Reproduction, resistance and joint-production of language power: A Hong Kong case study

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Abstract

This paper presents an analysis of a political meeting in contemporary Hong Kong, involving the British Hong Kong governor, Christopher Patten, and members of the Hong Kong public. The meeting was the first time that a Hong Kong governor had made himself openly and directly accountable to the Hong Kong people in a public forum. Taking place at the beginning of Patten's governorship, and in the form of question and answer, the meeting was presented by Patten as a demonstration of the more democratic, participatory, public discourse he wanted to promote under his governorship, in preparation for the change of sovereignty of Hong Kong from Britain to China, in 1997. The analysis shows that although Patten promoted the meeting as a democratic forum, his ultimate control of the discourse meant that he was able to reproduce the dominance that his status as governor accords him, and that in spite of attempts to resist his dominance by some questioners, members of the public, either willingly or unwillingly, participated in the joint-production of Patten's language power.

1. Introduction

This paper examines what Van Dijk (1993) calls, 'reproduction', 'resistance', and 'joint-production' of power (see also Fairclough, 1989) in a political meeting in contemporary Hong Kong. It is part of a larger research project which analyses the many facets of the political discourse of the British, colonial, Hong Kong governor, Christopher Patten, within the context of the change of sovereignty of Hong Kong from Britain to China, in 1997. The project is based upon a corpus of speeches, public addresses, public meetings, broadcast interviews, press conferences, interactions in the Hong Kong Legislative Council, writings, press reports, and other data relating to Patten, from the time of his appointment as governor in 1992. The intention is that the corpus will continue to expand up until at least the change of sovereignty in 1997, when Patten will leave.

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The participants in the meeting which is the focus of this paper were Patten and members of the Hong Kong public. The meeting took place the day after Patten had announced controversial political reforms in his annual policy address to the Hong Kong Legislative Council, in October, 1992. The meeting, called ‘Question Time with the Governor’, was an opportunity for the public to question Patten on his reform proposals and other social, economic and political matters raised in his policy speech. It was the first time that a Hong Kong governor had made himself openly and directly accountable to the Hong Kong people in a public forum. As the analysis will show, Patten used the forum to not only promote his democratic reform proposals, but also as a demonstration of the more democratic, participatory, public discourse he wanted to promote under his governorship and beyond the change of sovereignty.

This particular meeting has been selected from the corpus because it represents what Fairclough (1989) calls a critical moment in Patten’s governorship and in Hong Kong’s transition of sovereignty from Britain to China. The meeting is critical in so far as, on the one hand, it focuses on the political reforms Patten instituted in preparation for the handover and which have been the main plank of his governorship; it is critical, on the other hand, because it is a demonstration of the more democratic style of public discourse that, mirroring the legislative reforms, Patten has sought to make a feature of his governorship.

The analysis of the discourse of the meeting shows how, in spite of the fact that the governor was using the meeting to demonstrate democratic discourse in action, for most of the time, because of his control of the organisation of the meeting and because of his greater language power, he was able to ‘reproduce’ the dominance his status accords him. In some cases questioners used ‘resistance’ strategies, designed to challenge and undermine the discourse of the governor. However, questioners and other members of the audience all nevertheless participated, whether wittingly or unwittingly, in the ‘joint-production’ of the governor’s power over the meeting. Many features of the supposedly democratic discourse that Patten was promoting are therefore cosmetic. While the meeting did involve more participation by individuals than had previously been the case in public discourse in Hong Kong, ultimately control remained in the hands of the elite, in the person of the governor.

2. Political background

On July 1st, 1997, sovereignty over Hong Kong, a British colony for one and a half centuries, will revert to China. The terms of this reversion were agreed between Britain and China in 1984, in a document called the Sino-British Joint Declaration. During British rule there was very little democratic development in Hong Kong. At the time of the signing of the Joint Declaration, the governor led an executive government of appointed members. There was a Legislative Council, which was responsible for approving laws and expenditure, but members were all appointed by the governor. Under the terms of the Joint Declaration, however, and the subsequent ‘Basic Law’, a mini constitution drawn up by China for the post 1997 period, Hong
Kong was to have gradually increasing elected representation, resulting eventually in a Legislative Council that would be 100% constituted by elections. In the years following the signing of the Joint Declaration there was much negotiation between Britain and China over the pace of electoral reform, Britain preferring a faster pace than China.

In 1992, it is generally agreed that British policy on Hong Kong and its relations with China changed. Whereas up until 1992 Britain had compromised with China over the pace of reform, from 1992 onwards, Britain adopted a more confrontational policy and decided to go ahead with reform, even if this meant disagreement with China. This new policy was carried out by Hong Kong’s first ‘political’ governor, Christopher Patten, an ex-chairman of the British Conservative party and government minister, who was appointed in July 1992. Before Patten, Hong Kong governors had always been government servants, not politicians.

Following his appointment in July 1992, on 8th October, Patten made his first important policy speech, a day before the ‘Question Time with the Governor’ meeting which is the focus of this paper. The speech was controversial because Patten had refused to discuss its contents with the Chinese government before presenting it, in the knowledge that the proposals for political reform which it contained would not meet with Chinese approval.

3. Language and power

Before moving on to the analytical part of the paper, this section will review some of the key issues in the theory of language power, a construct around which the analytical part of the paper is developed. Discussion, especially in the critical linguistics and critical discourse analysis literature (e.g. Fairclough, 1989, 1993; Fowler, 1988; Fowler et al., 1979; Hodge and Kress, 1979; Van Dijk, 1993) on the notion of language power is based on a number of premises, including the following:

(1) Power is exercised by individuals and therefore involves choice, agency and intention.

(2) The interests of the powerful and the less powerful are likely to differ and therefore the exercise of power may lead to conflict, resistance, and coercion.

(3) On the other hand, individuals involved in power relations may not always be aware of the power they wield or are subjected to.

(4) Although power can be seen as productive, enabling, and as a positive capacity for achieving social ends, it is very often used negatively, and the literature on language and power has primarily concentrated on this negative aspect and how the powerful exploit the less powerful.

(5) In the modern world, power is exercised increasingly by linguistic means.

The seminal study on the relation between language and power is Brown and Gilman’s (1960) ‘The Pronouns of Power and Solidarity’. In this article Brown and Gilman studied the systematic choices which occur in many languages between the first and second person subject pronouns (tu and vous in French, Sie and du, in Ger-
man, *thou* and *you*, in old English), according to the power relations of the interlocutors. In languages which make this distinction, Brown and Gilman noted that the *vous* form is used to address the higher status or more powerful person, while the more powerful address their subordinates with the *tu* form. Those on equal terms or wishing to show solidarity use the *tu* form.

Since Brown and Gilman’s study, linguists have shown that it is by no means only the *tu/vous* distinction which functions as an index of power in language, but that just about any linguistic structure has such a potential. Terms of address, transitivity (i.e. the agent/process/goal relation in the clause), indexicals, and lexical categorisation, are just some of the linguistic structures which have been the focus of analysis in relation to language and power in the literature.

Since Brown and Gilman’s study, also, attention has spread from the level of linguistic form as an index of power relations to that of discourse strategy. At the discourse level, strategies of politeness, speech acts, topicalisation, metaphor, hyperbole, etc. and how these contribute to e.g. control, dissimulation, manipulation, access to specialised genres, development of consensus and acceptance of legitimacy, positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation, are just some of the indexes of power, at this level, to have been the focus of study.

Examples of the way such discourse strategies realise power relations would be the use of directive speech acts by adults to control children, topic control by doctors in doctor–patient interactions or by interviewers in job interviews, control of the floor in debates and political meetings, or the use of politeness strategies by political leaders to persuade people to vote for them. In colonial contexts, such as in Hong Kong, the context of the present study, examples would be the imposition of English as the medium of instruction on Cantonese-speaking school pupils, the imposition of English as the language of legal proceedings, or, as this study will show, the use of English in public meetings.

In an overview of the principles of critical discourse analysis, Van Dijk (1993) distinguishes three aspects of language power: ‘reproduction’, which is the process by which elites exert their dominance through language; ‘resistance’, which is the way the less powerful attempt to oppose the attempts by elites to dominate them; and ‘joint-production’, which is when dominated groups are persuaded that dominance is ‘natural’, or in some way legitimate. As Van Dijk notes (1993: 250), most studies have concentrated on the first of these processes, on the strategies used by the dominant to exploit the less powerful. The current paper, however, takes all three of these dimensions of language power as its theoretical framework. The position taken here is that in situations of conflict, it may be the case that strategies of dominance can only be understood within the context of the resistance strategies with which they are confronted and which they seek to overcome. Indeed, as the detailed analysis of the two questions and answers which will be presented later in the paper will show, strategies of resistance (here employed by questioners) may provide the catalyst for the exertion of dominance (here employed by Patten, in his answers). In resisting, individuals may be playing into the hands of elites. Strategies of resistance may thus be an essential component of strategies of dominance.
4. Overview of the analysis

The analysis will first look at some general features of the meeting which are significant in terms of reproduction, resistance, and joint-production of language power, and the question of language choice. This global analysis will then be followed by a detailed study of two questions and answers which highlight these power relations at a more micro level.

5. General features

5.1. Reproduction

As already mentioned, Patten's political goal in 'Question Time with the Governor' was to promote his proposals for political reform. As part of his political platform, the reform proposals were accompanied by a general call by Patten for more open and accountable government in Hong Kong in general. At the same time as promoting Patten's reform proposals, the meeting was designed to promote and highlight the policy of greater accountability. In terms of 'reproduction', Patten wanted to have ultimate control of the discourse of the meeting, but at the same time he wanted to allow others to participate, in order to demonstrate this greater openness and accountability – to demonstrate democratic discourse in action.

The main way that Patten demonstrated this freedom on the part of the public was in structuring the meeting as question and answer. On the surface, a turn-taking system consisting of question and answer would seem to be an equal distribution of power. Gastil (1992: 492) states that turn-taking "directly correspond[s] to the notion of equal and adequate opportunities to participate discursively in the democratic process". Given that the public has the right to ask challenging questions, while the governor is only able to respond, one might even think that the balance of power was in the hands – or mouths – of the questioners. However, a number of factors meant that such a balance of power was not the case.

First, while it is true that the turns were equally divided in terms of question and answer, Patten held the floor for much longer than did the questioners. While questions are expected to be brief and to the point, there seems to be no such injunction on the part of answers. Wilson (1990) reviews a number of quantitative studies of political interviews and parliamentary questions and answers, all of which show answers to be considerably longer than questions. In 'Question Time with the Governor', a word count shows Patten used just over double the number of words questioners did (3,687 against 1,834) in the question and answer phase of the meeting; and this was in spite of the fact that asking lengthy questions was, as we shall see, a 'resistance' strategy employed by a number of questioners (a resistance strategy that caused Patten considerable disturbance, we might add). In addition to greater length of turn, in responding to questions, Patten did not seem to be under any constraint to keep rigidly to the point. Instead he was free to make whatever points he felt he wanted to and ignore questions which he did not want to respond to. As a further
token of his dominance of the floor, Patten took the opportunity to make lengthy opening and closing statements (591 and 205 words, respectively).

The second factor which ensured Patten maintained control of the discourse was his greater communicative ability, or language power. As a professional politician, Patten has had ample opportunity to hone his communication skills. That he has made the most of these opportunities is evidenced by his chairmanship of the British Conservative party and the successful reelection he engineered of the British Prime Minister, John Major, and his government, against all the odds, in 1992. (It should be pointed out that he lost his own parliamentary seat in the process, a fact which then allowed him to become Hong Kong governor.) Patten’s language power is manifested in his argumentation (Toulmin, 1958; Van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 1994; Van Eemeren et al., 1984, 1987), his use of politeness (Leech, 1983; Lakoff, 1973; Brown and Levinson, 1987), implicature (Grice, 1975) and various other discourse strategies and rhetorical devices, as we shall see in the detailed analysis which will follow.

The third factor, and the one which perhaps most emphasises Patten’s ultimate power over the meeting, is in his organisation and design of ‘Question Time with the Governor’ as a demonstration of his openness and accountability and of democratic discourse in general. This construction of a ‘play within a play’ or what French literary theorists call ‘mise en abyme’ (Wales, 1989), is an ironic use of language power, a case of the assertion of language power to promote the idea of language equality. That this is Patten’s aim is clear from a number of references he makes regarding the audience – at the beginning, at the end, and during the meeting – showing how mature the people of Hong Kong are in being able to participate in a democratic discourse event such as ‘Question Time with the Governor’. The following is Patten’s reference to ‘mise en abyme’ in his conclusion to the meeting:

but what it [the conduct of the meeting] does show is that anyone who’s interested whether here or elsewhere is that the people of Hong Kong whatever their views can be trusted to talk about their future the future of their families and their community in a responsible and intelligent and mature and restrained way and that is how we’re going to show to the whole world what a sophisticated and democratic political community this can be

In planning the meeting as ‘mise en abyme’, Patten is clearly manipulating the audience and reproducing his dominance over them.

A feature of Patten’s language power, and an important one in his promotion of democratic discourse, is his use of politeness. As Gastil (1992: 472) notes, “friendly or neighbourly discourse is ... essential for maintaining healthy relationships among members of the ‘demos’ [democratic community]”. The detailed analysis will show Patten’s extreme care in employing both positive and negative politeness (Brown and Levinson, 1987) towards his questioners and audience – positive politeness to show solidarity and negative politeness to demonstrate respect and deference.

There is one important factor in the discourse structure of the meeting which undermines Patten’s language power and his attempts to promote a democratic image of the discourse. The mother tongue of the vast majority of Hong Kong people is Cantonese and, apart from a significant elite minority, most Hong Kong
people do not speak English. Because Patten does not speak Cantonese, (consecutive) interpreters had to be used, most of the questions (although not all) being in Cantonese, and Patten's responses in English. Ng and Bradac (1994) note how colonial regimes use their own language to displace the indigenous language in statute books and key institutions such as government, education, religion and the media. To a large extent this happened in Hong Kong under British rule. Now that Britain is withdrawing from its colonial role and promoting the idea of more democratic government, the use of Cantonese is being encouraged in these areas. Given his proclaimed role as a proponent of democracy, it is an embarrassment for Patten to use English and thereby draw attention to the colonialist role that he is trying to play down. At the beginning of the meeting, Patten apologised for not speaking Cantonese, but the constant reminder of the colonial situation that the use of English represents must be a negative factor in Patten's attempts to win the audience over to his side.

5.2. Resistance

In the meeting, a number of questioners were overtly hostile to the governor. These questioners can be said to have 'resisted' Patten's exertion of language power. A number of pragmatic strategies and rhetorical devices were used by these questioners.
- They chose embarrassing topics which highlighted various undemocratic practices in Hong Kong with which to confront the governor - the maltreatment of so-called illegal immigrants from China, cases of forced eviction of people from their houses - and did not limit themselves to topics raised in Patten's policy speech, which was what Patten had expected them to do.
- They undermined the conventions of turn-taking. They did this by making their questions much longer than Patten would have liked and covering several topics, thereby maintaining control of the floor (on numerous occasions Patten interrupted to try to make questions shorter). And they did this by making political statements of their own, rather than actually asking questions which required an answer.
- They used subtle, manipulative argumentation; for example in appropriating the views of the Hong Kong public as a whole in support of their position.
- They created powerful visual images of colonial malpractice, designed to embarrass the governor, through their choice of lexis.
- They made use of implicature, to again embarrass the governor. All of these devices will be illustrated in the detailed analysis which will follow.

5.3. Joint-production

Turning now to the joint-production of language power, in choosing to attend the meeting, members of the audience were participating in Patten's 'play within a play' on the theme of democratic participation and accountability, and they can thus be said to have been participating in the joint-production of Patten's language domi-
nance. This joint-production may have been willing or unwilling – on the one hand – and witting or unwitting – on the other. Whichever category members of the audience fitted into, they would all, however, have helped Patten in his goal of demonstrating democratic participation (at least as he conceives it) in action.

5.3.1. Willing or unwilling joint-production

Participants may have come to the meeting because they supported the governor’s democratic drive and wanted to show solidarity with it. At the time of the meeting Patten’s popularity was extremely high. In a newspaper-commissioned poll his approval rating was at 84%, according to a poll conducted on behalf of the Hong Kong Standard newspaper (Free, 1993). From the tone of the meeting, as created by the laughter and the applause, it is clear that the majority of the audience was quite supportive of Patten and of the aims of the meeting, and that those who sought to resist were in a minority. These supporters of Patten can be said to have been willing participants in the joint-production of Patten’s language power. This willingness was manifested by questioners and members of the audience in a number of ways;

Questioners:
- by not being aggressive in their questioning
- by showing deference
- by keeping questions short and to the point

Audience members in general:
- by applauding the governor
- by responding positively to the governors’s humour,
- by being supportive of the goals of the meeting and cooperative in general

Although the majority of the audience were probably willing in their joint-production of the discourse, there were some who were not supportive and who sought to resist. These can be described as unwilling participants in the joint-production of Patten’s language power. Those questioners who most obviously were unwilling participants were those who asked aggressive questions. Ironically, however, these aggressive questioners were actually at the same time helping Patten to achieve his goal. They helped him in two ways. First, they showed how in a democratic society everyone has the right to speak and criticise, even against the governor. Second, in criticizing the governor, they provided him with a platform from which to launch into a display of his own language power, in countering them. An analysis of the eleven questions of the meeting shows that there were three questions (two of which are studied in detail in this paper) which were overtly hostile to Patten and his policies. In each of these cases Patten raised the tone of his oratory in his replies, to overcome the resistance on the part of these three questioners. That these hostile questioners would have been unwilling in their joint-production of Patten’s language power is demonstrated by the fact that one of the hostile questioners, probably realising how he was playing into Patten’s hands and being manipulated by him, walked out of the meeting before Patten had finished his reply.
5.3.2. Witting or unwitting joint-production

Other members of the audience may have attended the meeting not because they wanted to demonstrate support for or undermine the governor, but out of simple curiosity, not realising the political significance of their decision. These members of the audience who had no specific purpose in attending the meeting other than general curiosity can be said to have been unwitting participants in the joint-production of the discourse. As Fairclough (1989: 41) notes, “in discourse people can be legitimizing (or delegitimizing) particular power relations without being conscious of doing so”. Although these people may have had no desire to either support or undermine the governor, their very presence would nevertheless have promoted Patten’s goal of demonstrating democratic participation. The democratic process, as Gastil (1992) has noted, requires the participation of as many of the demos as possible. The more people in the audience, the more democratic the meeting would appear. In this respect, it is noteworthy that while in 1992 Patten held four ‘Question Time with the Governor’ meetings, in various locations in the territory, all filled to capacity, in 1993 he held only two meetings and these were much less well attended. In 1994, probably realising the declining popularity of these forums, only one meeting was held. To hold the meetings with half empty halls and also, importantly, with the television companies no longer interested in broadcasting them, would have defeated the object of demonstrating democracy in action.

5.4. Language choice

As already mentioned, the meeting was conducted in English and Cantonese, with consecutive translation. The choice of language by individual questioners may have contributed towards reproduction, resistance and joint-production of language power.

The need for both languages, a result of colonialism, of course, would have highlighted the gap between Patten and his audience and would have undermined his aim of creating a democratic atmosphere. On the other hand, while accepting that the use of both languages highlighted the colonialist nature of the proceedings, the fact that individuals were free to choose the language they preferred would have contributed towards Patten’s promotion of the idea of democracy; to the extent that it promoted Patten’s goal, it would have contributed to the reproduction of his dominance over the meeting.

Of the questions, four were in English and seven in Cantonese. How might this language choice be interpreted in terms of joint-production and resistance on the part of questioners? First, what was the motivation for choosing English? It could have been that those questioners using English were sympathetic to Patten and that the use of English was a politeness strategy to show deference to him as an English-speaker. In showing such deference to Patten and, by extension, to his position, these questioners would have been participants in the joint-production of Patten’s dominance.

On the other hand, the use of English could have been the expression of a desire on the part of these questioners to show that they were part of the elite group of English-speakers in Hong Kong. Questioners who use Cantonese might be shown up as...
less educated. If the use of English was motivated in this way, then, although these questioners would have wanted to associate themselves with Patten’s position, the use of English here would have been seen as divisive and would have undermined Patten’s goal of promoting the idea of democratic discourse. In this case, while the use of English would have undermined Patten’s position, it would not have been the result of a conscious resistance strategy; on the contrary, it would have been as a result of a desire on the part of these questioners to identify with Patten. Attempts at willing joint-production can sometimes backfire and undermine the dominance of an elite.

What of those who chose to use Cantonese? What might have motivated the use of this language? First, these questioners may have had no choice; they did not speak English. Second, they may have had a choice, but felt more comfortable in Cantonese, their first language. Third, questioners may have chosen Cantonese as a sign of resistance and ethnic affirmation. The two questions which will be analysed in detail below, both of which were strongly critical of Patten, would not have been so powerful if they had been asked in English. Whichever interpretation the audience put on these choices to use Cantonese, and although the fact that (less educated) questioners who did not speak English could participate fully in the meeting could be interpreted as a sign of democracy, they would all have highlighted the gap between Patten and the audience, between the colonial governor and those he ruled over.

6. Detailed analysis

6.1. Question Three: the judiciary and the police

6.1.1. The question

The third question of the meeting, in Cantonese, was about the ‘walled city’. The walled city is an area within Hong Kong not covered by other treaties between
Britain and China relating to sovereignty. China therefore has a special say over what happens there and any actions taken by the British Hong Kong government can be disputed. At the time of the meeting, the British Hong Kong government had recently evicted people from this area in order to redevelop it. The procedures concerning compensation and appeal were criticised by some of those evicted:

**QUESTION IN CANTONESE**

**ENGLISH TRANSLATION**

Mr Governor Hong Kong is a place where the rule of law is upheld the executive and the judiciary should be separated may I ask you why is a black court established by the executive and the so-called proper appeal was conducted behind closed doors as lawyers and their clients were not allowed to know about the hearing and er I want to ask something about the walled city is it chinese territory or hong kong british territory the chinese the chinese authorities have made it clear that the residents should have reasonable compensation and why do you use your policemen to grab our property from us if you say this is crown land why why there was no sign saying so em I am very doubtful why the Hong Kong I am very doubtful why the ad hoc group was so powerful together with the welfare association in the walled city they virtually did everything they liked and the whole thing was conducted in the black court the hearing was secret I complained to everyone to the governor to the government and Mrs Elsie Tu who told me that the hearing was all powerful and that what’s going on behind the closed doors was they had the final say

This question, although lacking in a certain sequential coherence (native speakers of Cantonese who have viewed this segment of the video concur that it also lacks coherence in the original Cantonese), nevertheless, demonstrates the questioner to have considerable language power, as well as likely evoking sympathy from his predicament as a victim of the government. (The lack of coherence, of course, is itself symptomatic of how the discourse is weighted in favour of Patten, an experienced professional politician, and against the questioners, who probably have no experience of speaking in a public forum such as ‘Question Time with the Governor’).

In its considerable length, this question is an example of a recurrent feature of the questions throughout the meeting, a feature Patten is at great pains to prevent, stating at many points that questions should be short. Indeed, Patten interrupted the questioner during the original Cantonese presentation to say that the question was very long. From Patten’s point of view, one might surmise, the main role of questioners is to provide him with a chance to put over his political message. According to Patten’s conception of the interaction of the meeting (based perhaps on the prece-
dent of British parliamentary questioning, of British election meetings, and perhaps also of the BBC television programme, ‘Question Time’), questioners should limit themselves to one short question. This has the advantage of ensuring that questioners do not have the opportunity to make political points of their own, as does the questioner here. Indeed this questioner not only makes a long statement (framed as a question, but not really requiring an answer – a further rhetorical strategy) but also on a topic not dealt with in the governor’s policy speech, the delivery of which was the purpose of the meeting, as laid down by Patten. The questioner thus resists Patten’s control of the meeting in terms of Patten’s control of the topics.

It is not clear whether this questioner’s and others’ strategy of lengthy turns is due to a lack of experience on the part of the questioners or a conscious attempt to exert their own language power and undermine Patten’s control of the floor. If the former, it shows how Patten’s strategy of setting up a speech genre which he is very familiar with and which Hong Kong people are unfamiliar with (Van Dijk, 1993) backfires; instead of feeling the constraints of having to conform to the short questions expected in such political meetings, speakers feel free to have their say. If the lengthy questions are an intentional contravention of the genre conventions, then they are a powerful conscious resistance strategy.

Three points are made here by the questioner. These points are that:
- treatment of Walled City residents was illegal
- the Walled city is Chinese territory
- police mistreated residents of the Walled City

The implicature here would seem to be that Patten is undemocratic, a colonialist and that the judiciary and the police are used by him as tools of colonialism. Notice also here the use of emotive lexis to create a negative picture of the Hong Kong executive government and its judiciary, with the use of the following cohesive, lexical chain, or string (Hasan, 1984; Werth, 1984; Martin, 1992):

*black court – so-called proper appeal – secret – all-powerful – behind closed doors – black court – final say*

Also noteworthy is the rhetorical question, “why do you use your policemen?”, implicating Patten directly in the eviction, by attributing the ‘policemen’ directly to him, as if they were his personal property.

6.1.2. Patten’s reply

Patten’s response begins as follows:

Well if you don’t find my answer satisfactory I’m delighted to say that Elsie Tu is in the LAUGHTER is in the third row and as everyone in Hong Kong knows Elsie has an answer to absolutely everything

CANTONESE TRANSLATION
LAUGHTER

This preface has two possible functions. First, it functions as what Maynard (1994), in the context of Japanese political discourse, refers to as a “juxtaposition of semi-
otic contexts". "[W]hen the discussion heats up, or is about to heat up", Maynard states, in relation to the discourse of the ex-Japanese prime minister Takeshita, "juxtaposing another semiotic context becomes a favorite strategy to divert the objects of focus" (1994: 154). Thus, in the case of Patten, by inserting this metacommunicative comment on the conduct of the discourse, before he responds to the substance of the highly charged comments of the questioner, Patten reduces the emotive power of the questioner's intervention. This was a strategy Patten used consistently throughout the meeting. Second, this preface may also act as a stalling device, to allow Patten more time to prepare the substance of his response. Note also Patten's use of the positive politeness and involvement strategy of referring to Elsie Tu (a well-known local politician and social campaigner) by her given name.

The substantive part of Patten's answer is as follows:

let me just say this seriously in response to your question and er this em er is the walled city question for tonight I don't think we can have every question on the walled city in every community including this one the community as a whole decides from time to time that a particular area for one reason or another should be redeveloped that has happened in a number of other parts of Hong Kong when that happens it is only right in the first place residents and businesses should be consulted in the second place there should be compensation if the plan goes ahead that is what has happened in the case of the walled city with for example a right of appeal to the board that you describe in less than flattering terms er appeal to a board if you don't like compensation terms I have to say it's not an unreasonable point to make though I appreciate the strength of your feeling though I believe I'm right in saying that in ninety eight point five per cent of those who were affected by the redevelopment have accepted the terms offered them there are some who are still arguing but it does seem to me that ninety eight point five per cent is quite a high figure I'm sorry that I can't say any more to you than that but it will always be the case in any community particularly in one that's growing and expanding and thriving that one has to redevelop parts of it from time to time and make I hope adequate and generous compensation payments as a result

APPLAUSE
CANTONESE TRANSLATION

Demonstrating the power he has over the topics which can be raised in the discourse, in this segment, Patten first of all preempts any other questions on what is for him a difficult topic, stating, "this is the walled city question for tonight". Note how Patten first of all impersonalises and thereby removes himself from responsibility for this statement - which in speech act terms is a prohibition - by choosing not to refer to the agent of the action and then presents it as a collective decision: "I don't think we can have every question on the walled city". (At this point, it is to be noted, also, the questioner walked out. Not allowed the right of reply, given the structure of the discourse, this was the only way he could express his dissatisfaction with Patten's response to his question.)

In the rest of the segment Patten makes further use of impersonalization and thereby dissociates himself from the actions he refers to (this negative politeness strategy is referred to by Brown and Levinson with the maxim, "Dissociate speaker from the particular infringement"; Brown and Levinson, 1987: 136). In this use of
impersonalization Patten takes away responsibility for the evictions referred to in the question from himself and his government and passes it over to the community.

Further examples of Patten's exploitation of both negative and positive politeness strategies are abundant in this segment and are listed as follows (the maxims are from Brown and Levinson, 1987):

**Negative politeness**

*Statement of the face-threatening act as a general rule* - "in every community", "the community as a whole decides" "it will always be the case in any community" *impersonalization of speaker and hearer* - "one has to redevelop parts (of a thriving community)"

*understatement* - "98.5% is quite a high figure"; "in less than flattering terms" *hedges* - "I believe I'm right in saying ...", "it does seem to me ...", "I hope ...",

**Positive politeness**

*Demonstration of sympathy and understanding* - "I appreciate the strength of your argument", "I have to say it's not an unreasonable point"

*Apology* "I'm sorry"

Also noteworthy here is how Patten capitalises on the language power of the questioner to demonstrate his own (superior) use of language. Patten's rebuttal of this questioner illustrates a point suggested by Atkinson (1984), when he reports that the former British prime minister Harold Macmillan - a Conservative forebear of Patten - felt that when interviewed on television he would present a better image if he engaged in debate with a strong opponent rather than a neutral television commentator. A strong opponent, himself exerting considerable language power, as does Patten's questioner here, Macmillan astutely realised, may ironically help politicians, rather than hinder them, in terms of the impression politicians want to convey to their audiences. A politician who can better a strong questioner is surely superior to a politician who merely counters weak opposition. Evidence that this applies in the case of Patten's response to this question is provided by the spontaneous applause which breaks out at the end of his reply (see Atkinson, 1984, on the relation between the exertion of language power and applause).

6.2. Question Eight: Political development and illegal immigrants

6.2.1. The question

Moving forward now to a later question of the meeting, as in the previous question, we see considerable use of language power on the part of the questioner:

CANTONESE

APPLAUSE

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Mr governor I should like to ask you something on the nineteen ninety five direct election actually all the arrangements have been clearly laid down in the basic law and in the joint declaration but yesterday you said you would abolish all the appointed seats in the district
board that is the district board will all be directly elected so I want you to clarify this point you create confusion in society if you force your pace too much smooth transition in hong kong is what we want and I think you should discuss more with china I live in china I live in hong kong and I want to die in hong kong I don’t want you to I don’t want to see that you made a mess of hong kong SUBDUED LAUGHTER looking back in history we can see that every time the british retreated from her colonies there will be troubles for example PATTEN (INTERRUPTING) (POINTING TO AN EARLIER QUESTIONER) That was his line LAUGHTER

ENGLISH TRANSLATION CONTINUING

For example in india there was war between india and pakistan and secondly I would like to ask you something on the illegal immigrants it’s a disgrace to chinese people to see them all bound up and they have to squat by the roadside on the other hand the vietnamese migrants are so well treated so I think every chinese in hong kong is very angry about this.

As with the earlier questioner, we see here the strategy of the questioner taking control of the floor by not limiting himself to one question and by making his own political points, rather than asking questions which actually require an answer. Paralinguistics are significant here, the questioner’s dignified, but slightly aggressive stance, which is very obvious in the video recording of the meeting, contribute to his considerable display of language power. It is notable also that the questioner is able to counter Patten factually. Earlier in the meeting Patten had denied Britain had left chaos in its ex-colonies and had cited India and Pakistan as examples. As the speaker rightly points out, however, there was war between these two countries shortly after the British left. It is not surprising that Patten interrupts the questioner at this point, therefore, with his humorous “That was his line” – an allusion to the earlier questioner – trying to shift the focus away from what is, for Patten an embarrassing contradiction on the part of the questioner, or in Maynard’s terms, referred to earlier, juxtaposing another semiotic context, with the interposition of humour and diverting the object of focus, and thereby taking the heat out of the question. Also notice how Patten can get away with an interruption, but for questioners, even if they could get to a microphone, the conventions of the meeting tell us, this would be taboo.

In terms of purely linguistic skills, this questioner makes notable use of emotive lexis, presented as powerful cohesive chains. In the first part of the question a range of expressions creates a picture of the confusion the questioner sees arising as a result of Patten’s reform proposals:

 abolish – create confusion – force your pace – make a mess of

These items contrast with what the questioner sees as the calm and orderly situation prevailing before, as suggested by the following two related expressions:

the arrangements clearly laid down – smooth transition

To support his prediction of chaos if Patten goes ahead with his reforms, a chain of items is used to paint the picture of what the questioner sees as the confusion created by British colonial withdrawal throughout history:
In the second part of the question, on illegal immigrants, a further negative picture is painted of British colonial rule in Hong Kong, with a further chain of related lexical items:

illegal – arrested – criminals – disgrace – bound up – have to squat by the roadside – angry

As well as through the choice of emotive lexis, the questioner achieves a powerful effect through the use of lexical repetition and contrast (Atkinson, 1984; Tannen, 1989). In the following segment, the lexical items live/die, want/don’t want, China/Hong Kong are all either repeated and/or contrasted:

I live in china
I live in hong kong and
I want to die in hong kong
I don’t want you to
I don’t want to see that you made a mess of hong kong

Lexical repetition is used in conjunction with syntactic parallelism. Each clause in the above segment begins with the pronoun I, followed by either the verb live (twice) or want/don’t want (three times). Each of the clauses (except the fourth, which is a false start) ends in a prepositional phrase ending in either Hong Kong or China. The powerful syntactic juxtaposition of references to Hong Kong and China here gives rise to the implicature that Hong Kong is part of China and not part of Britain. There is implicature here too in the fact that Patten will leave, with the change of sovereignty, and in contrast to the questioner, will not spend the rest of his life in Hong Kong. And there is the further suggestion that, again, unlike the questioner, Patten is not fully committed to Hong Kong.

Powerful implicature is created by the questioner also in his statement, “I am Chinese and they are Chinese”, in relation to the treatment of illegal immigrants. Supported by the use of parallel structure, the implicature here seems to be that “Patten is not Chinese” (and that by extension, perhaps, he is a colonial racist, in treating the immigrants so badly). The repetition of the word “Chinese” twice more in the following sentences gives rise further to the powerful contrastive implicature suggested here. Indeed, the many uses of the words “Chinese”, “China” and “Hong Kong” throughout this question lead to the implicature that the Chinese, China and Hong Kong are inextricably linked (and that by extension, Britain [and Patten, who is British] is excluded).

Also worthy of note is how the questioner appropriates the attitudes of the Hong Kong people, claiming that everyone in Hong Kong shares his views on political development:

2 This parallelism is found also in the original Cantonese.
Smooth transition is what we want.

and on the treatment of illegal immigrants:

I think every chinese is angry about that.

This is a strategy noted by Fairclough (1989) in relation to the discourse of the British ex-prime minister, Margaret Thatcher. In an interview analysed by Fairclough, Thatcher makes a number of assertions about 'the people', assimilating what she takes to be the views of 'the people', to her own. As Fairclough puts it, by referring to 'the people', Thatcher "implicitly claims the authority to tell people what they are like – or, since she is herself a part of 'the people', the right to articulate on its behalf its own self-perceptions" (1989: 181–182). However, the Hong Kong speaker's assertions have more power than do those of Thatcher. When Thatcher refers to 'the people' she, in fact, distances herself from them, reifying them as something apart from her. When the 'Question Time ...' speaker refers to "every Chinese", however, by virtue of his ethnicity and language it is clear that he is a part of this group. And this identification of himself as a part of the "Chinese" group stands out all the more by virtue of the obvious fact that Patten is the outsider, in that he is obviously not Chinese, but European.

In this question, therefore, we see considerable use of language power. The speaker has a powerful physical presence and good verbal delivery skills; he takes the discourse in the direction he wants it to go, by not restricting himself to one topic and by putting over his own political points; he demonstrates good factual knowledge; he makes effective use of lexis and syntax; his use of implicature is strong; and, he uses the pragmatic strategy of appropriating the views he imputes to the majority to support his own point of view. The effectiveness of this display of language power is demonstrated by the spontaneous applause which followed it (Atkinson, 1984).

6.2.2. Patten's reply

In responding, Patten again uses the device of shifting the semiotic plane and thereby defusing the emotive power of the question. He does this by again asking the audience to make their questions brief (again betraying his concern that questioners are taking too much control of the floor):

Can I just say em in order that we can get questions from the three microphones which haven't had questions yet that is number eight number seven and number two that any further questions really must be brief otherwise it won't be fair on people who haven't had a chance to get to a microphone.

In the substantive part of this answer we see a classic use of the various rhetorical devices which the literature on political discourse has described in relation to some of the great political orators (Atkinson, 1984; Tannen, 1989; Wilson, 1990). The heightened oratory of this section is in line with its content. It is at this point, nearing the end of the meeting, that Patten decides that he will address the main political
question surrounding his legislative programme – his proposals for constitutional reform – and the opposition to these proposals by China. (Exercising his control of the discourse, it is notable that Patten chooses not to respond to the part of the question referring to the illegal immigrants, an embarrassing challenge to the impression he wants to convey of being a champion of democracy.) It is ironic that, as with the earlier questions which displayed considerable language power, the power of this question provides Patten with the platform from which to launch into his own display of oratorical skills. As with the earlier question, the power of Patten’s response is affirmed by the spontaneous applause that interrupted it at one point:

the proposals that I made yesterday proposals for discussion with china were entirely consistent with the basic law and the joint declaration they were consistent with the basic law and the joint declaration in every particular they were consistent with the basic law and the joint declaration in what that said about district boards they were consistent in what they said about functional constituencies they were consistent in what they said about the election committee they were consistent in what they said about lowering the voting age they were consistent in every part and frankly it is for others if they disagree with me to point out where my proposals are inconsistent and to put forward their own proposals it’s not enough for people to criticise people have if they disagree to put forward their own proposals for the nineteen ninety five elections I didn’t invent the fact that we have to produce an election committee in nineteen ninety five I didn’t invent the fact that we have to put together new functional constituencies those things are all consequences of the joint declaration and the basic law and those are problems which I have to address on the community’s behalf and with the help of the executive and legislative councils

CANTONESE TRANSLATION (INTERRUPTED BY APPLAUSE AT ONE POINT) APPLAUSE

Writing of the rhetorical style of the Reverend Martin Luther King and the Reverend Jessie Jackson, Tannen (1989) refers to how these famous black orators “spontaneously create a discourse in performance by repeating and elaborating previously used formulas in new ways”, what Havelock (1963), in discussion of the Ancient Greek poets, called “oral formulaic performance”. In this segment from Patten, especially with its heavy rhythmic use of repetition, a parallel can be drawn with King and Jackson. Even in the thirty odd hours between his speech to the Legislative Council and the ‘Question Time with the Governor’ meeting, Patten had already made the points contained in this segment many times, in the numerous press conferences and interviews he conducted. Like King and Jackson, Patten reformulates here, in a style bordering on the poetic, themes he had already elaborated upon many times.

In this segment the two most striking rhetorical devices which give the text its emotive quality are parallelism, with its associated powerful rhythm, and implicature:

**Heavy parallelism**
- “they were consistent” is repeated seven times, followed by one contrastive “inconsistent”;
- “in what they said about” is repeated three times;
- "the basic law and joint declaration" is repeated four times;
- "I didn’t invent the fact" is repeated twice.

Cockcroft and Cockcroft (1992) describe repetition as being the closest of the rhetorical devices to the spontaneous expression of emotion. They see the pattern created by repetition as validating the poet Coleridge’s insight about rhythm “striving to hold in check the workings of passion”. The parallelism here can be seen to express the emotional attachment Patten wants to project to promoting his vision of democracy in Hong Kong. As such it can be interpreted as a positive politeness and involvement feature, in its expression of solidarity with the people of Hong Kong.

Implicature
“they were consistent with the basic law and joint declaration”

This is a riposte not only to the questioner, but also to representatives of the Chinese government who had criticised Patten’s proposals and who would indeed later criticise them in the strongest possible terms – on the grounds that they were not consistent with the Joint Declaration and the Basic Law. This implicature is dependent upon the presupposition that the audience is familiar with China’s criticism that the proposals were not consistent with the Basic Law and Joint Declaration:

it is for others if they disagree with me to point out where my proposals are inconsistent and to put forward their own proposals, it’s not enough for people to criticise.

Here again Patten is referring to the Chinese government, who had criticised his reform proposals, but had refused to put forward any counter-proposals of their own. Not referring to the Chinese government by name at all in this segment is again a negative politeness strategy – by not naming the referent, the speaker avoids a direct threat to their face and the possibility of alienating the Hong Kong public, who want to see good relations between Britain and China and a smooth transition of sovereignty.

Respect for the face of the Chinese government also can explain the negative politeness strategy of the speaker dissociating himself from the infringement created by his proposals, as expressed by the repeated: “I didn’t invent the fact ... I didn’t invent the fact ...”. Here Patten is again referring indirectly to the Chinese government, who, with the British, had agreed to the need for political development. However, the blame is not directed at the present government, but at the government which made the earlier relevant agreements.

7. Conclusion

In terms of reproduction, resistance, and joint-production in the meeting as a whole, the analysis shows that, in spite of his promotion of the meeting as an exam-
ple of democratic discourse in action, most of the time Patten was able to ‘repro-
duce’ the dominance his status as colonial governor accords him. He did this by
establishing the structural organization of the meeting and restricting the topics
which could be legitimately raised, by determining that English would be used
(when just about everybody except him spoke Cantonese), by controlling the floor,
and by exerting his superior communicative ability, as manifested, for example, by
his argumentation, politeness, humour, other types of implicature, shifting of the
semiotic plane, and parallel structure.

In some cases questioners used ‘resistance’ strategies designed to challenge and
undermine the discourse of the governor. They did this by making their questions
longer than Patten would have liked, by not accepting Patten’s restriction of ques-
tions to those relating to his policy speech the previous day, by making political
points of their own rather than asking genuine questions, and, in the case of one
questioner, by walking out.

Questioners and other members of the audience participated, whether willingly or
unwillingly, and whether wittingly or unwittingly, in the joint-production of the gov-
ernor’s power over the meeting. Their simple presence at the meeting, which can be
seen as an instantiation of the democratic process, as promoted by Patten, was one
way they did this. They did this also by not making political points of their own, by
keeping their questions short and related to the topics raised in Patten’s policy
speech, by applauding and responding positively to the governor’s humour, and by
being supportive of the goals of the meeting in general. Those who tried to resist, by
flouting the restrictions imposed on their participation by Patten and by demonstrat-
ing their own language power by means of various pragmatic strategies and rhetori-
cal devices, ironically, in some respects, played into Patten’s hands, by providing
him with a platform from which to launch into demonstrations of his own superior
language power.

The analogy of a ‘play within a play’, or ‘mise en abyme’, is a useful one in relat-
ing the roles of Patten, the questioners and other members of the public, in their cre-
ation of the processes of reproduction, resistance, and joint-production in ‘Question
Time with the Governor’. In this play, if Patten (who has also written much of the
script and directed much of the action) is the leading man, the hero, the promoter of
democracy, the questioners take on the secondary roles. These roles may be as allies
of the principal protagonist – if benign questions are asked – or as enemies – if ques-
tions are aggressive. The friendly questioners provide the governor with an opportu-
nity to set out his democratic programme and to demonstrate his conception of
civilised, democratic discourse. The hostile questioners, his enemies, provide him
with an opportunity to prove his valour and skill in defeating them with his superior
use of language power. The rest of the audience play the role of chorus, laughing
with and applauding the governor at key moments, showing their disapproval of one
hostile questioner at one point, and even, on occasions (to create a little dramatic
tension, perhaps), applauding questioners when they agreed with the points they had
to make).

But are there really heroes and villains (Van Dijk, 1993) in this play, which after
all, is concerned with important issues, the future of six million people, no less,
under Chinese sovereignty? The analysis of this paper has shown that while Patten is ostensibly promoting democracy, he uses his elite position and dominant language power to do so. Is this a valid case of affirmative action, where the end (greater democracy) justifies the means (undemocratic discourse)? Not really. With the passage of time, it has become clear that Patten’s political reforms, which in the year following the ‘Question Time with the Governor’ meeting he did push through – in the face of vehement Chinese opposition – were the high water mark of his democratization programme. His subsequent refusal to act in many other fields where further legislation would create more open and accountable government – in the fields of human rights and press freedom, for example – has belied his avowed promotion of democratic values. While Patten has continued to use his language power to promote openness and accountability, in the run-up to the change of sovereignty, his actions have not matched his rhetoric. In this respect, those hostile questioners who attacked Patten in the meeting were not one-dimensional villains, seeking to undermine his position as the hero of democracy. They also played an important role in revealing the emptiness of many of Patten’s claims and the manipulative nature of his use of language power.

Appendix: Chinese versions of questions asked in Cantonese

**Question 3**

港督先生：香港號稱法治之區，行政同司法係獨立嘅，我想請問點解行政專責部門可以私自設黑法庭，咁所謂正途上訴，點解要嘅嘅打孖仔，唔俾記者同律師進入，又要追簽同意判決書，咁就叫做正途上訴，咁我想請問政府有無乜法例可以充公唔畀啲政府打死馬？公眾嘅目的是美麗地方或者市民嘅地方呢？同埋中國政府話要合理合理妥善安置，點解你地要出動軍警強搶？你話如果係官地，點解個場唔敢寫個官字兩個字？同埋點解專責機構權力唔係大，無人監督，系埋點議會福利會議事例，自導自演，而家⋯⋯

Patten: (interrupting)

this is a very long question

Let me finish it.

原班人馬，私設黑法庭，所謂聆訊，就強屈，證實假話假者後，咁判詞就唔講真假者，梁埈彤生安白造，撈走我業權，請問，我投诉無門，我投诉王子、投诉港督，投诉所有部門，都石沉大海，我投诉葉錦恩，葉錦恩話，關乎皇帝，行政就係極權嘅喇。

**Question 8**

港督先生，我想問嘅呢，就係關於呢個1995年嘅直選嘅問題，我地所知道嘅呢，係個基礎法同，聯合聲明已經併好清楚話明呢，呢個可以尊重嘅方式去做，但是我聽見港督細日所講嘅，就係取消縣議員嘅委任，以至直選，哩個做法，豈不是喺1995年全部都是直選，咁我唔希望澄清呢一點，就話關於呢個做法，會唔會惹起社會嘅混亂呢，因為太過急進做步伐，聯合聲明所話，不穩過渡，有咩重要事情，關於將來縣議員政府應該同中方商量，因
References