human thought develops, so does language, with new words and expressions continuously emerging to better reflect modern emotions and experiences. Code-mixing plays a meaningful role in this process by enhancing the speaker's ability to convey their intended message. In advertising, this strategy helps to elicit the desired psychological reaction from the audience, thereby aligning with the advertiser's communicative goals.

However, code-mixing is not simply a linguistic phenomenon because language as an important communication tool for human beings also has a strong social nature. In advertising, where language is used to achieve practical and often economic goals, this blending of codes aims to maximise communicative effectiveness. While code mixing serves pragmatic and commercial purposes, its broader social implications, including potential negative impacts, should not be overlooked. Although code-mixing in advertising is intended to be persuasive, it can sometimes have the opposite effect, confusing the audience and weakening the promotional message. This can lead to scepticism, giving the impression that the advertisement is overly focused on

Westernisation, rather than effectively communicating the product's value. Although code-mixing has a certain positive effect and is highly sought after by young people for their expressive function and westernisation effect, some Chinese scholars view it as chaotic phenomena regarding language standardization. In advertising, where language reflects broader social and cultural values, careless or excessive use of foreign words, especially to create an artificial Western appeal, can cause public outrage. Instead of attracting consumers, such advertisements may provoke negative reactions, including public disapproval and potential regulatory consequences for the advertisers involved (Yang, 2007).

After having explored the implications of code-mixing in Mainland China and Hong Kong and its linguistic and socio-cultural context in detail, the third chapter of this thesis will present the chosen research project. Based on the theories proposed in the previous chapter, a sample of Mandarin-English and Cantonese-English advertisements were collected to determine their implications and significance. Specifically, two case studies were chosen for the analysis: the companies McDonald's and MAC Cosmetics both in Mainland China and Hong Kong. Furthermore, we would like to point out that the proposed analysis is a qualitative one, aimed at observing the phenomenon of code-mixing in Chinese advertisements, rather than its quantitative measurement, focusing on its linguistic and psychological implications. Moreover, the sample of advertisements presented below is the result of online research. The analysed advertisements are taken from the internet and, specifically, from one of most popular Chinese social network platforms, e.g. WeChat (微信, *Wēixìn*), from online video-sharing websites e.g. Bili bili (哔哩哔哩, *Bīlī bīlī*) and Youtube, and from the official websites of the proposed brands. Consequently, the analysed advertisements will be digital ones, in the form of images and videos.

3.1 McDonald's

McDonald's (麦当劳, *Màidāngláo*), one of the most famous fast-food American chains, was founded in 1940 by the McDonald brothers, Dick and Mac, in San Bernardino, California. From the 1940's to the 1950's, the two brothers expanded their business in the

USA, until Ray Kroc turned their small business into the successful international business it is today. Kroc joined McDonald's as a franchise agent in 1954 and played a key role in transforming the company into a rapidly expanding national chain. He envisioned establishing over 1,000 McDonald's restaurants across the United States, a goal he pursued by emphasising a strong brand identity centred around quality, convenience, and value. Then, McDonald's continued to grow and expand into international markets beginning in 1967 opening in Canada and Puerto Rico. This objective was reached by implementing a self-service strategy that focus on efficient operations, standardization and consistent customer experience.

Nowadays, McDonald's operates in both Mainland China and Hong Kong, with a strong presence in both regions, in fact China is its second largest market after the USA. McDonald's entered the Chinese market in 1990 by opening its first restaurant in the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone. Just two years later, the company opened the largest McDonald's in the world at the time in Beijing. Since then, McDonald's has consistently enhanced its business strategy in China through distinctive marketing tailored to Chinese consumers, which encompasses a profound comprehension of Chinese culture, adaptation to the specific business environment, and the implementation of effective strategies such as professional marketing services, customized menus, outbound marketing and email marketing, to successfully attract Chinese consumers.

McDonald's promotional strategy is carefully tailored to its target audience, with a particular focus on understanding and responding to customer preferences. Over the years, the company has invested heavily in advertising and promotional activities to improve communication with consumers in different markets. These campaigns are customised to reflect the cultural and regional diversity of each country and often rely on television adverts and in-store promotions. Additionally, McDonald's utilises digital platforms such as its website, mobile app, and social media effectively to engage customers. Interactive features such as sweepstakes, retweet-based promotions and point-based rewards encourage consumers to participate and earn coupons or small prizes to buy their products with a discount. These promotional strategies not only drive sales but also increase brand visibility through consumer engagement and sharing. In the last few years, McDonald's has established itself as one of the most recognisable and successful franchises in the world, with new branches opening approximately every three hours, maintaining its position as the world's largest fast-food chain. Its rapid growth reflects the effectiveness

of McDonald's strategic planning and operational efficiency, that are key drivers of its worldwide success (Xu, 2023).

3.1.1 Analysis of the advertisements in Mainland China

One of the main functions of English in advertisement is persuasion, that is largely driven by the linguistic strategies implemented by copywriters, as outlined in paragraph 2.4.1. The language used in advertisements significantly influences both product promotion and consumer behaviour. In fact, Mandarin-English code-mixing is frequently used by international companies in Chinese advertising to produce a positive psychological impact on the target audience and to attract their attention. This objective is evident in the advertising campaigns of the international fast food chain McDonald's, particularly in its 2024 campaign promoting a new 大鸡排汉堡 (*Dà jīpái hànběǎo*, “big chicken cutlet burger”), as illustrated by the two screenshots⁷ taken from the television advertisement presented below:

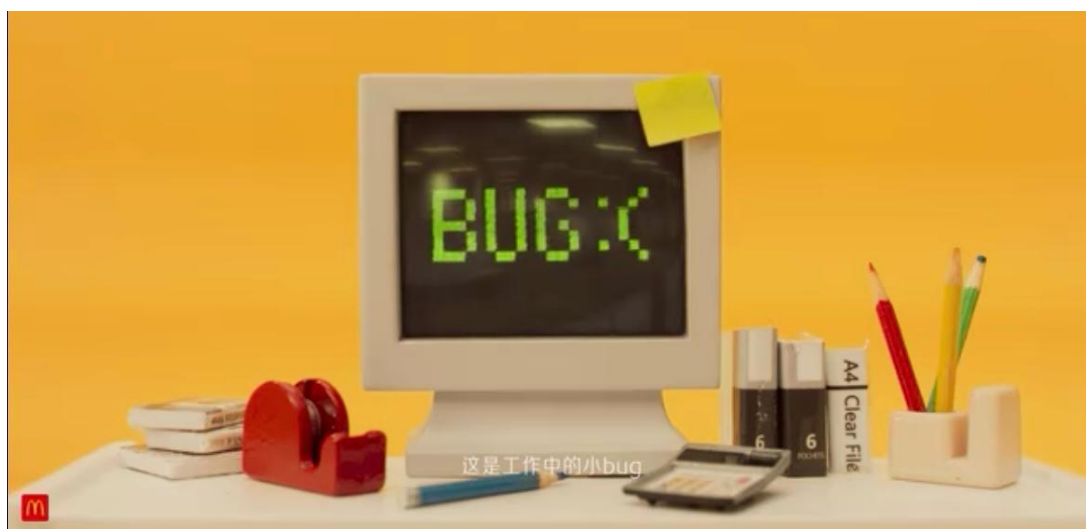


Figure 9 First screenshot of the 2024 McDonald's chicken burger advertising campaign (Source: Bili Bili).

Referring to Muysken's (2000) classification of code-mixing, it can be observed that in this first example “这是工作中的小 bug” (*Zhè shì gōngzuò zhōng de xiǎo bug*, which can be translated as “This is a small bug while working”, my translation), there is an insertion, because the English word “bug” is inserted in the syntactic structure of

⁷Online material available at: <https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1iT421r7Lg/>

Mandarin Chinese. Moreover, in this instance, the copywriters used the internet slang word “小\ bug”, instead of the Chinese word “小故障” (*Xiǎo gùzhàng*, “little bug”), to establish a humorous link between the everyday frustrations of work and the idea of fast food as a quick solution, making the advertisement more relatable and appealing to the target audience.



Figure 10 Second screenshot of the 2024 McDonald's chicken burger advertising campaign (Source: Bili Bili).

In this second example “这是工作完吃的大 burger” (*Zhè shì gōngzuò wán chī de dà burger*, which can be translated as “This is a big burger you can eat after work”, my translation), there is also a lexical insertion, since the English word “burger” is inserted into the structure of the Mandarin Chinese phrase. In this context, McDonald's use of expressions such as “大 burger” (*Dà burger*, “big burger”) conveys a casual and playful tone that aligns with Chinese youth slang and online communication. In addition, by preserving English terms such as “burger” and “bug” instead of translating them fully, the brand maintains its Western identity while tailoring its message to local consumers. This linguistic blend expresses a sense of cosmopolitanism that particularly appeals to urban Chinese young people, who are attracted to global trends.

Another instance in which the phenomenon of Mandarin-English code-mixing can be observed is the “500 大卡套餐” (*500 Dàkǎ tàocān*, “500 calories set menu”) campaign that McDonald's China launched in May 2025. By implementing this new campaign, McDonald's expanded its “500 calories set menu” campaign, launched for the first time in 2019, by introducing six new meal options in order to offer a greater variety while supporting calories-conscious eating. The company has also updated the nutritional

information on its official website and launched a public solicitation to encourage consumers engaging with the brand. In fact, as part of this campaign, McDonald's is inviting consumers to use a nutrition calculator to create their own 500-calories set meal combinations (McDonald's China, 2025), as figure 11 illustrates:

In this advertisement the phrase “苹果支撑 Pro” (*Píng bǎn zhīchēng Pro*), which can be translated as “Apple plate pro support” (my translation), represents another example of



Figure 11 Screenshot of “500 calories set menu” McDonald's China campaign (Source: McDonald's China)

insertion, as described by Muysken's (2000) code-mixing classification. In addition, copywriters used English strategically in this advertisement to enhance scientific credibility and align with global health and lifestyle trends. Phrases such as “No sugar” and words like “Pro”, “476 Kcal” are associated with sugar-free diets and fitness culture and therefore appeal to health-conscious Chinese consumers. It can be assumed that advertisers used these words also because certain English terms lack precise equivalents in Mandarin Chinese, in particular “Pro” could be translated as “专业” (*zhuānyè*, which means “specialized,

professional”), but this term doesn't convey the exact advertising intended meaning in this case, so to ensure clarity the advertisers used the English term. In contrast, Chinese expressions such as “500 大卡套餐喜欢您来品味” (*500 dàkǎ tàocān xǐhuān nín lái pǐnwèi*, “We are happy if you come and taste our 500 calories set menu”, my translation) and “板烧蔬果，美味充能” (*Bǎn shāo shūguǒ, měiwèi chōng néng*, “Delicious and

energizing grilled vegetables and fruits”, my translation), are used to maintain cultural relevance and ensure the message remains accessible to the local audience.

A clear instance of diglossia code-mixing in McDonald’s China advertising campaign can be found in the one promoting children’s birthday parties, as illustrated by the image below:



Figure 12 McDonald's advertisement promoting children birthday party (Source: WeChat).

communicative efficiency and commercial appeal. Therefore, “BFF” is a loanword deeply embedded in Chinese internet slang, particularly among young people, the mix between Mandarin Chinese and English in this advertisement create a hybrid identity that resonate with young Chinese consumers.

An instance of alternation in McDonald’s China advertisements can be observed in the brand’s 2024 “Cage-free Chicken” campaign. As we mentioned in the previous chapter, alternative code-mixing refers to the use of relatively complete utterances from two or more languages that appear alternately within the same advertisement (Muysken, 2000). Last year, McDonald's China introduced the “Cage-Free Chicken” logo to raise awareness

Diglossia code-mixing, as was explained in Chapter 2, refers to the fact that parallel stretches of Mandarin Chinese and its English translation appear alternatively within the same advertisement. In this example, the Mandarin Chinese phrase “永远好朋友” (*Yǒngyuǎn hǎo péngyǒu*) is directly followed by its English translation “BFF”, which is the abbreviation for “Best Friend Forever”. As a matter of fact, the English abbreviation doesn’t introduce new content, but its inclusion broadens the advertisement's accessibility and international appeal (Xin and Liu, 2014). Moreover, it can be said that these English abbreviations nowadays are widely accepted by Chinese consumers in everyday language, consequently they enhance

of the high-quality, white-feathered chickens used in its products. Chicken is the most common used meat by McDonald's in China, so the company works closely with its suppliers to consistently deliver high-quality chicken products to its customers. This initiative supports sustainable farming practices, including regenerative agriculture, and since its launch, key chicken menu items such as the Spicy Chicken Leg Burger, Braised Chicken Leg Burger and Spicy Chicken Wings have featured the new label on their packaging and on digital ordering platforms (McDonald's China, 2024). The logo of the campaign is presented in figure 13 below:



Figure 13 Logo of McDonald's "Cage Free Chicken" campaign (Source: McDonald's China website).

In this example, the Mandarin Chinese slogan “无笼好鸡” (*Wú lóng hǎo jī*) which can be translated as “Good cage free chicken” (my translation) is followed by the English slogan “Cage Free Chicken”, resulting in a case of alternation. In addition, it is worth noting that in the Chinese slogan copywriters use the word “好鸡” (*hǎo jī*), that means “good chicken”, to underline the high-quality of the product even more. It can be assumed that this campaign is designed to appeal to bilingual consumers who perceive English as a symbol of scientific or ethical credibility, and Mandarin as a symbol of cultural authenticity. By repeating the term in both languages (“无笼” and “Cage Free”) the message is effectively communicated to both monolingual and bilingual audiences.

3.1.2 Analysis of the advertisements in Hong Kong

As discussed in paragraph 2.5.2, Hong Kong's linguistic situation is shaped by its colonial history, making it an example of language contact. During the British colonial rule, Hong Kong experienced a diglossia situation. Cantonese was used for everyday and intra-ethnic communication, while English was primarily used in administrative domains. Since the handover to the People's Republic of China in 1997, Hong Kong's language environment has continued to shift in response to changing political and cultural conditions. Currently, the main spoken languages are Cantonese, English and Standard Chinese, each playing different roles depending on the speaker's background and the communicative context. In terms of written language, both English and Standard Chinese are commonly used. A notable feature of Hong Kong's linguistic identity is the widespread use of Cantonese-English code-mixing. This phenomenon is deeply embedded in daily communication, influencing both informal and professional interactions.

In addition, code-mixing extends beyond interpersonal communication into advertising and the media. In Hong Kong advertisements, it is common to see a combination of Cantonese and English, or even Cantonese, English and Mandarin Chinese, to appeal to audiences who are familiar with and receptive to this hybrid form of communication. Compared to Mainland China, English features much more prominently in Hong Kong's advertising landscape. A comparison of the McDonald's websites in Mainland China and Hong Kong illustrates this clearly: while English is scarce in the former, it appears frequently in the latter. This distinction reflects the different linguistic environments and language policies employed in the two regions through the years. Furthermore, despite the absence of official recognition for written Cantonese, copywriters frequently include Cantonese characters into Hong Kong commercials (Basciano, 2015).

An instance of Cantonese-English code-mixing can be seen in a 2024 McCafé advertisement by McDonald's Hong Kong, which features the famous local actress and singer Sabrina Cheung promoting a new type of crispy pancakes⁸ as illustrated in the image below:

⁸Online material available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0CgMSmCjciw>



Figure 14 First screenshot of the 2024 McDonald's Hong Kong advertisement for the promotion of the crispy pancakes (Source: YouTube).

In the advertisement, Sabrina Cheung delivers the line “每個人嘅朝早應該都要咁 sweet 嘅” (*mui5go3 jan4 ge3 ziulzou2 jing1goi1 dou1 jiu3 gam2 sweet ge3*, “Everyone’s morning should be so sweet”, my translation), as part of the product promotion, showing the use of Cantonese-English code-mixing to create an engaging message for the local costumers. In this instance, there is a lexical insertion (Muysken, 2000) whereby the English adjective “sweet” is inserted into the Cantonese phrase. More precisely, the adjective is preceded by “咁” (*gam2*), an adverb meaning “so” in Cantonese, and followed by “嘅” (*ge3*), which has two meanings in Cantonese: a possessive particle, corresponding to the Mandarin Chinese “的” (*de*), and an emphatic particle used at the end of the phrase to convey a “sound of sighing”; in this specific case, the second meaning is intended.

Therefore, the English word occupies the same position where the Cantonese adjective should appear, demonstrating a full grammatical integration. The term “sweet”, does not have a direct Cantonese equivalent with the same emotional connotation. Although “甜” (*tim4*) literally means “sweet” in taste, it lacks the metaphorical warmth of the English term, which implies that mornings should be pleasant and warm. This reflects the concept of specificity as outlined by Li (2000), which suggests that English terms are often

perceived as more precise compared to their Cantonese equivalents. As a result, English terms are frequently favoured in contexts where a higher degree of clarity is required.

Another example of Cantonese-English code-mixing from the same advertising campaign is presented in the following image:



Figure 15 Second screenshot of the 2024 McDonald's Hong Kong advertisement for the promotion of the crispy pancakes (Source: YouTube).

The phrase “送畀大家一個 good good good morning!” (*sung3bei2 daai6gaal jat1 go3 good good good morning!*, which can be translated as “Sending everyone a good good good morning!”, my translation) also presents a case of insertion (Muysken, 2000), since the English phrase is embedded within the Cantonese sentence structure. Furthermore, the triple repetition of the term “good” mirrors Cantonese reduplication for emphasis (e.g. “好好” *hou2hou2*, which means “very good”), enhancing memorability. This advertisement strategically uses Cantonese-English code-mixing to convey energy, warmth and relatability. It also reveals broader sociolinguistic trends in Hong Kong, where bilingualism serves as both a means of communication and a tool for constructing cultural identity.

As mentioned previously, it is more common for advertisers in Hong Kong to use English compared to Mainland China, due to the region’s unique linguistic situation. Looking at the McDonald’s Hong Kong website makes it clear how advertisers often use diglossia code-mixing, where parallel stretches of Cantonese and its English translation appear alternatively within the same advertisement (Xin and Liu, 2014). This can be observed in

the following promotional campaign for the Mc Crispy bacon, launched in 2025 in collaboration with Baby Monster, a Korean girl group:



Figure 16 McDonald's Hong Kong advertisement in collaboration with Baby Monster, for promoting McCrispy Bacon (Source: McDonald's Hong Kong website).

In this instance, it can be observed that advertisers choose to use diglossia code-mixing, since the Cantonese phrase “煙肉脆爆雞腿飽” (*jin1 yuk6 ceoi3 baau3 gai1 teoi2 baau2*) is followed by its English translation “Mc Crispy Bacon”. Similarly, the Cantonese phrase “限時登場” (*haan6 si4 dang1 coeng4*) is followed by its English translation “limited time only”. In this example, English retains its function as symbol of modernity and of connection to the historical past, while Cantonese connect the ad with local culinary culture, as seen in expressions like “脆爆” (*ceoi3 baau3*, which means “crispy explosion”). In addition, collaborating with the K-pop group Baby Monster and using internet-friendly symbols such as “×” targets younger consumers, who are familiar with transnational pop culture.

Finally, this study presents an example of McDonald's Hong Kong advertisement promoting the “Signature Collection” hamburgers, in which copywriters simultaneously employ diglossia and insertional code-mixing to enhance the promotional message, as the following image shows:



Figure 17 McDonald's Hong Kong advertisement for the promotion of the "Signatura Collection" hamburgers (Source: McDonald's Hong Kong website).

Reading this advertisement from left to right, it can be noticed that in the first example there is a combination of insertion and diglossia code-mixing, because in “DOUBLE 芝士安格斯” (*DOUBLE zɪlsi2 onlgaak3 si1*), the English word “DOUBLE” is inserted into the Cantonese syntactic structure, and it is immediately followed by its English translation “Double Angus Original”. In the other two examples in figure 17, advertisers used just diglossia code-mixing, since the Cantonese names of the hamburgers “蘑菇安格斯” (*mo4gul onlgaak3 si1*) and “芝士安格斯” (*zɪlsi2 onlgaak3 si1*) are followed respectively by their English translations: “Cheesy Champignon Angus Burger” and “Angus Original”.

Moreover, English words such as “100% Angus” and “Signature Collection” emphasize the premium quality of the products and the international appeal, leveraging the prestige of English in marketing, while the use of Cantonese serves an involvement function, helping to establish a relatable tone that resonates with local costumers. These linguistic choices reflect Hong Kong’s hybrid identity and English’s pragmatic role in advertising.

3.2 MAC Cosmetics

Make-Up Art Cosmetics (MAC), which in Mandarin Chinese is translated as 魅可 (*Mèi kě*), was founded in Toronto in 1984 by two Canadian co-founders Frank Toskan, a make-up artist and photographer, and Frank Angelo, a beauty salon owner. The brand was initially developed to meet the specific needs of professional photo shoots, where conventional make-up would often fail under intense lighting. Although MAC started out as a niche product for industry professionals, its effectiveness and unique appeal quickly attracted a wider customer base, leading to its public launch. In 1995, Estée Lauder acquired 51% of the company shares, and following the death of one of the founders in 1998, they assumed the full ownership of it. Benefitting from Estée Lauder's global reach and influence, MAC has grown significantly to become a leading international cosmetics brand with over 1,500 retail locations across 78 countries. At the core of MAC Cosmetics' brand identity is inclusivity, as reflected in its motto: "All ages. All races. All sexes", so their make-up is developed to be inclusive and accessible for all. This commitment is evident in the brand's product design, which aims to be universally accessible and suitable for a diverse range of users. While many of MAC's seasonal collections feature bold and unconventional designs, often characterised by vibrant colours and creative style these collections contribute to the brand's youthful image. This aesthetic, coupled with a wide range of inclusive shades, particularly benefits individuals with darker skin tones, further reinforcing MAC's reputation regarding diversity (Chesters, 2011). Moreover, MAC has established a strong presence in the highly competitive cosmetics industry thanks to its effective brand positioning and strategic marketing strategies. The brand's commitment to ongoing innovation and dynamic promotional efforts has enabled it to attract and retain loyal consumers, establishing its position as a global leader in the beauty market.

The rise of social media has significantly transformed modern marketing, providing brands with new opportunities to interact directly with consumers. Traditional companies that once relied on traditional advertising methods are now turning to digital platforms to expand their market presence. MAC is a prime example of a traditional brand that has adapted well to this digital shift. As a prominent player in the global beauty industry, MAC has strategically embraced social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter to build a strong online presence and foster direct interaction with its audience. A key part of MAC Cosmetics' social media strategy is its focus on user-generated content

(UGC), which creates a sense of authenticity and community among consumers. By encouraging customers to share their personal experiences and creative looks using MAC products, the brand boosts engagement and trust in an effective way. In addition to UGC, MAC relies heavily on collaborations with beauty influencers, leveraging their large followings and credibility to extend the brand's reach and enhance visibility (Yan, 2024).

MAC cosmetics first opened in Hong Kong in 1995, while in Mainland China it started to sell in 2005. In recent years, MAC has made significant progress in increasing its presence in the Chinese market by adapting its approach to local consumer preferences. In order to increase sales in Mainland China and Hong Kong, MAC cosmetics has adopted a marketing strategy that involves collaborating with KOL (Key Opinion Leaders). These individuals possess considerable influence within specific industries and on social media platforms. Their impact stems from their specialized knowledge, distinctive personal appeal, and the strong emotional bond they cultivate with their followers, making them a vital component in modern product marketing and brand promotion (Wang, 2025). Recognising the importance of innovation and personalisation, MAC has introduced interactive experience centres, such as the one launched in Shanghai in 2019, which integrate digital technology with in-store engagement. These centres offer features such as virtual try-on mirrors and customisable products, enabling consumers, particularly younger demographics such as Generation Z, to enjoy a more personalised and immersive shopping experience. The brand has established itself as a leader in professional-quality makeup, particularly appealing to Gen Z consumers who value creativity, self-expression and customisable products. By allowing customers to mix their own lipstick shades, for example, MAC strengthened consumer satisfaction and fostered brand loyalty in a competitive beauty landscape. However, despite its success in appealing to modern Chinese consumers, MAC has been criticised for its animal testing policies. Due to regulatory requirements in mainland China, the brand permits animal testing where legally mandated, a practice that has raised concerns among ethically conscious consumers. This complicates MAC's ethical positioning, particularly for consumers who prioritise cruelty-free products. While the brand is committed to ethical sourcing and product quality, its compliance with local testing laws remains an issue for global and local audiences alike (Wei, 2025).

3.2.1 Analysis of the advertisements in Mainland China

As discussed in section 2.4, English plays two key roles in Chinese advertising: it is a persuasive tool, and it shapes social and cultural identities. From a sociolinguistic perspective, language does more than convey information; it actively constructs social realities. In this context, using English in advertisements becomes a social practice that contributes to identity formation. In regions where English is not the dominant language, its presence in bilingual advertisements carries significant symbolic power, thereby amplifying their overall persuasive impact. Therefore, language choice in advertising becomes a strategic tool for promoting products and connecting with audiences on a cultural level. These advertisements not only mirror societal values but also help creating a shared sense of identity and community among consumers. By linking products with certain lifestyles or values through language, advertisers create discursive spaces in which consumers can see themselves reflected and included. These two primary objectives are evident in the Mandarin-English code-mixed advertisements created by MAC Cosmetics for the Mainland China market, as illustrated in the image below:



Figure 18 Advertisement showcasing MAC cosmetics' 2025 best-sellers products in Mainland China (Source: MAC Cosmetics China website).

In this instance “年中必 BUY 攻略” (*Nián zhōng bì BUY gōnglüè*, which can be translated as “Mid-year must-haves”, my translation), the copywriters used insertional code-mixing (Muysken, 2000), by inserting the English verb “BUY” into the Mandarin phrase, in this way they emphasize the transactional appeal of the advertisement. Furthermore, the term “Best-sellers” is retained in English, likely due to its widespread

recognition in retail contexts, while the Chinese equivalent “畅销品” (*Chàngxiāo pǐn*) is omitted. This suggests that English words are perceived as having connotations of prestige and modernity.

Moreover, the English elements serve as attention-grabbers, leveraging the perceived sophistication of English in commercial contexts. The phrase “即刻探索>” (*Jíkè tànsuǒ>*, “Explore now>”, my translation), uses the dynamic verb “探索” (*tànsuǒ*, “explore”) combined with the adverb “即刻” (*jíkè*, “immediately, at once”), creating a sense of urgency and direct engagement. The symbol “>” is not traditional in Chinese punctuation; instead, it is borrowed from Western digital websites and apps, and it signals interactivity and progression. This hybrid style aligns with modern digital aesthetics, particularly in bilingual campaigns.

Another instance of Mandarin-English code-mixing in MAC cosmetics advertisements can be seen in the one promoting the “New Studio Fix”, which is a 24-hour buildable and breathable foundation with a natural, soft-matte finish. The advertisement features the well-known Chinese actor Ding Yuxi, as illustrated in the image below:



Figure 19 Screenshot from the 2025 “New Studio Fix” promotional campaign (Source: WeChat).

This advertisement features alternation code-mixing (Muysken, 2000), which involves switching between two distinct grammatical structures from different languages within a single sentence. This type of code-mixing is more symmetrical, based on the idea that switches occur at points where the two languages' structures are compatible. In this case, the name of the product, “New Studio Fix” is retained in English to evoke associations with professional makeup, followed by the phrase “无瑕底妆家族” (*Wúxiá dǐ zhuāng jiāzú*, which can be translated as “flawless base make-up family”, my translation). This acts as a descriptive Chinese slogan, contextualizing the product's purpose and advantages. So, the English segment is not embedded in the Mandarin one,

instead each segment maintains the structure of its respective language.

In addition, the phrase “油皮的神 24H 持妆玩不脱” (*Yóupí de shén 24H chí zhuāng wán bù tuō*, which can be translated as “holy grail for oily skin, 24-hours long-lasting makeup that won’t smudge”, my translation), is a case of insertion (Muysken, 2000), since the English element “24H” is inserted in the Mandarin phrase. Moreover, the use of English terms in this ad signal scientific authority and credibility. While Mandarin phrases such as “油皮的神” (*Yóupí de shén*, “holy grail for oily skin”) reflect the language used in Chinese online beauty communities (e.g. 小红书, *Xiǎo hóng shū*), enhancing trust. The combination of English and Mandarin appeals to younger, cosmopolitan consumers who value both international branding and local preferences.

A further example of Mandarin-English code-mixing can be observed in 2025 MAC Cosmetics’ advertisement, named “50 度裸 50 色唇” (*50 Dù luǒ 50 sè chún*, “50 shades of nude, 50 shades of lips”, my translation), promoting their nude-toned makeup products, in which advertisers used euphemism. This is a strategy usually employed in advertising to express culturally sensitive or awkward topics in Chinese culture, and where English terms are used to mitigate the discomfort that can arise from directness (Li, 2000), as the two following images illustrate:

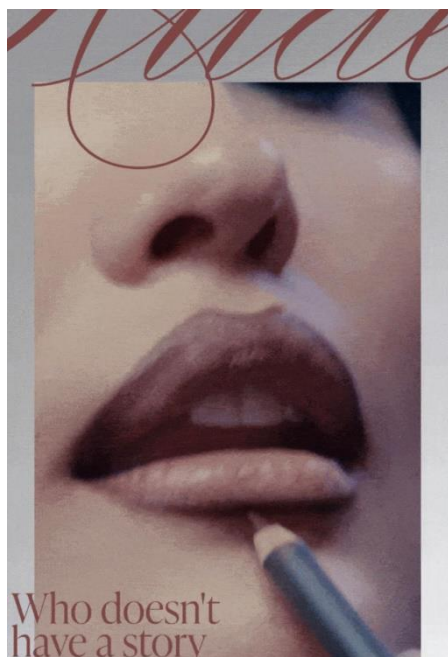


Figure 20 First screenshot of MAC “50 度裸 50 色唇” promotional campaign (Source: WeChat).



Figure 21 Second screenshot of Mac “50 度裸 50 色唇” promotional campaign (Source: WeChat).

In Figure 20, it can be observed that copywriters used only the English phrase “Who doesn’t have a story about NUDES?” to distance the term “nude” from its literal meaning and frame it as a beauty trend rather than a culturally loaded concept. In fact, the English term “nudes” allows the brand to evoke “nude” shades of lipstick without using explicit Mandarin terminology, thereby mitigating audience discomfort. Figure 21 shows an instance of alternation code-mixing (Muysken, 2000), where the phrase “裸，自在表达” (*Luǒ, zìzài biǎodá*, “Nude, free of expression”, my translation), is followed by the English phrase “It’s personal”. The Mandarin phrase softens the term “裸” (*luǒ*, “be bare, nude”) by pairing it with “self-expression”, aligning it with art rather than sexuality. The English phrase below it further specifies this concept, avoiding collective cultural discomfort. Moreover, in the phrase “找到你的本命裸色” (*Zhǎodào nǐ de běnmìng luǒ sè*, “Find your destined nude shade”, my translation), copywriters used the term “本命” (*běnmìng*), which nowadays is used within the anime fandoms to mean “the first anime character you liked and you will always like”, to present nude shades in a funny and personal way, rather than as a taboo. “Nude” shades make up products are marketed worldwide, and this promotional campaign adapts this terminology to suit to the local culture and customs. Finally, the 2024 MAC campaign, which promotes special edition make-up products for Valentine’s Day and features the famous Chinese singer Jackson Wang, can be considered as an instance of diglossia code-mixing (Xin and Liu, 2014), as illustrated in Figure 22:

In this example, it can be noted that the English phrase “Love who you love” is followed by its Chinese translation “爱谁谁” (*Ài shéishéi*), showing a case of diglossia Mandarin-English code-mixing. Moreover, the English phrase promotes unconditional love and self-determination and express LGBTQ+ inclusivity. Meanwhile, the Chinese phrase anchors the ad’s message in a local linguistic playfulness, by subverting the traditional Chinese romantic slogans, that typically emphasize commitment and long-lasting relationships.



Figure 22 Screenshot of MAC advertising promoting Valentine’s Day make-up products (Source: WeChat).

3.2.2 Analysis of the advertisements in Hong Kong

As outlined earlier in Section 2.5.2 and demonstrated by the analysis of McDonald's advertising in Section 3.1.2, Cantonese-English code-mixing has become a defining feature of everyday communication in Hong Kong. This is evident in both informal interactions and professional settings and is a consequence of the territory's colonial past and the various policies adopted by the government over the years. This linguistic blend is also prevalent in the media, particularly in advertising. Hong Kong's advertisements often utilise a strategic mix of Cantonese and English to appeal to an audience accustomed to bilingual messaging. The most common code-mixing patterns in Hong Kong advertisements are typically: Standard Written Chinese combined with English and a more intricate combination involving Standard Written Chinese, Cantonese, and English. These mixed linguistic elements, whether single words or full clauses, fulfil both informational and emotional functions, emphasising the communicative versatility of code-mixing in Hong Kong's unique linguistic environment. An instance of Cantonese-English code-mixing in MAC Cosmetics Hong Kong advertisements is the one promoting the "Glow Play Lightful C3", which is a tone-up primer that evens the skin tone instantly, creating a smooth base for makeup application, as the following image illustrates:



Figure 23 MAC cosmetics' 2025 advertisement promoting the "Glow Play Lightful C3" (Source: MAC Cosmetics Hong Kong website).

In this example, it can be observed that the copywriters used insertional code-mixing (Muysken, 2000) twice, as the English words are inserted into the Cantonese syntactic structure in both cases. The first instance is the phrase “全日 GLOW 級透光 高效修護” (*cyun4jat6 GLOW kap1 tau3gwong1 gou1haau6 sau1wu6*, which can be translated as “All day radiant GLOW with high-efficiency repair”, my translation), in which the intentional use of “GLOW” instead of a Cantonese equivalent, expresses a trendy and cosmopolitan appeal.

The second instance is the phrase: “全新一代 Glow Play Lightful C3#調色小燈霜配合 2 大專為亞洲肌膚而設的獨

特色調, 探索無限妝容!” (*cyun4san1 jat1doi6 Glow Play Lightful C3#diu6sik1 siu2dang1 soeng1 pui3hap6 2 daai6zyun1 wai6 ngaa3zau1 geilful ji4 cit3 dik1 duk6dak6sik1 diu6, taam3sok3 mou4haan6 zong1jung4!* which can be translated as “The new generation Glow Play Lightful C3, #tone-up cream, with 2 exclusive shades specifically designed for Asian skin, explore endless make-up looks!”, my translation). This slogan exemplifies the strategic use of code-mixing in Hong Kong advertising, because it creates a cosmopolitan image, aligning the product with global beauty trends while retaining local relevance. The use of English conveys an idea of prestige and high-quality, while the Cantonese explanations ensure accessibility, and clarity.

Another instance of insertion code-mixing (Muysken, 2000) is the 2024 MAC Cosmetics Hong Kong advertising campaign for the launch of the new “MAC Studio Fix”, which is a 24-hour buildable, breathable foundation with a natural, soft-matte finish suitable for all skin tones⁹, as illustrated in Figure 24:



Figure 24 Screenshot of MAC Cosmetics' advertisement for the promotion of the new "MAC Studio Fix" (Source: YouTube).

In this image we can observe how the phrase “全新升級 皇牌 NO.1 #霧鏡粉底” (*cyun4san1 sing1kap1 wong4paai2 NO.1#mou6 geng3 fan2dai2*, which can be translated as “Brand-new, upgraded, superior, number one reflective foundation”, my translation) is an example of insertional code-mixing, because the term “NO.1” (number one), symbolizing superiority and prestige, is inserted in the Cantonese syntactic structure. The

⁹ Online material available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jSyXtOAAmA8>

Cantonese-coined term “霧鏡” (*mou6geng3*, which literally means “mist mirror”), could be considered a metaphor to express the “reflective” finish of the product. In addition, the symbol “#”, widely used on social media to imply popularity, was used by advertisers to attract young customers.

A further example of Cantonese-English code-mixing can be seen in 2025 MAC Cosmetics’ Hong Kong advertisement promoting their nude-toned makeup products¹⁰, in which advertisers employed alternation code-mixing (Muysken, 2000), that entails a switch between two distinct grammatical structures from different languages within a sentence, as shown in the following image:

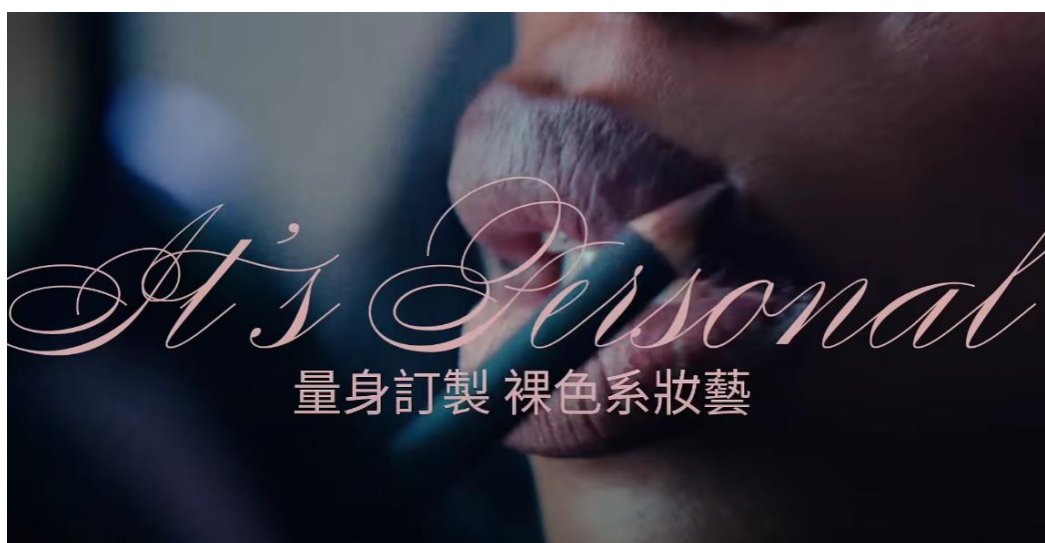


Figure 25 Screenshot of MAC Cosmetics’ promotional campaign for their nude-toned make-up products (Source: YouTube).

In this case “It’s personal, 量身訂製 裸色系妝藝” (*It’s personal, loeng6san1 deng6zai3 lo2sik1 hai6zong1 ngai6*, which can be translated as “It’s personal, customized nude colour makeup artistry”, my translation), the English sentence alternates with the Cantonese one, exemplifying alternation code-mixing. Furthermore, the word “裸色” (*lo2sik1*, meaning “nude colour”) was retained in Cantonese, rather than using the original English word, reflecting a localization strategy. This indicates that the term is already integrated into Cantonese as a borrowing from the English “nude” in Hong Kong beauty advertisements and is no longer perceived as foreign by customers. In addition, the term “量身訂製” (*loeng6san1 deng6zai3*, meaning “customized, tailor-made”), conveys a

¹⁰ Online material available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T7moaNH4ZGA>

sense of luxury and exclusivity, making the product particularly appealing to customers who value personalized items.

Finally, an instance of diglossia code-mixing (Xin and Liu, 2014), in which parallel stretches of Cantonese and its English translation appear in succession within the same advertisement, can be seen in the 2024 MAC Cosmetics Hong Kong advertisement for their new “MACximal silky matte lipstick¹¹”, as figure 26 illustrates:



Figure 26 Screenshot of MAC Cosmetics’ advertising for the promotion of their new silky matte lipstick (Source: YouTube).

In this example, the English phrase “silky matte lipstick” is followed by its Cantonese translation “絲柔啞光唇膏” (*si1 jau4 aa2 gwong1 seon4gou1*), demonstrating a case of diglossia code-mixing. In this kind of advertisements, English is typically employed to convey an idea of credibility and modernity, while Cantonese helps to establish a relatable tone that resonates with local customers (Wu and Chan, 2007). Nowadays, Cantonese-English code-mixing has become a normalized linguistic practice in Hong Kong advertisements, functioning as a tool that enhances communicative clarity. At the same time, it serves as a subtle mechanism for preserving Hong Kong’s unique linguistic identity within an increasingly complex and shifting political context.

¹¹ Online material available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EI2L4M_cJf0

Conclusions

This thesis presents a research project that aimed at exploring Mandarin-English and Cantonese-English code-mixing in contemporary Chinese advertising. Advertising discourse constitutes a compelling site of language contact, where innovative linguistic strategies are employed to engage consumers and increase product sales: among these, as we have seen in both Mainland China and Hong Kong, is the use of English. The use of English in advertising is not just related to persuasion, but also to identity construction. Drawing on Anderson's (1983) concept of the “imagined community”, advertisements create a collective identity in which individuals, despite being strangers, feel a sense of shared belonging to a collective identity. Language plays a pivotal role in this process, shaping how audiences relate both to the product and to the wider community. By doing so, advertisements connect cultural meanings to consumer identities, forming emotional and ideological bonds through language and symbolism.

As previously explained in Section 2.3, Mainland China's linguistic landscape reflects a balance between unity and diversity. While the majority Han population shares Mandarin as a standard language, the country officially recognises numerous minority languages. Since 1949, the government language policies have focused on promoting Mandarin Chinese to strengthen national communication and cohesion, whilst still allowing regional and ethnic linguistic identities to persist. Hong Kong, however, presents a unique linguistic situation due to its colonial history. Under British rule, English and Cantonese have coexisted in a diglossic environment, with Cantonese being used for daily life communication and English serving administrative functions. Since its handover in 1997 to the People's Republic of China, Hong Kong linguistic landscape has continued to evolve. English retained its official status alongside Chinese (standard written Chinese and spoken Cantonese) in Hong Kong, remaining particularly prevalent in areas such as government, business, law and education. Meanwhile, the use of traditional Chinese characters and Cantonese in everyday communication and informal media has helped to shape a distinctive Hong Kong identity. These distinct linguistic contexts significantly shape the strategies and language choices employed by advertisers in Mainland China and Hong Kong.

The comparative analysis of advertising practices in Mainland China and Hong Kong conducted in this thesis reveals significant differences rooted in their distinct historical, political and sociolinguistic contexts. In Mainland China, English is often used strategically in advertising to convey modernity, innovation, international prestige and clarity. Mandarin-English code-mixing tends to adhere to established structures, reflecting state-regulated language policies and a national drive towards cultural standardisation. In contrast, in Hong Kong, Cantonese-English code-mixing occurs in a more fluid and spontaneous manner. Advertising in this region demonstrates a linguistic approach characterised by creative and often playful blending of Cantonese and English. Moreover, code-mixing in Hong Kong is less constrained by state regulation and more reflective of local linguistic practices and consumer preferences. In advertisements, English is often used for informational purposes, particularly to convey product details or features, while Cantonese often serves an involvement function, helping to establish a relatable tone that resonates with local costumers (Wu and Chan, 2007). In addition, English in Hong Kong advertisements is used to convey euphemism, conciseness, bilingual punning and specificity (Li, 2000).

Building on the theoretical frameworks outlined in Chapter 2, particularly Berruto's (2009) definition of code-mixing, the Matrix Language Frame of Myers-Scotton (1997) and the code-mixing classification of Muysken (2000), in Chapter 3, we analysed a sample of advertisements from McDonald's and MAC Cosmetics, focusing on instances of Mandarin-English and Cantonese-English code-mixing. The main findings of this analysis are presented below.

Firstly, a comparison of the official websites of McDonald's and MAC Cosmetics reveals that English is used more frequently in the Hong Kong versions. Moreover, according to Muysken's (2000) classification of code-mixing, the examples of the two brands in Mainland China and Hong Kong presented in Chapter 3 demonstrate that insertional code-mixing (Muysken, 2000) is the most common type, which refers to the insertion of English words or phrases into the syntactic structure of Mandarin or Cantonese. The second most common type is diglossia code-mixing (Muysken, 2000), where English phrases are directly followed by their Mandarin or Cantonese translations. The least common type is alternation code-mixing (Muysken, 2000), which involves the use of relatively complete utterances from two or more languages, in this case English and Mandarin or Cantonese, that appear alternately within the same advertisement.

Secondly, in Mainland China, McDonald's campaigns predominantly use Mandarin as the matrix language (Myers-Scotton, 1997), incorporating English lexical items in a controlled and purposeful manner. English terms are carefully inserted to signal modernity, global connectivity or technological innovation, but their usage is generally restrained to align with state-enforced linguistic norms and the broader objective of linguistic unification. Similarly, MAC Cosmetics in Mainland China primarily uses English in product names, promotional slogans and references to beauty trends to elevate brand prestige while maintaining linguistic coherence and compliance with national language policies. In contrast, advertising strategies in Hong Kong demonstrate a much higher frequency and flexibility of Cantonese-English code-mixing. McDonald's advertisements in Hong Kong display a more natural and casual integration of English expressions, often embedded within Cantonese, reflecting the region's bilingual urban culture. In this case, code-mixing reflects genuine language use in daily life as well as a stylistic device. Similarly, MAC cosmetics' promotional campaigns in Hong Kong exhibit extensive and playful code-mixing, leveraging English not only for prestige, but also to convey a cosmopolitan identity, self-expression and trendiness, that are key traits valued by local young people and fashion-conscious consumers.

Overall, despite being limited to qualitative research, this thesis represents a valuable contribution to existing research on this topic by offering a detailed analysis of code-mixing in Chinese advertising, focusing on Chinese-English and Cantonese-English code-mixing. Further research regarding this topic would be interesting, including quantitative analysis, and we hope that our research can serve as a useful foundation for future investigations in this academic field.

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