

Global English, National Chinese? Values, Identity and Language Roles in Hong Kong's Primary Curriculum Reforms

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Abstract:

This paper examines how globalisation and securitisation intersect in Hong Kong's recent primary language curriculum reforms by comparing the 2025 English Language Education and 2023 Chinese Language Education Curriculum Guides (Primary 1-6). Building on work that links language policy to inequality, ideology and identity (Fairclough, 1992; Tollefson, 1991; van Dijk, 1998), it situates the analysis within Hong Kong's biliterate (Chinese-English), trilingual (Cantonese-English-Putonghua) regime and its evolving "biliterate and trilingual" policy (Poon, 2018). The study asks how English and Chinese are differentially positioned as resources for global participation, national identity and values education in a context marked by new Values Education and National Security Education frameworks (Curriculum Development Council, 2021, 2023, 2025; Education Bureau, 2022, 2025).

Using comparable corpora of both guides, the analysis adopts a corpus-assisted critical discourse approach (Baker, 2006; Baker et al., 2008; Taylor, 2017). Keyword, collocation and cluster analyses identify salient lexical fields and discourse prosodies, which are then interpreted through close reading of vision, aims, values and assessment sections, informed by appraisal theory and critical discourse analysis (Martin & White, 2005; Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

Findings indicate an emergent functional division of labour. English is framed as an international language associated with global competitiveness, 21st-century skills and cross-cultural communication, while simultaneously being integrated into a National Security Education framework that emphasises safeguarding national security and cultivating "proper values and attitudes". Chinese, by contrast, is constructed as the primary carrier of Chinese culture, moral cultivation and national identity, with dense lexical fields around "中華文化 (Chinese culture)", "德育 (moral education)" and "國民身份認同 (sense of national identity)". References to social inequality, race/ethnicity and linguistic rights are rare or absent in both guides, suggesting that globalisation and security are foregrounded over equity and linguistic justice (Shohamy, 2006). The paper argues that these discursive patterns reconfigure the symbolic hierarchy between English and Chinese, offering students asymmetrical identity trajectories as global competitors and national subjects. It concludes by reflecting on implications for language education policy and for understanding how globalisation and securitisation reshape language hierarchies and learner identities in other postcolonial and increasingly securitised education systems.

Keywords: corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis, language education policy, globalisation and securitization, bilingual and multilingual education